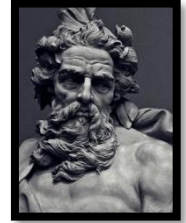


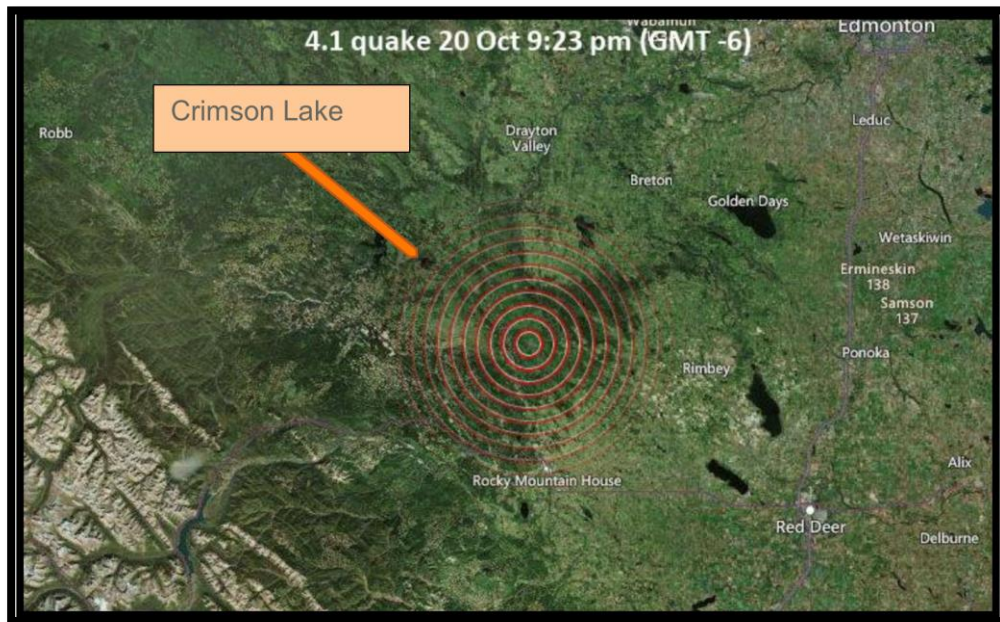
4.1 on the Richter Scale

October 21, 2021
Crimson Lake, Alberta



Poseidon was mildly irritated last night.

We are at the cabin for a couple of days. As we were getting ready for bed last night, we heard a rumbling and the floor of the cabin shook. It felt like a passing forestry truck going over a rough patch, but there wasn't any traffic on Crimson Lake Drive. The tremor lasted about ten seconds.



The Ancient Greeks believed that when Poseidon got angry, he would strike his trident on the shore, which caused the ground to shake. The extent of the *God of the Sea and Earthquakes'* anger could be measured by the damage done.

I don't know what we did to tick Poseidon off yesterday; we never even went down to the lake. I watched some trumpeter swans migrating over it and took a couple of photos of colourful tamarack trees near the shore, but I can't imagine that irritating Him.

Whatever the cause, Poseidon's anger registered

....4.1 on the Richter scale.



A Barley Sandwich

October 13, 2021

Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan

Canada has a landmass of 3,855,000 square miles. What are the chances of two random Canadians owning properties adjacent one another, in two separate locations, among all those billions of acres?

Neighbour Dave and I do.

I never knew Dave before we moved in next door to the Clarke's at Millarville in 2005. But, during our very first conversation we determined that:

- We are the same age
 - We both grew up in southeastern Saskatchewan
 - Both of us are pilots
 - We both lived in Regina for a while
 - We spent our summers at Carlyle Lake
- and
- Both our families own land near Gravelbourg, SK.



Dave and I are neighbours in two places at the same time.

With that many parallels it wasn't a big surprise to discover that our lifestyles are very similar. We agree on music, meat n' potatoes meals, and the health benefits of what we Saskatchewanians call ...

... a "barley sandwich".

