

Four Strong Winds

Sunday April 5 – Day 25



*Just like springtime in Alberta
Warm sunny days and the skies of blue
Then without a warning
Another winter storm comes ragin' through
And the mercury's fallin'
I'm left all alone
Springtime in Alberta
Chills me to the bone*

Springtime in Alberta - Ian Tyson

If you only read these few lines to Ian Tyson's song *Springtime in Alberta*, you could be forgiven if you think it is a ballad about the seasons. You would be correct, but when you dig a little deeper what you hear is the sound of a breaking heart.

<https://youtu.be/kb1tcVxi34Y>

I was among a small audience of friends and neighbours at the East Longview Hall several years ago, when Tyson performed there. He was in a particularly nostalgic mood that evening; *Cowboys Don't Cry*, *Navajo Rug* and *Summer Wages* all rolled off his guitar, while Ian sang his lyrics into the rafters. He paused after a particularly touching piece and said,

"Ya, my love life has had its ups and downs.....but it makes for good songwriting".

I have thought about Tyson's words many times. They are a poetic rendition of the adage, *what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*.

We are going through difficult times right now. Some people will come out the other side busted or broken; others will grow. Who knows, somebody might even turn the experience into a musical standard.



*Think I'll go out to Alberta
Weather's good there in the fall
I got some friends that I can go to working for
Still I wish you'd change your mind
If I asked you one more time
But we've been through that a hundred times or more*

Ian Tyson – ***Four Strong Winds***

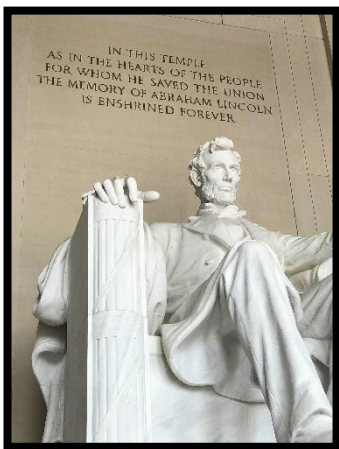
Never Left the Farm

Monday April 6 – Day 26

*Smokin' them wildwood flowers got to be a habit
We didn't see no harm
We thought it was kind of handy
Take a trip and never leave the farm*

Wildwood Weed – Jim Stafford

Four years ago, we planned a trip to Washington, DC. I prepared for the coming adventure by brushing up on American history. I researched the monuments and attractions we wanted to see and spent time in the Smithsonian on-line archives. We were fully prepared, packed, and ready to head for the airport, when it was announced that there was a severe ice storm in DC - the city was shut down, in a state of emergency.



It was a great vacation!

We cancelled the trip and didn't immediately reschedule. Instead, I decided to take a "virtual" holiday to the American capital. Unfettered by physical limitations, I was able to sit down with then President Obama at the White House. I took a Blackhawk fighter jet from the National Air and Space Museum and went for a spin around the Pentagon. Then, I traveled back in history - I introduced myself to Thomas Jefferson in the morning, and swapped stories with Lincoln in the afternoon. In the evening, I watched from our window in the Watergate hotel as Nixon's burglars placed listening devices in the DNC headquarters next door.



In 1974, Jim Stafford was promoting the idea of smoking "*wildwood flowers*" and taking hallucinogenic trips. Smoking weed wasn't legal then, and it still wasn't in 2016 when we took our trip to Washington. Today, I could go down to the local *Wildwood Weed* store/travel agent and get some virtual-travel-aid, but I really don't see the point. With very little effort, and at absolutely no cost, anyone can find that smoky corner of their brain where imagination happens. It's not even addictive (well it is, but not in the clinical sense).

So, it's Sunday, we are all isolated in a pandemic, let's go on vacation together. Bring some smelly flowers if you want, but the bus is leaving in 5 minutes.....



Not a lot of planning went into this expedition, and I don't know where you have already been, so we are winging it. We are sparing no expense - let's go somewhere exotic.

