

Chicken in the Straw Poll

April 29, 1969

NW 17-7-4 W2, Saskatchewan

I am conducting a straw poll concerning the picture below, your feedback is appreciated.



My sister published the photo on a *Facebook* site called *Old Saskatchewan*, where historical photographs are posted to induce memories of life on the prairies. Val put a caption with the photo that read:

Adrian Paton, Phyllis Resvick and Kevin Paton, near Arcola, carrying chickens to the scalding pot, circa 1969.

Val received numerous responses to the posting. Many people it seems, can relate to the time-honoured prairie tradition of butchering and preserving poultry.

There were comments about the foul (pun intended) smell of scalding chickens. Even

more people could relate to the smell and wonderful taste of fried spring chicken.

The photograph invoked widespread, (and 100% favourable) memories for people of rural Saskatchewan, as witnessed by their comments.

Three days after the posting, Val received a notice from *Facebook* advising that the picture and all attached comments were being deleted from the *Old Saskatchewan* website, citing **Animal Cruelty**.

Val made a call to *Facebook* protesting the ban with the explanation that the photo was posted on an historical website, in an historical context. She explained that many Canadians rely on butchered poultry as a primary food source and that there is no *cruelty* involved in on-farm processing of poultry. Val mentioned that there had not been a single negative comment on the photo.

The agent refused to lift *Facebook's* censorship and told Val flatly that *Facebook* does not tolerate cruelty to animals.

So, here is the poll question:

On a scale of 0 to 10, how offended are you by this photograph?

0: Not at all offended, the photograph is an accurate depiction of farm life in the time period.

5: No opinion one way or the other.

10: Grossly offended, no picture of animals being processed for food should ever be published.

I will get back to you with the results of this ...

.... **Chicken in the Straw Poll**

Jemima, William, and Claire Paton processing peas on the porch, near Maidstone, SK, c 1960.



Dictator

April 30, 2021
Wokeville, Alberta

On the topic of censorship....



*“Will this picture be banned next?”
– Jim Paton*

The *Victoria and Albert Museum* had a fig leaf placed on David's genitals before each Royal visit in response to Queen Victoria's shock at the statue's nudity.

Queen Vicki would have been an outstanding candidate for *Facebook's* PC Police Force.



And a joke that is very likely to get me censored...

Q: What is Mr Potato Head's penis called?

A: Dictator

Thank You Paul!

April 30, 1983

Westin Hotel, Calgary, Alberta

One of my regular *victims* mentioned a book she is reading by Paul Theroux. I am grateful for the recommendation and intend to read *Deep South, Four Seasons on Back Roads*, before our next trip to the American South. Thank you, Terry J.!

I enjoy Theroux's travel journals and novels. *The Mosquito Coast* is a particular favourite because it got me a job promotion.

I was working for a bank-owned leasing company in 1983, in the aftermath of the NEP*.



(*Those three letters are recognizable to every Albertan of a certain age, and the reason for the near-extinction of Liberals in our province - but that is another story, for another time.)

My job back then was to help customers get back on their financial feet after the National Energy Program crisis (or repossess all their assets, for the hopeless cases). There wasn't much glory in the position.

I was living in Regina at the time and commuting to Calgary three days a week, attempting to fix problems in two provinces. It was a daunting assignment and not one that attracted much positive attention from upper management. I was the *workout* department, and all the glory was going to employees in income-generating units.

We had one particularly besieged customer in Calgary who owed the bank multi-millions of dollars and was on the brink of insolvency. The account was large enough that the President of our division flew out from Toronto to assess the file. **Mr.** Thompson (he didn't have a first name as far as I know) asked me to pick him up at the airport and drive him to the Westin Downtown. Thompson invited me to join him for dinner to discuss the file. I was a junior manager, on a junior manager's salary, so dining with the President at the swanky *Owl's Nest Restaurant* was a big deal.

Before dinner we conferred about the account, he had traveled 3,000 km to discuss. There was not much good news to report so the opportunity of spending time with Mr Thompson wasn't having the desired effect. Try as I might, the prospect of the bank losing millions of dollars was overshadowing my career aspirations.

When the waiter showed up to take our order I asked for a small, lean-cut steak to demonstrate my commitment to frugal money management, but Mr. Thompson seemed not to notice. The waiter asked what I wanted for a side, and I said “asparagus”. I casually mentioned to Mr. Thompson that I had been craving asparagus because I was reading a book where it was mentioned. Mr. T. asked me “which book”?