Harvest Gold

October 13, 2021

Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan

It took Dave and I twelve hours to make the six-hour trip to Gravelbourg this fall. We meandered along secondary roads, tertiary roads, and roads that aren't *any*ary. The route took us to places like Manyberries, Etzicom, Elkwater, and Ravenscrag.

Dave snapped this photo in the Greater Senate area.

We try to make the pilgrimage to Gravelbourg once a year to check on our properties. The Clarke/Dodick farm has an old house on it, so accommodation is assured.



The Dodick farmhouse is possibly the most *Saskatchewan* place I have ever been. It hasn't been occupied full-time for decades, so the décor is static 1970's.

Harvest Gold should be the official colour of Saskatchewan.

The utility pail under the sink adds another Saskatchewan flair. Sask Wheat Pool was an institution in the province for decades. This pail probably contained growth-inducing chemical or pesticide when it was brought home from the Pool elevator. It is now a reminder of the "waste-not, want-not" culture that pervades the province.



The colour of the receptacle blends nicely with the harvest theme.



A fly-swatter-at-the-ready is another essential element of every Saskatchewan home.

But, as every Gravelbourger knows, you swat flies, but you never swat a maple bug. They leave a nasty orange stain that clashes with...

... the **Harvest Gold**.



A Bridge with Such Character

August 16, 1968

Arcola, Saskatchewan



They are going to tear this bridge down.

Moose Mountain Creek Bridge, near Arcola, Saskatchewan.

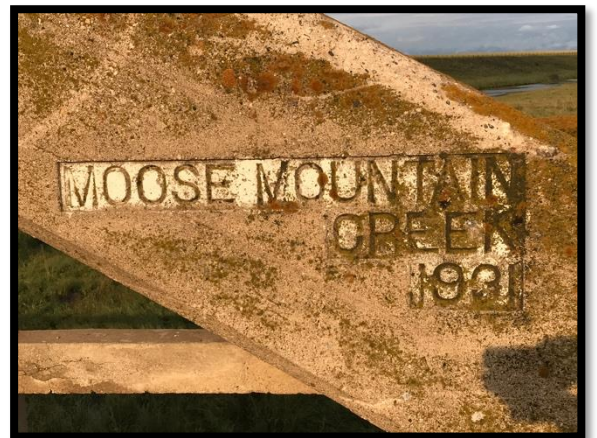
Cliff Swallows nest under the bridge. People swim and skate here. Painted Turtles live in the muddy water, so do clams and ducks and garter snakes. Mathew Warner once rode his bicycle over the arch.

Tear it down?! Who do they think *they* are?

Three thirteen-year-old boys camped near Moose Mountain Creek Bridge in the summer of 1968. They had bonfires, waded in the creek, and slept in a tent. The boys ate burnt wieners and beans from a can, with roasted marshmallows for dessert. They stayed up most of the night telling dirty jokes. The boys were grimy, smoky, and tired, but having the time of their lives.

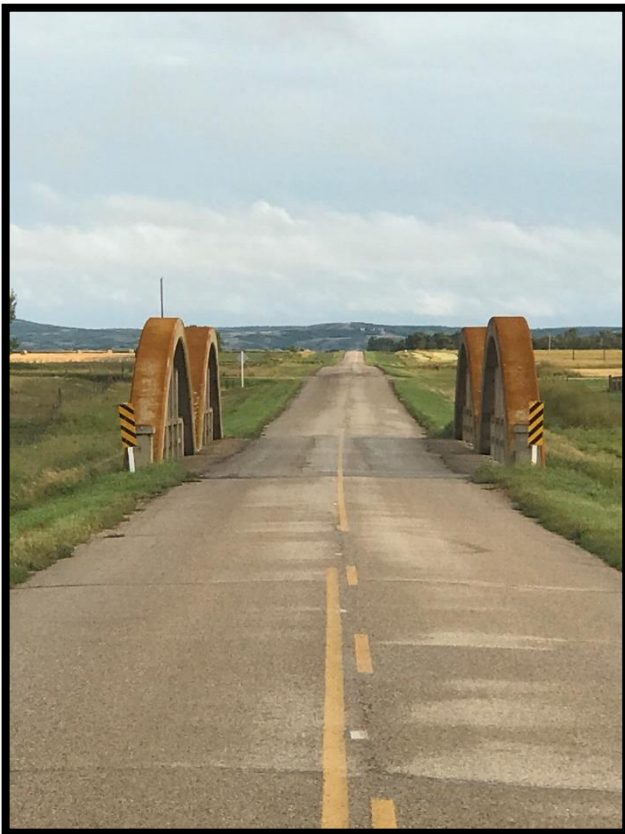
They were having so much fun the boys planned a second night. Supplies were running low, so they hitch-hiked into town for groceries. The first car that came by stopped and picked them up, as Saskatchewan folks will do.

