

Hapa Power at the Torino Games

At 5'7 and 170lbs, Scarborough's **Vicki Sunohara** would be dwarfed by the smallest player on Canada's men's hockey team at the 2006 Torino Olympics. Yet she flies home tomorrow after the closing ceremonies with a gold medal hanging around her neck—a prize that eluded the men this year in a much-publicized and -lamented collapse. At 35, she is a veteran on Team Canada—the only current member of the National Women's Team to have played at the inaugural World Women's Championship in 1990. She was two months shy of her 20th birthday at the time. Having played in ten World Championships and two Olympic Winter Games prior to the Torino Games, Sunohara has plenty of experience to share with her younger teammates, a fact that is reflected in the "A" she proudly wears on her jersey. While not as high profile as some of her team mates, she brings experience and a steadying influence to this remarkable team, which outscored its opponents 46 to two on its way to a gold medal win over Team Sweden.

Sunohara's father David, who once played hockey for the Ryerson Rams, died of a heart attack when Vicky was only seven. Her mother Cathy is of Ukrainian descent but made sure her three kids grew up proud of their Japanese heritage. While she wanted to enroll Vicky in Japanese lessons, though, they took a back seat to hockey, floor hockey and bowling. Years later all that practice paid off when Sunohara made her first trip to Japan as a member of Team Canada, winning a silver medal at the 1998 Nagano Games. There, Sunohara became a minor celebrity, receiving more than 100 interview requests from Japanese media outlets on her arrival in Japan. While in Japan, she made a pilgrimage to Ueda-shi, the small village where her father's ancestors hailed from, and had an emotional reunion with relatives there, where she was feted as a hometown hero.

Over the past 16 years, Sunohara has seen the women's hockey scene change dramatically, with many more girls taking up the sport as opportunities open up for female players. This is attributable in large part to the success of the National Team program including its hard-won Gold Medal at the Salt Lake City Olympics. While Team USA remains their only real competition, that team's surprise upset by Sweden at the Torino Olympics points the way to increased competition in the future. This can only be good for the game, which continues to be played in the shadow of the faster, more physically punishing men's game.

With a bushel of medals and awards, including two Olympic gold medals, to her name, Sunohara is uncertain how long she will continue playing on a competitive level. Prior to the Torino Olympics, Sunohara told hockeycanada.ca, "You never know when it's going to be your last time. It's just so much fun. Time goes by so fast . . . that's what keeps me going. People ask me: 'You have an Olympic gold medal, what do you need now?' But to be able to make this team is huge. The competition to make this team is unbelievable. There



are so many great players. To be able to make the team and be a part of all this . . . I can't imagine anything better. The friends that I've made and how much I love the competition. Trying to get better every day. I can't imagine trading that for anything."

Still, when the day does come that she hangs up her skates, coaching is very real possibility. She has had some experience coaching at the University of Toronto, and experience she says was positive. For now, she continues to play with the Brampton Thunder in the NWHL, where she continues to work on becoming a complete player in the mold of Detroit's Steve Yzerman, one of her role models. Still, despite her recent attention to the defensive side of her game, she remains the team's all-time leading scorer.

When not leading her team on the ice, Sunohara owns and operates the Vicky Sunohara Female Hockey School. She also has an award, named after her, with the Whitby Girls Hockey Association and is a spokesperson for the Youth Assisting Youth Program, helping to provide youth with the same opportunities she had growing up.



Another hapa, United States short track speed skating star **Apolo Anton Ohno**, skated away with a gold and two bronzes at the Torino Olympics. In the 1000 metre he finished third behind two Korean skaters; in the 5000 metre relay his team finished third behind the Koreans, who overtook the Canadians in the final few metres to take the gold. The Canadians—Eric Bedard, Jonathan Guilmette, Charles Hamelin, Francois-Louis Tremblay and Mathieu Turcotte—ended up with the silver medal despite a well fought race.

Ohno finished up these games with a gold medal finish in the 500 metre, relegating Canada's Francois-Louis Tremblay to the silver medal.