It's been a while since anybody has been to the moon. Let's go there – I have a map.

When we were in Spain a few years ago I did some research on Vasco de Balboa. There is a crater named after him on the western edge, I'd like to check that out....

It looks like there are 5 craters with the Conquistador's name on them. Cool! Now, let's see if we can find a lunar restaurant, with paella on the menu.

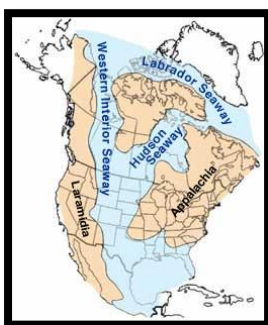


Look, a golf ball! With Neil Armstrong's signature. What a souvenir! You keep it.

That was fun, and we collected 728,000 AirMiles!



Next stop, the beach at Laramidia. Bring your bathing suit.



We don't have to travel any *distance* to get to this beach, but we will need to step back in *time*. Pack a lunch, it's a long trip - about 66 million years, give or take.

Alberta was on the east coast of an island continent called Laramidia during the Late Cretaceous period.

The island and the sea nearby are teeming with coelurosaurian dinosaurs, including this tyrannosaurus.



If you see one, create a diversion.....

.....I'll be on the bus.

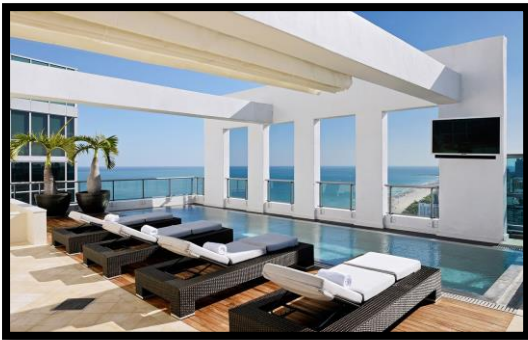
That was a close call! Did anybody get a picture?



Ok, its getting late, lets pack up and head for the hotel in Abu Dhabi. It is a little expensive, but our virtual credit card can handle it.



Bear and I are staying in the Underwater room. We will meet you by the pool.



Who's up for seafood, later?



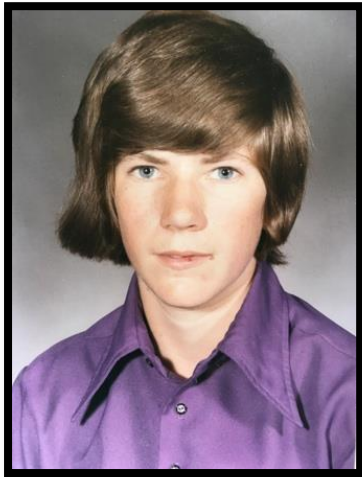
Thanks for coming! Best trip ever, and we.....

.....never left the farm.

Not So Much

Tuesday April 7 – Day 27

I need a haircut. Not as much as I did in Grade 11 but getting close.



Bear and I watched an instructional video, twice. We gathered up the clippers and scissors and sat a stool in front of the bathroom mirror. I dragged along the vacuum hose, and *Bear's Barber Shop* was open for business!

Bear brought the little spray bottle she uses to discipline Furgus when he is picking at the furniture. I knew what was going on in her mind; she never said a word, the smirk on her face said it all.

I cut holes in a Hefty bag, crawled into it and plopped down on the stool.

- Bear:** Okay, so what are we doing here?
Me: You are going to make me look like George Clooney.
Bear: These are scissors, not magic wands.
Me: In that case, just follow the YouTube and cut it like she did.
Bear: I have never done this. Don't get mad if I flub it.
Me: If I come away with two ears, we will call it a success.....



Two men, whose wives cut their hair. I am pretty happy with mine. Vincent,

.....not so much.

Well Has Gone Dry

Wednesday April 8 - Day 28

John Prine died yesterday.