The Hopewell family, Dad, Mom and two prissy young girls, pulled over on the side of the road near the bridge in a brand-new Oldsmobile. They welcomed the boys into the car; two got in the back with the well-dressed girls and one scrunched into the front seat beside Mom Hopewell.



The Hopewell's immediately regretted their decision to pick up the vagrants. It was only four miles to town but by the time they dropped the campers off at *Francis and Sons Grocery* the new Oldsmobile and it's occupants smelled like a campfire fart in a wet wool mitten.

The boy who sat by Mrs. Hopewell.



Moose Mountain Creek Bridge is 90 years old. Trucks keep getting heavier and the bridge is starting to crumble. It has reached the end of its useful life.

This iconic piece of Saskatchewan's landscape will disappear. I doubt that it will be replaced by

....a bridge with such character.

Common Loon

September 3, 2021

Crimson Lake, Alberta

There are about 1000 things I like “best” about being at the Lake. Loons are at the top of the list.

Courier d’Bear and I paddled the canoe around the lake today to watch the loons perform.



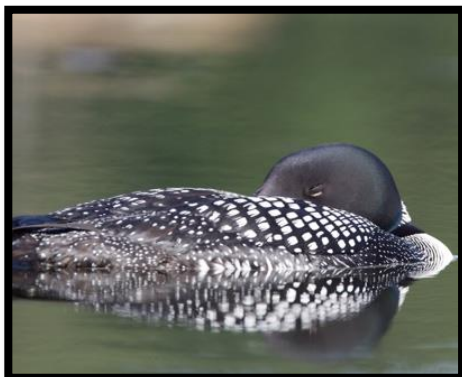
Loons evolved as accomplished swimmers, they are also well-adapted for flight, but the birds are hopeless on land. Their legs are located so far back on their bodies they don’t balance properly. It is comical to watch them waddle, flop, and fumble on solid ground. Back in the water, their grace and dignity return.

Loons nest on semi-submerged, shoreline mounds in the early spring. As soon as their chicks can swim, the loons are back in the water for the summer, sometimes carrying hatchlings on their back.



Loons don’t even return to shore to rest.

Common Loon, asleep on a waterbed.



Loons can’t get enough forward motion to take flight from land. They migrate south in the late fall before ice forms on the lake. In preparation for flight, they do this crazy foot-paddling, wing-rowing thing to practice getting airborne from water.

Watch this 20-second take-off practice.

https://youtu.be/KUI_M4W-eWk

Loons are accomplished divers. They disappear from the surface for minutes at a time, then pop up 50 meters away, often with a minnow in their beak.



Because they spend so much time on and under water, loons must preen their feathers daily. They secrete oil from a gland under their tail and spend time each day lubricating. When Bear and I saw a loon doing its floundering, grooming procedure, we thought it was in distress. It looked like the loon was trying to get away from a tangled fishing line or had a broken wing.

We paddled up close enough to investigate; the loon seemed not to notice us and continued with his personal oil change.

Where the loon truly distinguishes itself is with its call. There is no sound, man-made or natural, that comes close to the beauty of the haunting cry of the loon.