Raised by his father Yuki, Ohno (who combined the Greek words "Apo," meaning "away," and "lo," meaning "look out" to create his unique first name), Ohno is a star in the US short track speed skating world. He began his training at age 13 and at 16 became the youngest skater in history to win the World Cup. At the Salt Lake City games, Ohno won a gold at 1,500 metres and a silver in the 1,000. His gold was received after placing second in the 1,500, then moving up to first after Kim Dong-sung was disqualified for cross-tracking. Ohno's win outraged South Korea fans so much that they bombarded him with hate mail and called for a boycott on U.S. imports while the team threatened to pull out of the closing ceremony at Salt Lake.



the long road
boughs of white blossoms
light the way

Helen Baker
North Vancouver, British Columbia
Best Canadian Poem

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival

Linda Poole spent most of her life in Vancouver, and always remembered spring as a special time, with the thousands of blooming cherry trees adding a special magic as winter melted away. When her husband, who is in the Canadian foreign surface, was posted overseas in hot climates, they only came home to Vancouver in the summers and she found herself missing the blossoms.

When they returned home two years ago, Poole came up with the idea of a city-wide celebration that would encompass many different events and bring together people of all ages and cultures to celebrate the arrival of the blossoms and their special contribution to Vancouver's natural beauty.

With a very small budget, she embarked on a two-year mission to make her dream a reality. This month, Vancouver City Council will proclaim March Vancouver Cherry Blossom Month at the opening ceremonies, which are, at this point, TBA in early March. On the phone this morning, Poole pointed out that weather forecasting is an inexact process at best, making it difficult to predict with certainty when the cherry blossoms will make their appearance. Her Sakura Team—botanists and arborists from The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and UBC Botanical Garden—are monitoring the west side of Vancouver, looking for signs of impending blooms. Poole herself has been driving down to the Burrard Skytrain Station, the site of the launch, on a daily basis, looking for confirmation that the launch date—hopefully March 7 or 8—can be announced.

Whatever its eventual date, the inaugural opening event will get off to a rousing start with a performance by two taiko drummers from Vancouver's Chibi Taiko. There will also be a performance of Orff music by 30 grade five students from Vancouver's Renfrew Elementary School, an Uransenke tea ceremony demonstration, and free food samples from Hi-To Food/Fisheries and Savory Coast, both of whom will be supplying special bentos for the cherry blossom picnics that provide the edible part of the festival.

Both Japanese and West Coast Style bentos will be available for purchase. The bentos will be available from March 13 onwards and order forms are available on the festival website. Poole points out that all aspects of the festival are free, except the bentos, and through purchasing the Official Cherry Blossom Viewing Picnic you can support the festival. As an added incentive, orders of 15 or more will be delivered free to the cherry tree of your choice.

Poole has been overwhelmed by the response to the festival. The haiku contest alone attracted almost 1,000 entries from around the world. Four local poets volunteered to go through the entries and select the top 30 haiku, which will be printed on ribbons and hung in a cherry blossom tree at Burrard SkyTrain Station in downtown Vancouver. Four of these haiku will also appear on a poster in 400 city buses. is amazed at the dedication of volunteers such as the Pacifica Haiku Selection Committee who were up until 5:30am completing the selection process. "I wouldn't ask a paid staff member to do that," she says, "and these were volunteers!" Many of the haiku are posted on the festival website: www.vcbf.ca, where you can find up-to-date information on the various activities, as well as the launch date, once it is set.

for events listing see page 15

Bulletin Readers' Haiku

Unfolding cherry blossoms
exuding a sweet scent
Spring has sprung

Patsi Naomi Yodogawa, Vancouver

I made a student cry
by giving so much homework
I cried too

James Edel, Richmond

pink petal shower:
luscious blossom kisses on
this windy spring day

Lorene Oikawa, Surrey

A majestic tree
standing alone in the wood
silently in thought

The eagle soars high
above the cares of the world
with wings of justice

A cookie pony
both beautiful and tasty
there are none left now

Michael Bennett (14)

Top Haiku from Festival Entries

cherry blossoms
I fold my resumé
into a crane

*Barry Goodmann
Hackensack, New Jersey
Best U.S. Poem*

cherry tree
even the blind woman
picks blossoms

*Rosa Clement
Manaus, Brazil
Best International Poem
(outside North America)*

stopped in traffic—
on my window
cherry blossom

*Sophia Frentz (age 13)
Tauranga, New Zealand
Best Youth Poem
(age 18 and under)*

Pixel Perfect Pets

The whole thing seemed harmless enough; my daughter was happily occupied and it didn't seem to be affecting her grades at school. It also satisfied her deeply rooted nurturing tendencies.

