



CROSS-BORDER CONVERTS: A STORY OF PICKLEBALL, PASSION & PATCHED CONCRETE

By **Jim MacQuarrie**

The first thing you need to know about Protection Island, British Columbia, is that it's unique. A small island oasis of wild green parks, gravel-strewn beaches, an abundance of birds and wildlife, and dusty dirt roads connecting a community of about 400 people. It is located north of the state of Washington on the Pacific coast of Canada. Downtown Nanaimo is just a 10-minute boat ride away.

Protection Island is eclectic. Our residents include a mix of retired university administrators and

online workers along with a host of aging hippies, sailors, handymen, craftspeople and musicians. In summer, we are joined by a regular contingent of American citizens escaping the heat down south. That is where my story begins—with one special American neighbor and his cross-border import of the bare necessities of pickleball.

Fred is from southern California; however a big part of his heart lives here, and we all know it. On his Canadian sojourns, Fred would arrive with enthusiastic stories about his love of the game of



pickleball. Determined to spread the sport, he showed up three years ago with a pickleball net and a couple of paddles and drew a receptive audience.

There's not much other than homes on Protection Island, but there is one ancient tennis court that hadn't been used much in the past decade. There are cracks in the concrete, weeds growing through the chain-link fence and it's subject to a steady rain of leaves and branches and, well, rain. As it turned out, Fred's pickleball passion was contagious. He would host regular clinics, and soon

volunteers descended on the court with masking tape and blue paint for marking lines. That's another thing about Protection Island—every project is a volunteer project.

These days, that old court has thrown off the effects of age and deterioration (a metaphor aging island residents can certainly appreciate) and become a noisy and competitive forum. The court is simply buzzing! The oldest players are in their 80s; the youngest, their early 20s. The hardcore players are seniors who believe that 70 is the new 50. Pickleball is proving them right.

Sadly, COVID-19 has separated us from our American friends and neighbors like Fred. No one is happy about that. Every time we take to the courts, however, we slap paddles in gratitude for our American neighbor who has made such a difference to Protection Island, even when he can't be here.

Jim MacQuarrie is a retired television producer who saw much of Canada during his years with CBC, Canada's public broadcaster. When he found Protection Island, he knew he was home. Community pickleball is the icing on the cake. •



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https://pickleballcanada.org/membership_faq.php

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