Observing them this morning, we decided that there is nothing *common* about the

.... **Common Loon**

<https://youtu.be/4yoteZQxRkK>

Marshall caught this photo of a loon, and a very brave perch.



His Nibs

September 29, 2021

White Rock, BC

Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, and a pair is eight. If you understand this phrase, you are probably a cribbage player.



The game of cribbage has been around for about 400 years, with no sign of declining popularity. It is the perfect combination of luck and skill. There are 12,994,800 possible hand variations to forestall boredom and plenty of opportunity for social interaction among players during a game.

Sir John Suckling: British Poet, Soldier, Knight, Brawler, Bowler, Parliamentarian (for 5 days), Traitor, and Inventor of the Game of Cribbage. Born 1609, died in exile in 1642 (of suicide, by poison).

All you need to participate in the game of cribbage is an opponent, a small playing surface, a full deck of cards, and a cribbage scoreboard. With very little training and only rudimentary math skills, you are on your way.

Mom taught me how to play when I was a child, so I grew up with the game. My first boss, Ken Reed, was an avid crib player. Ken encouraged us to play at lunchtime, after work, and even *during* work on occasional slow days. Ken would drop the cards and board on a desk and announce; *get your nickels ready!*

We never had a TV at the cabin when the kids were growing up, so they all play a mean game of cribbage. The board has a perpetual home on our dining room table.

Neighbour Dave and I have a never-ending Friday night crib tournament. We use a well-worn board and beer-stained playing cards. As with many “sports”, our skill level diminishes in direct correlation to the number of empties in play.

When Covid came along, I found a Cribbage App on my phone and kept my skills up playing a pro-level cyber opponent.

Leaving modesty well behind the skunk line, I am a master cribbage player. I can count cards as fast as the loneliest submariner, and I automatically know more scoring combinations that most life-sentence prisoners. I play for keeps, every chance I get.

The odds of scoring a 29 hand in cribbage are 1 in 216,580. I have had two of them.

While we were out visiting Adam and Bianca in White Rock last week, my Grandson Leo mentioned that he is learning to play cribbage. Leo made it clear that his objective is to displace me as *King of the Board*.

I found this ornate cribbage board in an antique store on our way home through the Okanagan. The dealer had purchased it at the estate sale of a naval man. The scoring holes are bored into a piece of dense, burl'd hardwood, with brass spacing frets. There are nautical creatures and waves carved into the piece. With some minor repairs and a deep cleaning this crib board is ready to get back in the game.



I think this gnarly cribbage board, with its toothy walrus and nautical theme, is destined to be near water. Leo lives just up the road from White Rock beach. I am going to send the board to him for his 16th birthday, but I will retain ownership until he beats me. When Leo out-plays Grandpa, the board is his.



It won't be long. Leo is smart and determined.

The King will soon be replaced by ...

... His Nibs.

Go Fly a Kite

August 10, 2021
Millarville, Alberta

When my brother Brad's grandkids came to visit this summer, we picked up some activities for them, including a Dollar Store kite. The fun we had with it eclipsed the price 100/1.

We even let the kids use it for a while.

Mom, Dad and Uncle Jim made us a kite one summer when we were kids. They used thin strips of wood cut from a hockey stick for the frame, covered it with a dry cleaner's plastic bag, and used folded strips of newspaper for the tail. The kite was strung on a length of twine borrowed from the hay baler.

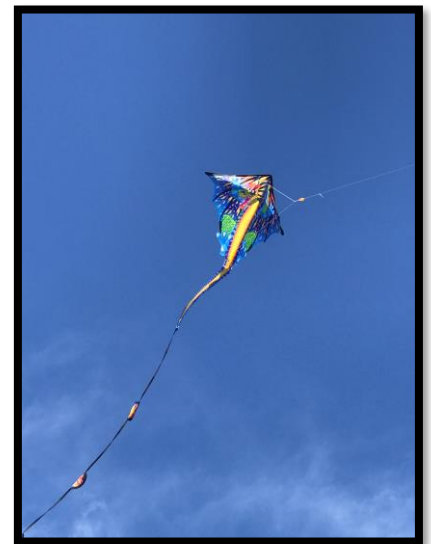
I don't remember if our homemade kite ever flew; the attempt was the reward.