Then last week my daughter announced that her tamagotchi and Hannah's tamagotchi were getting married and having a baby.

The other day my daughter showed up after school with a new treasure clasped in her little palm. This isn't unusual; my daughter is the queen of miniature. For her, the ultimate pleasure is finding little objects that she can collect, name and cherish. Sometimes they're actual toys—she's got a collection of Hamtaros, Littlest Pet Shops and Beanie Babies—and sometimes they're more commonplace: the plastic tabs that hold milk bottle lids in place for instance. They invariably get names like Fluffy, Fuzzy, Lily or Olive. Her Beanie Babies, for some as-yet-unexplained reason, are mostly named after food items: Burrito, Avocado, Quesadilla, Banana, etc.

This time it was different; when she opened her hand, she was holding a small object shaped like a slightly flattened egg with a miniature screen and several tiny buttons. It looked vaguely familiar. Maybe it was some kind of kiddie Blackberry. *What is it?* I asked. *It's a tamagotchi,* she said, *Emma gave it to me. Tamagotchi?* I said—*I thought they were extinct. What's 'extinct'?* she wanted to know. *Like the dinosaurs,* I said.

You remember tamagotchis don't you? They're those little virtual pets that were *de rigueur* among the pre-teen set in the mid-nineties. Like most fads, they came and went, another salvo in the Japanese quest for world domination.

I asked around the schoolyard, and sure enough, tamagotchis had made a comeback, sort of like bellbottoms and ABBA. *Well,* I told my daughter, *that's fine, but if you forget it at home one day I'm not feeding it,* remembering the tears when my niece—who is older and had one of the first generation tamagotchis—let her pet die from neglect. The whole thing seemed harmless enough; my daughter was happily occupied and it didn't seem to be affecting her grades at school. It also satisfied her deeply rooted nurturing tendencies.

Then last week my daughter announced that her tamagotchi and Hannah's tamagotchi were getting married and having a baby. It turns out that not only can this new breed of tamagotchi exchange gifts and visit each other, they can procreate. By now, my mind was starting to boggle. *And how does the marriage process work?* I asked. *Well,* she explained, *you save up points by winning games, then you buy honey and*

rub it on yourself (images of Jerry Springer immediately sprang to mind, which I quickly suppressed) *then you connect with another tamagotchi, they kiss, a heart appears, the screen goes black, then fireworks light up the screen. When the screen comes back, there are two babies. One baby jumps into the other tamagotchi's screen . . .* by this point I needed to consult a higher power. I headed online to explore this further.

I quickly found a website that contained everything you always wanted to know about virtual pets but were afraid to ask: *"The egg-shaped toy simulates the life cycle of a pet, letting kids experience the fun and responsibility of feeding, tending to and caring for their virtual pet. The advanced Tamagotchi Connection features new infrared communication functions allowing the virtual pet to become friends with other Tamagotchi, visit its friends to give gifts or play games together, and eventually have a possible second, third and fourth generation virtual pet."*

The website didn't cover everything, however. What about same-sex marriage, I wanted to know. Do the tamagotchis have to be of the opposite sex in order to marry and have babies? This stumped my daughter. A couple of days later she solemnly reported that two female tamagotchis has successfully mated. What about boy tamagotchis? *No,* she said, *they'd tried and it didn't work.* I changed the subject. *So what about you and Hannah?* I asked, *have the nuptials had taken place yet?* *No,* she explained, *no fireworks.* They'd tried for days, dousing themselves in copious

quantities of honey, and no luck. *That's OK,* I commiserated—*it happens all the time in real life.*

By now I felt like I had a vested interest in this little pixel-generated creature and my daughter was more than happy to explain the intricacies of tamagotchi ownership. It turns out taking care of a tamagotchi is much like taking care of a real baby, but the time span is more condensed. They need to be fed, played with, given medicine when sick, and otherwise nurtured.

If you ignore them, they complain. If you play with them and buy them things they're happy.

You also need to clean up after they poop until they get potty-trained (my daughter pointed out the other day that while they do number 2, they don't do number 1). They go through adolescence, complete with surly behaviour. Once they're old enough, they're ready for marriage and a baby.