I said I was reading *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux, a novel set in Honduras.....

Before I could say more, Thompson exclaimed that he too was reading the book. From that point on we talked about everything but banking; we discussed books, travel, and adventure. A much more positive aura overtook the meeting.

At the end of the evening Mr. Thompson returned to the business at hand. He asked what course of action I recommended and what I thought the likely outcome would be for the bank. I told him the only way we were going to extricate the bank from the dismal situation was if we put the account into intensive care. I went on to say that I was confident I could recover an optimum amount, but I couldn't do it unless I was in Calgary full time and unburdened of other administrative duties.

The next day I was permanently posted to Calgary; I had an assistant and a (slightly) larger salary.

Thank you, Paul Theroux!



The Mosquito Coast, Honduras

Gordie Howe

May 1, 1966

Arcola, Saskatchewan

About three times a year in my youth, I would visit *Middle Earth*. The mythical realm existed just west of Arcola Town Hall, on the corner of Souris Avenue and Claire Street.

From the outside the building looked like most other houses in the neighbourhood; a nondescript *Inselbrick*-clad cottage, with a south-facing entrance. Caragana and Lilac bushes defined the property boundaries; a giant Manitoba Maple dappled the roof. Feral grass covered the yard and protruded from every crack in the sidewalk leading up to the entrance.

A hand-painted sign in the window proclaimed:

*M. Hawman - Shoemaker
- Skates Sharpened -*

Shoes with holes in the soles were the key to this realm. If you possessed a pair you were allowed entrance.



Worn-out boots in hand, I crossed the threshold of the porch. Reality stayed behind on Claire Street, and I entered a world apart.

The first transcendental sensation was the smell – tanned leather, shoe oil and wood smoke. Then, as my eyes adjusted to the light, my mind also recalibrated. The space was small and dark; overcrowded with a bizarre array of gadgets and antiquated equipment. Material was piled everywhere: leather hung in drapes on the walls and lay coiled in heaps. Boxes of tacks and hardware were scattered on every level surface, the tops lolling open like silent tongues. There were an array of oily machines perched on haphazard benches; their utility defied logic.

Deep from within the piles, a not-unfriendly voice queried:

What have you got, Son?

I am here to pick up my skates, and Dad's boots have holes. I clumped them on the counter.

I strained to see where the voice had come from. A stool in the back swivelled and a pair of feet thumped on the wooden floor. Murray the shoemaker, shuffled toward the counter.

Murray had a pleasant face, and his hair was well-groomed, but that is where convention stopped. Unravelled, he may have been of average height, but Murray was decidedly *ravelled*, his body twisted by polio. Murray's back was a mountain under a dishevelled shirt. His torso stooped; his hips sloped at an impossible angle. The shoemaker's distorted legs were supported on boots that could not be accurately described as a *pair*. The sole of his right shoe was eight inches thick and the other bent where boots should not bend.

The shoemaker grasped Dad's boots with the strongest hands and forearms I have ever seen. Calloused and stained from years of shaping leather, Murray's hands were a marvel of dexterity, attached by powerful arms to an awkward jumble of body parts.

These boots will need soles and heels. Your skates are on the wall behind you. Tell your Dad his repairs will be ready Saturday, he can pay for the skates then.

Murray plopped Dad's boots on a pile and dragged himself back toward the stool.

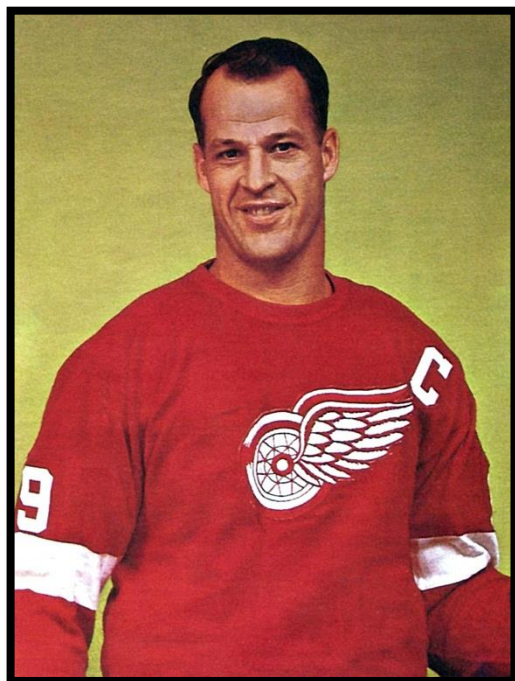
Thanks Mr Hawman.