Kites have been around for a very long time. The Chinese claim to have invented them in the 5th century BCE, but evidence of tethered airfoils shows up on every continent, long before written records were available. The oldest depiction of a kite, called a *kaghati*, is in a Mesolithic cave painting dating about 9000 BCE.

Kites everywhere, and in all eras, conform to a similar basic structure. They are built on a light frame of wood, bamboo, or plastic, covered with thin fabric, and tethered by string or plant fibre. Most kites have a tail that keeps them aerodynamically stable.

The plastic dragon we flew this summer stayed aloft until our arms grew tired.





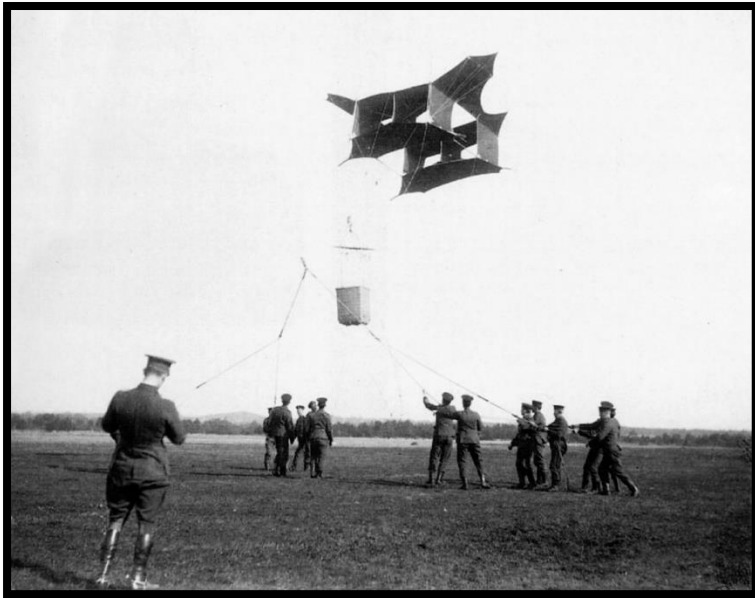
Kites are more than just fun; they have great utility. One of our readers Keith McD, once told me how he used a kite to help propel his kayak off the shore of the west coast several years ago.

Keith also played with a whale on that trip, but I will let him tell the story.



When the San Francisco earthquake happened in 1906, city officials sent a kite-mounted camera aloft to survey the damage. This is the first ever aerial photograph.

Kites have long been used for military purposes. They are useful for signaling, reconnaissance, and target practice. During WW I the British army attached a basket to a kite to carry a spy over enemy lines.



No volunteers had come forward to sit in the basket when this photo was taken.



There is some doubt that the famous *kite-in-a-thunderstorm* experiment said to have been conducted by Benjamin Franklin, ever actually happened. Scientists speculate that, had Franklin's kite been struck directly by lightning, the American founding father would probably not have survived. What is more likely is that Franklin's kite was subjected to an ambient static electrical field, in which case the image on the US \$100-dollar bill should be altered slightly.



I was so taken with kite flying this summer I ordered an adult two-handed parafoil. I am not going to wait until somebody tells me to



.... Go Fly a Kite.

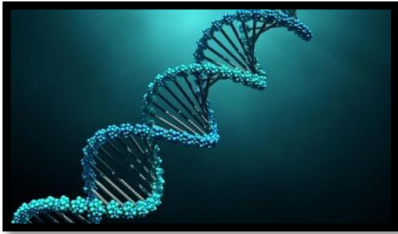


The photo on the left has nothing to do with kites, but I couldn't resist. The pigeon is equipped with a chest-mounted camera for military surveillance purposes. We can only speculate on how the bird learned the art of photography.