Summer's End is one of the last songs John wrote. Anybody who isn't touched by the lyrics in this video, well their.....

.....well has gone dry.

<https://youtu.be/nXbEFTv9zr0>

Summer's end's around the bend just flying
The swimming suits are on the line just drying
I'll meet you there per our conversation
I hope I didn't ruin your whole vacation

...

Valentines, break hearts and minds at random
That ol' Easter egg ain't got a leg to stand on
Well I can see that you can't win for trying
And New Year's Eve is bound to leave you crying



Mom (third from the left) and her friends - 1953

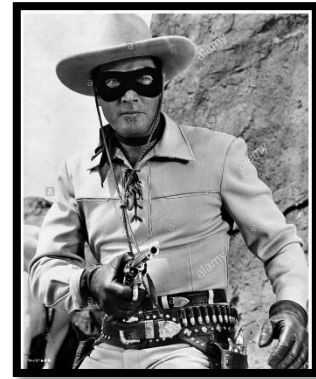
Ke-mo Sah-bee

Thursday April 9 – Day 29

There was a time, if you went into a bank or a grocery store with a mask on, somebody would call the cops. Now, if you *don't* wear one, an alarm goes off.



I donned a mask and gloves, sucked up my courage and picked up some groceries today.



and-beans, or beans-and-pork, everybody was in a *get in, get out* mood. It appears that in a crisis, the Lone Ranger goes shopping, while Tonto holds the fort.

I don't plan on shopping for another month if I can help it, so my sterilized cart was teetering on the brink of its wobbly wheels when I pulled up to the till. I chatted briefly with the cashier through the bars and glass of her cell, but nobody is in much of a mood for a pow wow these days.



I purposefully never wore my cowboy hat to the grocery store, so I could show off my outstanding new haircut. I was a little disappointed that nobody commented.

With my saddlebags packed, I rode off into the sunset.

Where we go now.....

.....Ke-mo Sah-bee?

<https://youtu.be/N9-o-YDcq6l>

A Fine Cockwomble

Also, on Day 29

I learned a new word today. It is an old Scots-English term which has regained popularity in recent years:



Cockwomble: *(noun) A person, usually male, prone to making outrageously stupid statements and/or inappropriate behaviour while generally having a very high opinion of their own wisdom and importance.*

I can't imagine how the word became so popular again.

I am learning a lot of new things in isolation. For instance:

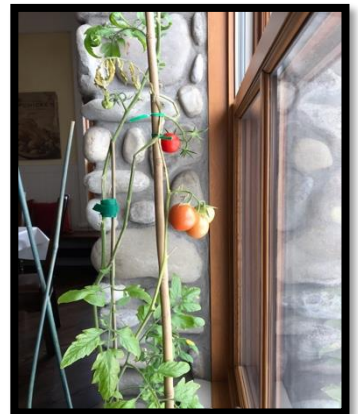
Almost everything will work again, if you unplug it for a while.

And,

I knew this one before, but it never hurts to say it again.

*Only two things money can't buy
That's true love and homegrown tomatoes.*

Homegrown Tomatoes - Guy Clark



And,

If you prepare a new recipe and it doesn't turn out - don't fuss about it, just change the name. This *Skillet Apple Pie* is now an *Apple Cockwomble*.

It is a very poor pie, but.....

.....a fine **Cockwomble!**

<https://youtu.be/6TWwyhCVBDg>

An Academy Award Winner

Friday April 10 – Day 30

Before Covid, Bear and I used to go on some awesome dates. We would ride to the car wash together, the recycle centre, the post office – once, we even went to Peavy Mart! With pampering like that going on, I don't know why it came as such a shock to Bear when I asked if she wanted to go out to a movie tonight.

Bear: Ya, right!

Me: Seriously, it starts at 7:30. Dress warm.

Bear: What are you jabbering about? The theatres aren't even open.

Me: Who said anything about a theatre. I will pick you up at 7:15.