Now here's the thing about tamagotchi parenthood, it turns out that once a baby is a few days old, the mother dies. When I expressed horror at this seemingly cruel and heartless quirk in the tamagotchi evolutionary process, she explained, perfectly logically, that she couldn't take of two pets, so of course the mother has to die. *Of course,* I replied, rather queasily, wondering if National Geographic had heard of this phenomenon.

As for the responsibility that comes with ownership, if you don't care from them properly or pay them enough attention they get mad and misbehave. Eventually, if neglected long enough, they grow little angel wings and die. And here's where virtual pets differ



from real life. If you need a break from your little tamagotchi, you don't need to find day care, you just put it on pause. And if your little pet does shuffle off its mortal coil, a press of a button will get you a new egg and you can start all over again. After all, when all's said and done – it's still a kid's game. **JEG**

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Events

Community/Media Kick-Off Event

Forecasted for March 7th or 8th at Burrard Station. Date to be confirmed.

Cherry Blossom Viewing Picnic

A Spirit of Vancouver initiative, the Vancouver Board of Trade introduces Vancouver to the Japanese tradition of Hanami (blossom viewing with picnic celebration). The Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Map (March 2nd edition of Vancouver Sun West Coast Life) identifying some of Vancouver's spectacular displays of cherry trees. Check our forecast for weekly updates with regards to peak bloom locations. Following our launch for the month of March you will be able to order a specially created picnic online: a Japanese Bento Box lunch by Hi-To Food/Fisheries or a West-Coast Picnic by Savory Coast. For details go here.

Vancouver in Bloom

Artists paint the blossoms in March and Vancouver enjoys the results during the exhibition, April 15th and 16th at VanDusen Botanical Garden.

Blossom Watch

Share your favorite cherry tree by entering a photo to win in the media's Blossom Watch Web Site Contest. Prize: Tickets for two to Japan on Japan Airlines. Contest is open to amateur photographers. Full contest details March 2nd only in The Vancouver Sun.

Story Time and Origami Workshop

Vancouver Public Library presents a workshop on folding origami cherry blossoms while sharing cherry blossom stories.

Self-Guided Blossom Walks

Haiku

The Vancouver Public Library hosts a haiku presentation by Haiku Society of America vice-president Michael Dylan Welch, and the Pacifi-kana haiku group will host a gink in Queen Elizabeth Park. We invite one and all—but particularly, aspiring haibun (haiku poets)—to come out to these events.

Premiere Screenings of the NHK Japan Prize

Cherry Blossom Zen

Including Cherry Blossom Origami, Ikebana and Way of Tea at Queen Elizabeth Park.

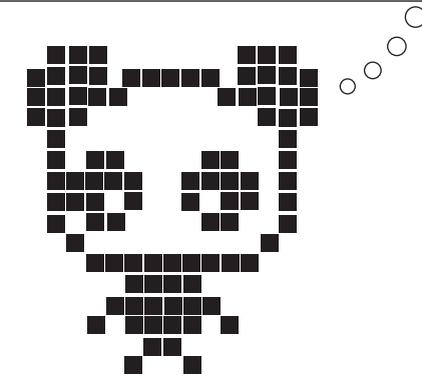
Program subject to change

For a complete listing of events please refer to the Vancouver Sun March 2nd, the Festival Pull Out Guide in WestCoast Life, or check www.vcbf.ca.

From Wikipedia

The Tamagotchi (たまごっち Tamagotchi) is a handheld virtual pet created by Aki Maita and sold by Bandai. The name combines the Japanese word for egg ("tamago") and the syllable "chi" which denotes affection, and is also a pun on both "wotchi" (ウォッチ; borrowed from English "watch", as in the time piece) and "tomodachi" (Japanese for friend.) Also, because "tamago" is Japanese for egg, and "tomodachi" is Japanese for friend, Tamagotchi could be taken to mean egg-friend.

In Japanese and most other languages it is pronounced with a long "o" sound — ta-ma-goh-chee — although in the United States it is typically pronounced "ta-ma-GAH-chee". In Japan, the final "i" is usually elided, thus becoming Tamagotch. This is a common occurrence in the Japanese language.



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