

## Excerpts from the book: *FRITZ*, by Martin Shepard (June 2014)

*(The book is available for download, for a small price, on Google Books, and provides an interesting read and insight into the man.)*

### Pages 221 – 223: Cowichan

Fritz had been casting about for a center of his own that he might direct – a Gestalt “kibbutz” – where participants would share work as well as stories and labor as well as receive therapy. By mirroring life more fully, whatever therapeutic feedback occurred ought to be more accurate for those who took part. He also saw it as a great training center for Gestalt Therapists, who might immerse themselves in Gestalt concepts for months at a time.

One property he considered was just outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where his son Steve lived, but, for some reason or other, it never materialized. After the elections of 1968 and his fear for our evolving body politic, Fritz opted for Canada. He bought an old motel on Lake Cowichan, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, at the end of 1968, and in late 1969 – at the age of seventy-six – along with a nucleus of his coterie at Esalen, founded The Gestalt Institute of Canada.

With the establishment of Cowichan in June 1969, Fritz Perls had come full circle from lone wolf to kibbutznik. Fritz, who was so insistent upon having people “do their own thing,” established a center in which interdependence was essential and in which he, the prototypical Ayn Rand’s solitary hero, played paterfamilias to a community of others.

Although The Gestalt Institute of Canada ranked as the fulfillment and culmination of his life’s work, he was not around very long to enjoy it. In December, six months after its founding, he was off on his annual European junket. He died the following March, before returning to his commune.

Cowichan itself is a small hamlet, not more than a block or two long but sporting its own gasoline station. A couple of motels and hotels constitute its main attractions. One of these was purchased by Fritz for a down payment of \$12,000. Although not exactly in the wilderness, it was nonetheless distinctly off the beaten track.

The Institute had been an old fishing motel on Lake Cowichan and was best described as “ratty,” “charming,” run-down,” or “funky” – depending on one’s attitude toward such places. There was the main house, which contained the dining room, a kitchen, a living room, and a small vestibule where the one telephone was placed. The furniture was ancient, worn, and comfortable.

There were two rows of clapboard living units equally as old as the main house, each unit containing a room or two with toilets. A new building that quickly went up between them served as the community meeting place. From the main house, one could view the lake and watch the barges go by, carrying the logs cut by neighboring lumbermen. Upon its two and a half acres were a woodshed, trees, and law. A couple of pigs being raised on the property kept getting loose and had to be chased and repenned.

Fritz lived in one of the units beyond the new building, the Lord and Master of this rustic paradise.