When I was cleaning out the storage room last week, I came across a box of Super 8 film canisters. The handwritten labels identified them as *Shepherd Family home movies* from 1953 to 1975. There were also two projectors in the box.

I took the box down to the barn and have been tinkering with the contents for the past few days. Neither of the projectors would *project* when I plugged

them in. The one that showed the most promise had the wrong size reel mounts, a burnt-out bulb and a broken rubber belt. I switched the bulbs, bore out a bigger centre hole in one of the reels and jerry-rigged a couple of rubber bands to replace the broken belt. I carefully mounted a roll of the ancient film and flipped the switch. To my astonishment a flickering, blurry image of little Terri Shepherd appeared on the wall!

I set up a couple of lawn chairs and put the projector on a box between them, so it projected onto the back of the barn door. I found a couple of bubbly waters and headed up to the house to pick up my date.



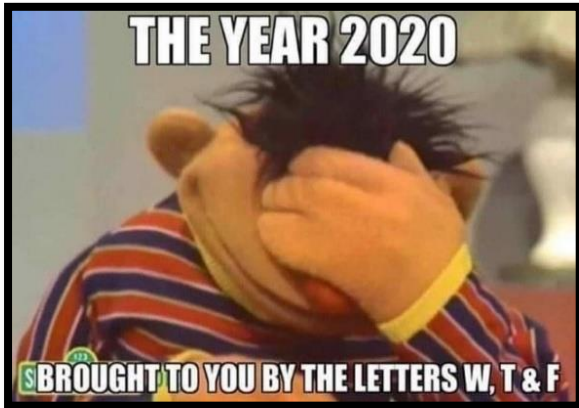
I have been accused of taking Bear on some pretty lame dates, but this one was.....

..... an Academy Award Winner.



Defying Gravity

Saturday April 11 – Day 31



I listened as Premier Kenny addressed the province on Tuesday and came away with the feeling that the fundamentals in Alberta may have changed, inalterably.

The Covid news is serious, but it appears that the heroes in the healthcare system are gaining control. Albertans will weather the effects of the virus without overwhelming the system if the rest of us continue to do our part. If we all remain

vigilant, casualties should be kept to a minimum.

I wish I felt the same way about our economy. We have been through tough times in Alberta but what we are facing today makes the NEP meltdown of the early '80's look like a picnic. The **gravity** of the situation we are facing, with our largest economic driver in the proverbial toilet, is frightening. Even if we turn the corner on the Covid pandemic, the Alberta economy may take years to recover, if ever. If world oil prices and distribution networks don't get corrected, there is a very real possibility that Alberta of the 2020's could look a lot like Alberta of the 1930's.

In other disturbing news.....I want to reach out to a very close member of our circle. I won't mention the person's name or where they live because he/she hasn't been officially diagnosed, but one of "us" is experiencing symptoms that sound a lot like Covid. The person is otherwise healthy but has been suffering respiratory issues, dizziness, and extreme fatigue for several weeks.

He/She said, "*I am so tired I can't stand up; it feels like somebody tripled **gravity***".

I am sure you all join me in wishing him/her well.

Our friend, and everybody in Alberta, is going to get an opportunity to see if we are capable of.....

.....**defying gravity.**



Uncle Jim, Grandpa Billy, and Dad (Adrian) – Moose Jaw, SK 1938

To Be Continued.....

Over the next few weeks, I intend to spend some time interviewing my dad and others who either experienced the Great Depression, or whose parents and grandparents lived through those difficult years. I want to find out how they coped, what they did to detach from the hardship, and how their lives were altered because of the experience.

I plan on writing some articles on the topic. I hope that we will all benefit from knowledge of the past and pass that understanding on to the next generation.

They may need it.

Defy Gravity,

Russ

If you have stories or anecdotes about challenges members of your family faced, in the 1930's or any time, I would be pleased to hear them. With your permission, I will add them to future posts to broaden the perspective.Thank You!

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