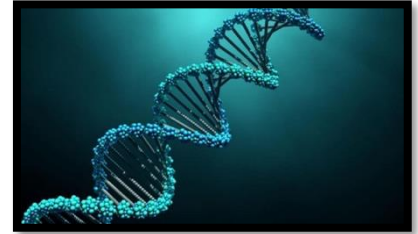
Your Equalness

October 22, 2021

Buckingham and Millarville



Your Deoxyribonucleic Acid



Royal Deoxyribonucleic Acid

The DNA of Royalty contains nothing strikingly different from yours or mine - or a raccoon, or a blade of grass for that matter. So why do we continue to defer to these people as, “*Your Highness*” or “*Your Majesty*”? In my opinion, hereditary monarchies should be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Queen Elizabeth II has graced our money for as long as I have been on the planet. She has conducted herself as Queen with the utmost dignity, but my patience for the concept of Royal birthright ends with her. After Elizabeth, there is not a person in line for her job that I would bow to, or that I consider in any way *Majestic*.



Ninth in line for the job is a sexual predator. He hasn't been convicted, (and

may never be, given his Regal status and the influence of that inbred regime) but, by his association with Jeffrey Epstein, and similar accusations from dozens of victims, it is clear that Prince Andrew is as common as dirt.

Sixth in line for the monarchy doesn't want the job. Prince Harry knows what the rest of us have for some time, the world is a better place without royal birthright.



Second in line for the throne is Prince William, eldest child of the Prince of Wales. William seems like a nice fellow. So far, he has kept his pants on in public, but he still pulls them on one leg at a time, just like the rest of us.



The others among the top ten in line for the throne are children. I cannot conceive of a situation where I would refer to someone wearing a diaper as, *Your Highness*.

The heir apparent "*by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of his other realms and territories King, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith*", is Prince Charles. If Queen Elizabeth lives to be 100, which seems entirely possible, Prince Charles will be 78 when he inherits the job.

As monarch-in-training for 60 years, Charles has distinguished himself as having some very common attributes. His love life has been a mess, he has racist, misogynistic tendencies, and is a proponent of every *Woo Hoo* alternative medicine to ever slither out from under a rock.

Try as I might, I don't see *Highness* when I look at Charles.



It would be nearly impossible to abolish the monarchy, and I am not saying we should. When QEII is gone the concept of a hereditary nobility will disintegrate on its own. British Royalty will be reduced to celebrity tourist attractions, without political or religious power. Public support will wane and with it, financial support. Without state funding or taxpayer-sponsored pageantry, the monarchy will fail.

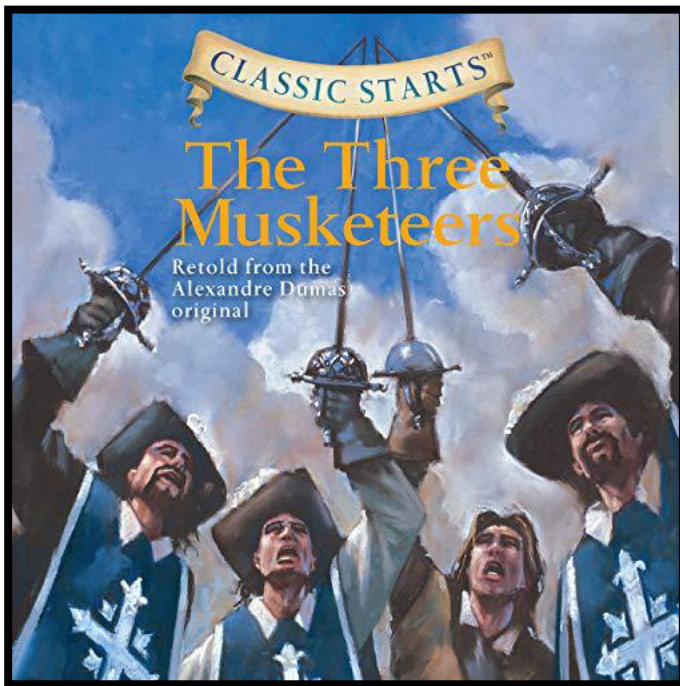
In the not-to-distant future, descendants of the House of Windsor may very well be referred to as

.... **Your Equalness.**

Musketeers

August 13, 2021

International Left-Handers Day



If you take a close look at the book cover on the left, you might notice an anomaly:

Two of the three musketeers are left-handed.