I pulled my skates off a peg on the wall and turned to re-enter reality.

You will score more goals than Gordie Howe now, Kid!

I glanced back over my shoulder as I turned onto Souris Avenue. Murray Hawman's distorted silhouette threw a shadow on the window. I wondered, why do some people contract polio and others skate through life like ...

... Gordie Howe



Truck Stop Shower

May 2, 2021

Nashville, Alberta

Simplicity is a wonderful thing. Two voices, one guitar and a percussion instrument (shaped like a human skull) got this musical duo on a *Rolling Stone* Top Ten list recently.

The couple collaborate as *Smooth Hound Smith*, a self-described, garage-y, folk-y, country-tinged, soul-inflected rhythm & blues band.

Smooth Hound Smith started where all great musicians do, at the bottom. They played night clubs, did road shows and often, slept in their Ford Econoline van.

Zachary Smith writes simple songs, about common human conditions, and blends them with Caitlin's glowing harmony. The result is magic, made simple.



Bear and I have been known to travel great distances to see a favourite artist (Cape Verde, Florida for *The Civil Wars*, and Nashville to hear *Keb Mo*, as examples). When Covid ends and *Smooth Hound Smith* hits the road again, so will we.

We may travel in a van, stopping occasionally for a

.... *Truck Stop Shower*.



<https://youtu.be/v5N6jFSR8W0>

Come along for the ride but wear some rubber sandals if you can.

Morning Has Broken

May 6, 2021

Millarville, Alberta

My hearing is moderately impaired, too many tractors, airplanes and head colds, and yet I recognized Cat Steven's *Morning Has Broken* before the first full line was sung this morning.

Amazing when you think about it. There are 7,850,000,000 people in the world, and probably as many songs, but the human sensory system, even one as damaged as mine, is able to isolate the voice print of a single individual.

*Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.*

There are probably 8 billion smells in the world as well, but I detect coffee.

No doubt about it,

.... Morning Has Broken

7,850,000,000 days into isolation, and
this is what we think about.

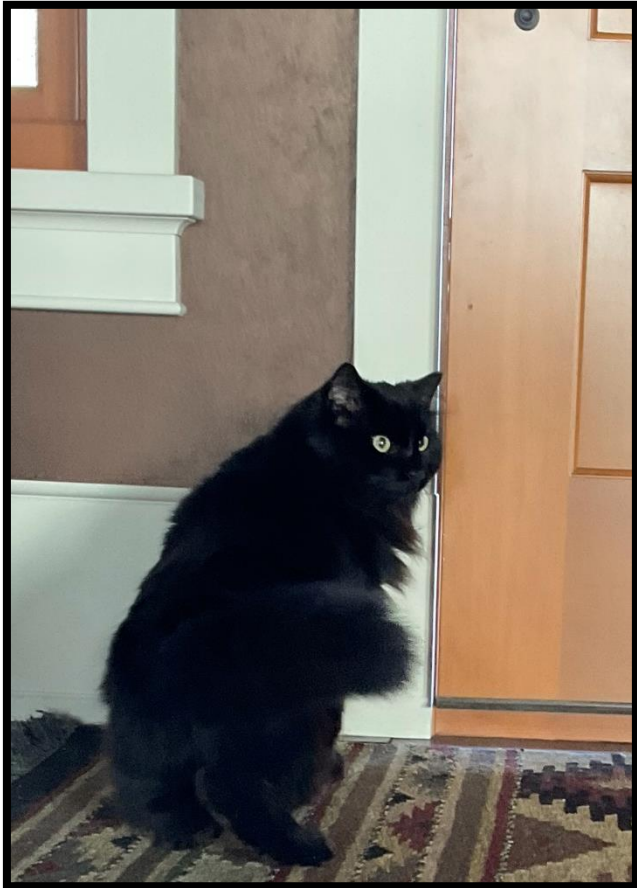


Palace Guards

May 7, 2021

Buckingham, Alberta

It's spring, so Furgus stands by the door endlessly, waiting for an opportunity.



