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Kamloops This Week - Entertainment

WHERE THE HELL IS WILLIAMS LAKE?

By **Tim Petruk - Kamloops This Week**
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If you happen to find yourself at tonight's world-premiere performance of *Never Shoot a Stampede Queen* at the Pavilion Theatre and you see a middle-aged man with long hair rising from his seat in a distracting fashion, forgive him.

He is Mark Leiren-Young, the award-winning author of the eponymous book from which he adapted the *Never Shoot a Stampede Queen* script.

And he's very excited about being present for the show's opening.

"I'll be somewhere," Leiren-Young told *KTW*.

"Hopefully I'll be at the back, because I don't sit very well."

Never Shoot a Stampede Queen is Leiren-Young's real-life story of his post-university years working as a reporter at the *Williams Lake Tribune*.

The play's opening line offers some insight into where it's going.

"Where the hell is Williams Lake?"

Leiren-Young was a city boy in 1985 when, at 22, he took the reporter job and drove from the Lower Mainland to the Cariboo.

Immediately upon arriving in what would be his new hometown, he happened upon a robbery in progress.

"And things never got less strange," he said.

"From the time I arrived to the time I left."

Leiren-Young said his editor came up with a nickname for the intrepid, if not lucky, new reporter — News Magnet.

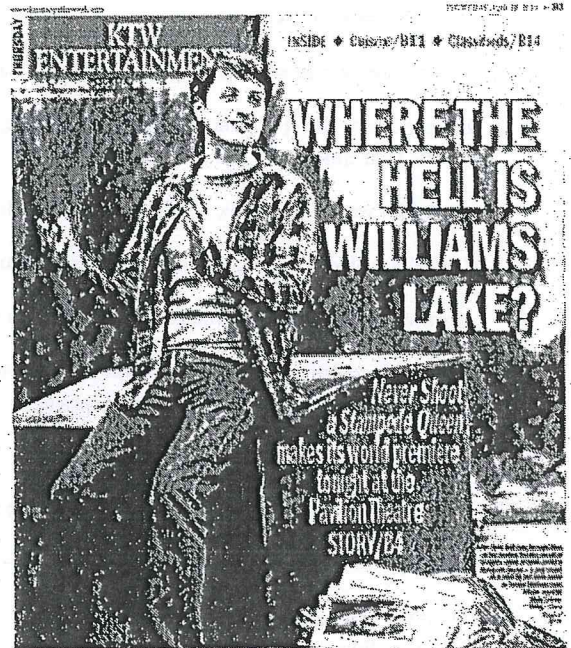
His friends, meanwhile, were fascinated by his tales of life in a place that sounded not unlike the Wild West.

"All of my friends said, 'You've got to write these stories down before everybody thinks you're making it up,'" Leiren-Young said.

So, he did and had the collection of 33 tales bound at a local print shop to be sent out as Christmas presents.

A few years later, Leiren-Young's friend suggested he turn the stories into a play.

Not one to turn down the advice of his pals, he did that, too.



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What came of it was a fringe-festival act, which played in Edmonton, Winnipeg and Australia.

That was it.

That is, until another conversation with another friend a dozen years later.

That friend was an author, and he encouraged Leiren-Young to punch up his story — not by fictionalizing it, but by organizing it into a book.

“I went home that night and started re-writing everything,” he said.

“Next thing I know, this book that I’d completely abandoned for 20 years was in the hands of publishers and everything changed.”

Never Shoot a Stampede Queen was released in book form in 2009.

Later that year, Leiren-Young was awarded the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour — the top prize Canadian humour writers.

Eventually, he was approached by director TJ Dawe about adapting the story to a script.

Leiren-Young did it himself and tonight is the night he’ll see it performed for real — in front of a real audience for the first time ever.

He said it was easy to pick where to debut the show.

“I said Kamloops or Prince George,” Leiren-Young said.

“I wanted to open it somewhere where people would know Williams Lake and get the jokes.”

According to Leiren-Young, the script debuting tonight is even better than the book that was recognized as Canada’s best humour less than four years ago.

“I haven’t given these stories this much thought since I wrote them in 1987,” he said.

“What’s really amazing to me is saying the book won the Leacock and now I wish I could add to the book.”

Dawes, who is directing the play, echoed Leiren-Young’s sentiment.

“Just the other day in rehearsal, Mark said two of the lines we added in the last couple days were two of his favourite lines from the show,” he said.

Vancouver-based actor Ryan Beil, who portrays Leiren-Young in the one-man show, said he has enjoyed working so closely with the reporter-turned-author-turned-playwright.

“Mark is pretty relaxed and open to finding these changes,” he said.

“It’s also really great because we can just ask him directly and say, ‘Was this person like this?’”

Western Canada Theatre’s production of *Never Shoot a Stampede Queen* runs until May 4 at the Pavilion Theatre.

Show times are 7:30 p.m. Mondays and Tuesdays and 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays.

There will also be a pay-what-you-can matinee at 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 27.

For tickets, go online to kamloopslive.ca or call the Kamloops Live Box Office at 250-374-5483.