There is a reason for this.

When we were watching the Field of Dreams baseball game yesterday, I noticed the disproportionate number of left-handed ball players and how they were deployed, both offensively and defensively, during the game.

Left-handed pitchers have an advantage over right-handed batters. Baseballs thrown by the left hand, arc and break away in patterns peculiar to a batter with a right-handed brain.

Left-handed batters also have a statistical advantage over right-handed pitchers. Fourteen of the top twenty Major League Baseball batting averages have been posted by left-handed batters.

It works the same with fencing. A sword wielded by a left hand is difficult for a right-brained opponent to defend against.

The fourth man in the picture above is d'Artagnan. He is an aspiring musketeer. I haven't read the book but statistically d'Artagnan is more likely to die in a sword fight than left-handed ...

.... Musketeers.



Left-Handed Compliment

Also, on August 13, 2021

I spent some time on International Left-Handers Day reading about the advantages and disadvantages of being a southpaw. Here are some highlights:

- 90% of people worldwide are Right dominant.
- Left-handedness in Scandinavian countries is as high as 18%. In China only 3.5% claim to be Left dominant. This could be attributed to the difficulty of writing Chinese calligraphy with the left hand.

漢 汉



- Writing left-handed was historically discouraged in many cultures due to the difficulty of scrolling left to right with a dip pen and ink. Ink dries slowly so drawing the left hand across fresh ink is impractical. Also, dip pens and quills are sharp and tend to snag when pushed rather than pulled across paper.

- 7 of the last 15 US Presidents were left-handed. Obama, Clinton, Reagan, and Bush #1 among them. Apparently, left-handedness is non-partisan.

- Intelligence: This is interesting. Left handers are no more or less intelligent than right handers, on average. But there are more left handers

among high achievers, conversely the left-handed are over-represented among those with intellectual disability. The geniuses and mentally impaired balance one another out so, as a body, left-handers and right-handers have equal average intellect.

- Left-handed people are much more likely to suffer mental health issues in their lifetime.

- A study at Durham University found that left-handed men were almost twice as likely to die in war. The study theorized that this was because weapons are designed for the right-handed.

- This bolt-action Lee-Enfield .303 is a good example.

- 40% of children with cerebral palsy are left-handed.

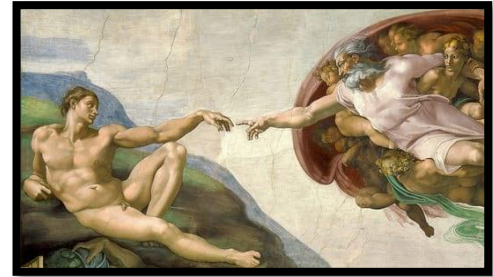
- Left handers are more likely to suffer bone fractures.

- Among college graduates left handers earn 10 – 15% **more** than their right-handed counterparts, but ...

- Left-handed people earn 10 to 12 percent **less** over the course of their lives than right-handed people. Scientists attribute this disparity to higher rates of emotional and behavioural problems in left-handed people.



- Michelangelo was left-handed, so was Adam, but apparently God is right-handed.
- Men are 23% more likely to be left-handed than women.



➤ Alcoholism is more common in left-handed individuals.

➤ Less than 1% of guitars are played left-handed.

➤ Left-handedness is often associated with being clumsy, unlucky, insincere, even malicious. The word “sinister” means both “evil” and “on the bearers left, on a coat of arms.”

So, to all my left-handed friends, Happy Left-Handers Day, you are special! Which, when you think about it, is the ultimate...

... left-handed compliment.