Palace Guards

Remind you of anybody?

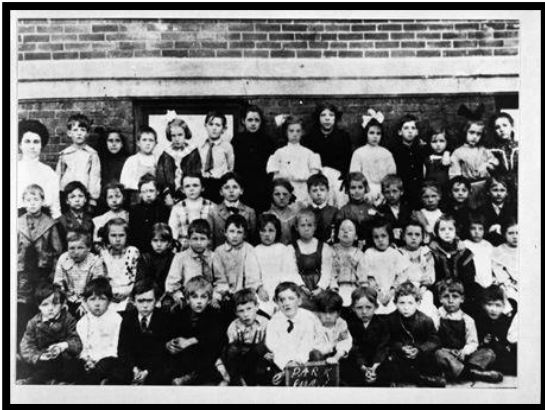


Helen's Paperboy

May 8, 1911

Kansas City, Missouri

Walt Disney is the handsome young fellow on the bottom row, fourth from the left in this photo. Bear's grandma, Helen Banks is one of the girls in the picture, we don't know which.



Benton Grammar School, Kansas City Missouri, c. 1911

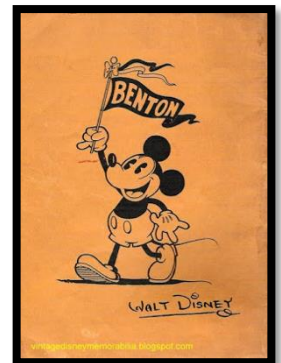
The Disney family lived at 3028 Bellefontaine Ave, just east of Benton school. The Banks family lived three blocks further east, on Indiana Avenue.

Walt Disney and his brother Roy had a paper route, delivering *The Kansas City Star* in their neighbourhood. The brothers would rise at 4:30am and distribute the morning paper before school. Then in the afternoon,

they would deliver the evening edition. We have no idea if Bear's great grandparents subscribed to the *Star* but, if they did, Walt Disney probably delivered it.

As an older woman, Helen Banks vaguely remembered a boy named Walter in her class. Of course, she had no idea who the shy boy, always daydreaming and doodling, would become.

Walt Disney drew this cartoon for the *Benton Grammar School Reunion Newsletter*, in 1931.



While Grandma Helen never knew Walt Disney well, there was something serendipitous about her brush with the entertainment mogul. Two generations later, Helen's Grandson Brian Ferguson became an animator at Walt Disney Studio in Hollywood.

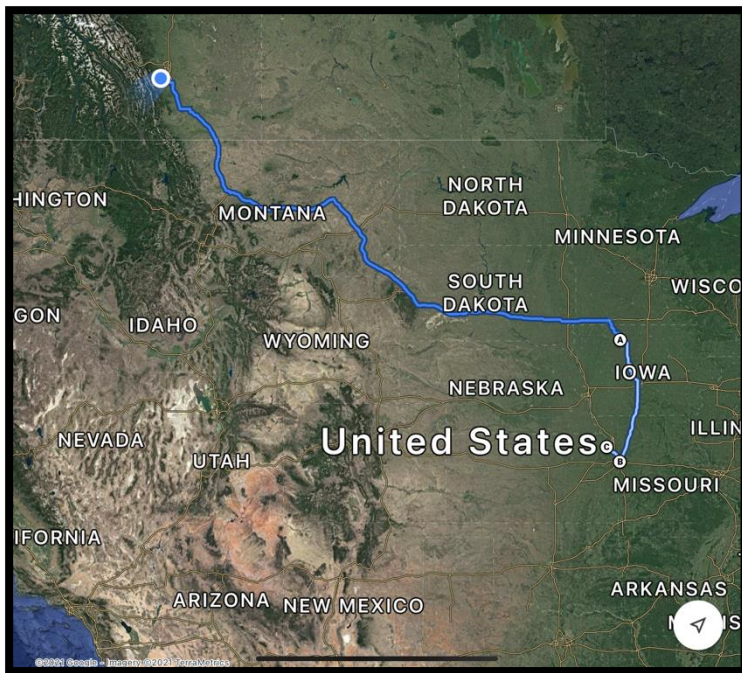
Timon, the meerkat in *The Lion King*, and many other beloved Disney characters were created by Brian, at the direction of ...

...Helen's Paperboy.

Bingo!