Footedness is also a thing. In board sports, most people lead with their left foot and steer with their right. Footedness is referred to as being either “Right-footed”, or “Goofy”.



Two of my four kids are Goofy.

A Little Different Today

October 26, 2021

Calgary, Alberta

Bear and I have both lived on the extreme edge of the rural/urban divide. We come from small agricultural communities, and yet we both developed careers in an urban environment. During some phases of our lives, we were comfortable in either culture.

The expanse of my rural/urban experience has been particularly pronounced. At one time in my life, I regularly milked cows by hand. At the height of my business career, I signed contracts with New York bankers with those same hands.

I loved the city days; the excitement of building a business, of negotiation, and interaction with vibrant people, but the whole time I was doing the *urban* thing I dreamt of the country. The past few years I have drifted back toward the *rural* side of life, after I quit traveling to the city for work.



Every morning I decide how I dress for the day based upon my duties; clean jeans if I am going shopping for hardware, dirty jeans if I already have the hardware, I need to complete the projects I am working on. The past few weeks I have been rebuilding a windmill; I start the day covered in grease and get dirtier from there.

Most of our shopping and cultural activities these days start and end in the Millarville area. We go to Black Diamond for basics, then travel to the town of Okotoks for major items and *fine dining*. *Entertainment* involves

Sunday supper with the kids, occasional coffee shop encounters, and stay-at-home movies. Some of this is Covid-related, some of it is just *us*.

Today was different, we took an urban vacation. Bear booked tickets for a Van Gogh exhibit at the BMO Centre, then lunch at a restaurant on the 40th floor of a downtown office building. It felt odd donning a jacket and cleaning my fingernails on a Tuesday morning, then heading to Metropolis.

Bear and I both worked downtown when we met. We wore the urban uniforms, dined at all the right places, and socialized with up-and-comers. It was exciting. We caught glimpses of that life again today.



The art show was moving. The life, words and work of Vincent Van Gogh have been digitized by modern artists and are displayed in a spectacular format. The walls (and floor) of the BMO Centre are flooded with phrases and paintings created by the artist. The images move as if by magic.

Van Gogh's words, drawn from hundreds of letters written to his brother, depict a deeply troubled mind. The artist spent most of his life in extreme poverty, under a constant cloud of depression. And yet, his art is a display of unparalleled colour and vibrancy.



Van Gogh knew something about the urban/rural divide. His career pulled him to Amsterdam, London and Paris and exposed him to other notable artists and art dealers, but the troubled artist constantly drifted to the country. Many of his paintings depict peasant people and rural landscapes. Wheat fields, flowers and stars are constant, while cityscapes are rare among Van Gogh's artwork.



We had driven the truck to the BMO Centre but decided to walk downtown to the restaurant Bear had chosen. I hadn't had time to wash my vehicle, so it looked a little hillbillyish. As a consequence of my return to rural life, I don't feel as comfortable driving, or parking in the city centre. It was only a 20-minute walk, so we did, on a swirling, oil-painted landscape.





We haven't done trendy for a while so *Major Tom* was a *major* treat. The restaurant is on the 40th floor of Steven Avenue Place, overlooking the downtown and the mountains beyond. I was happy I had dug deep in the closet and found a suit jacket to wear, the *Major Tom* crowd is decidedly *uptown*.

The vistas from the restaurant are amazing, Van Gogh-esque, but people-watching was even better.

The "suits" were there, with bulging expense accounts and \$200 haircuts. Their female companions on display put *Iris*es to shame.

We enjoyed watching the stars of business, keeping the world of commerce turning from their lofty perch 40 floors above.

Major Tom is obviously named in honour of the David Bowie hit from *Space Oddity*.

*This is Ground Control to Major Tom
You've really made the grade
And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear
Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare
"This is Major Tom to Ground Control
I'm stepping through the door
And I'm floating in a most peculiar way
And the stars look very different today.*



It was fun to return to the city. The stars of business downtown, and *Starry Night* above our rural home, both look ...

... a little different today.

To be Continued