Sometime 2021 (with any luck) Midwestern, USA

I have started asking people; “Where is the first place you will go when Covid ends?” So far, nobody has mentioned “Iowa”.



Bear and I both have ancestral links to the American Midwest. My grandmother’s family was from Rodman, Iowa, and Bear’s grandma was born in Kansas City, Missouri. We were planning a road trip there before Covid came along. The dream is still alive.

Rodman (population 42 at the last census) is an interesting place, statistically speaking. The ethnic “mix” is 100% white. Median age is 60.5 years.

Based upon median income vs. average house value, you can live very well in Rodman. An average house costs \$56,000, while the median annual

income is \$80,000, a ratio unheard of in most of America.

Politically, Rodman voters were overwhelmingly Democrat (80%) in the pre-Obama years but switched en masse to Republican in elections in the past decade. In the 2020 election, 68% of voters selected Trump/Pence over Biden/Harris. Rodman seems like a place to look for clues about what is going on in American politics, but the stats may have already provided an answer.

We may as well engage in politics while we are there. I googled “what to do in Rodman” and all that popped up for the week was an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and ...

.... Bingo!

Apparently Not

May 18, 1971

Arcola, Saskatchewan

I have a scar on my left thumb. The injury happened in the spring of 1971, at Beaver Lumber in Arcola.

My friend Wayne and I occasionally worked at the building supply store, stacking lumber. When a truckload of dimensional lumber arrived, we were hired to unpack it and store the boards in bunks in the woodshed.

Lumber would arrive bunched together with metal strapping. Sometimes the bundles twisted when they were unloaded from the truck and the strapping would be under intense pressure. Wayne or I would cut the band with metal shears, and it would recoil off the bundle like a high-tensile cobra.

One Saturday morning we were unloading 2x4's which had come off the truck in a twisted heap. I was on one side of the bundle; Wayne and the shears were on the other. Not realising where I was, Wayne cut the strapping just as I reached up to grab it. The twanging metal snake bit deep into my thumb, just above the knuckle.

I bandaged the injury with supplies from Beaver Lumber's first-aid kit and went back to work thinking; *I won't do that again*. The cut healed, but it left a jagged little scar as a reminder to be more careful.

Fast-forward fifty years.....

Bear saw a deck ornament on Pinterest; three logs bound together with metal strapping and asked if I could make her one. I happen to have a strapping tool that doesn't get much use and logs are in plentiful supply around the farm, so I decided to give it a try. I gathered up the material, cut the logs to length and wrapped the strapping around them. The first one was a little sloppy, so I applied more pressure to the second strap. As I was bearing down on the tension tool it slipped, awakening the metal serpent once again. The sharp edge of the severed strap struck me just below the knuckle of the same thumb damaged fifty years ago.



Once bitten, twice shy?



... Apparently Not.

Nobody's Perfect

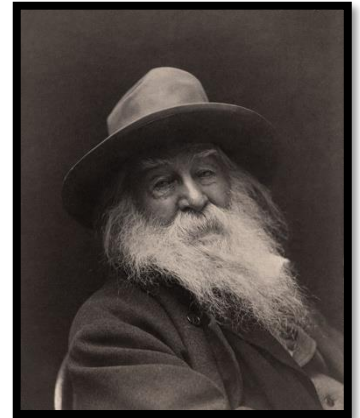
May 23, 2021
Everywhere

Well, that was an eclectic mix of gibberish, from the scalding pot, to taking a shower at a truck stop; from David and Mr. Potato-head's junk, to picking asparagus in Honduras. I never claimed to be Walt Whitman.

On that note, I am going to leave you with some musical selections.

They all focus on the theme ...

...Nobody's Perfect



All About That Bass – Postmodern Jukebox

<https://youtu.be/aLnZ1NQm2uk>

*Yeah, my mamma she told me don't worry about your size
She says, boys like a little more booty to hold at night*

Fortunate Son - Credence Clearwater Revival

https://youtu.be/ZWijx_AgPiA

*It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no senator's son, son
It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no fortunate one*



Dance of Lurch and Wendy Addams

<https://youtu.be/rLvbVLmzHNM>



Fuck All the Perfect People – Chip Taylor & The New Ukrainians

<https://youtu.be/dt9GBafFziE>

*Some choose to dismember your rise and your fall
And fuck all those perfect people.*

Deliverance

<https://youtu.be/NFutge4xn3w>



To be continued