

This is Water

March 11, 2021

Two young fish are swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish going the opposite direction. The older fish says to the pair, "Good Morning Boys, how is the water?". The two young fish swim on. Eventually one turns to the other and says, "What the hell is water?"



When things are going well, we gravitate to the default setting, *complacency*. It is a natural tendency. If we swim around in a pool without predators long enough our minds become numb to our surroundings.

Throw a shark in the pool and suddenly we are acutely aware of our circumstances.

Covid is that shark and we have been swimming with it for a year today. Complacency went out the window early and was replaced by keen awareness.

Suddenly, there was colour in the world again. Sometimes the colour was *fear* or *scarcity*, or *limitations*, but we were all forced to see the world in vivid Technicolor because of Covid. Which isn't a bad thing.

Swimming with the shark the past year intensified awareness of the people around us. We found empathy, to truly care more about others.

We recognised that our bounty is not limitless, we were forced to pay attention to what we consume. And, we were reminded that our lives have limits; we must be disciplined to survive.



The stars shine a little brighter as a result of Covid.

Tragically there were casualties, but for those of us who evaded the shark the only lasting side-effects will be heightened awareness and a renewed appreciation of our circumstances.

The shark is losing its bite. We have found our defence; the predator will be vanquished. But do we really want to return to our pre-Covid lives, to complacency?

As we venture back into the pool, we should constantly remind ourselves ...

.... **This, is Water.**

A Full Year of Uninterrupted Russell

March 2021 Everywhere

Top Ten Things I am going to do when Covid ends:

- 10: Shake somebody's hand.
- 9: Stop feeling guilty for breathing.
- 8: Eat something cooked by a professional.
- 7: Delete my Zoom App.
- 6: Travel everywhere in a Johnny Cash song.

<https://youtu.be/mFRpa81MUAY> *I've Been Everywhere* – Johnny Cash (listen for Gravelbourg)

- 5: Wear real pants.
- 4: Burn my mask.
- 3: Stand in a crowded room and laugh.
- 2: Abandon the air hug and the elbow bump - give my kids a proper hug,

And the Top Ten thing I am going to do when Covid ends....

- 1: Congratulate Bear, for enduring **a full year of uninterrupted Russell.**



I don't know if Johnny Cash passed through Gravelbourg, like the song says. If he did, I am certain he visited *Notre Dame de L'Assomption Co-Cathédrale*.

Until you have seen it, you really haven't been, Everywhere.

Old Fogey Lake

February 2021

Old Wives Lake, Saskatchewan

“As of Feb. 24, seniors 75 and over and seniors 65 and over living in First Nations and Métis communities will be eligible for vaccination.” - CBC News February 19, 2021

Sometime around 1840 a band of Cree hunters followed a herd of buffalo into Blackfoot territory. Blackfoot scouts discovered the encroaching Cree band and attacked. The Cree were able to defend themselves against the small contingent of warriors, but they anticipated a much more vigorous attack once the Blackfoot had assembled a war party the next day.

At nightfall, the Cree band set up camp near a large, shallow lake. They discussed their options and decided that survival depended upon escape. The united Blackfoot nation would be far too powerful to defend against, so the Cree devised a plan to save the core of their band.

Older women volunteered to keep fires burning through the night to trick the Blackfoot into believing that the Cree tribe was not abandoning the camp, while core members escaped.

The ruse worked. When the Blackfoot war party arrived in the morning, they found a few elderly women tending dozens of fires. The Cree band had safely retreated toward their home territory in the Qu’Appelle valley under cover of darkness.

The Blackfoot killed the old women in vengeance.



The brave elder women are revered for their sacrifice, for the greater good of the tribe.

The lake where the band camped, where their Grandmother’s blood was spilled, is called *Old Wives Lake*.

I was reminded of this story when news of the roll-out of Covid 19 vaccine was announced today.

Attitudes have shifted to such a degree that our tribe now places the welfare of the *vulnerable* ahead of the *virile*. Vaccinating the

elderly and infirm, to the exclusion of highly productive, child-bearing members of society is a dangerous undertaking. If our society is to endure, we must take lessons from the Cree. The hunters, the young, the future should be protected first when resources are limited.

When my turn comes, they can give my vaccine allotment to a farmer, a teacher, or a pregnant mother.

Maybe I will get a lake named after me....

..... Old Fogey Lake



Native American Encampment
– Paul Kane 1845



Hunters Returning to Camp (in the Qu'Appelle Valley) – Michael Lonechild

Different Circumstances

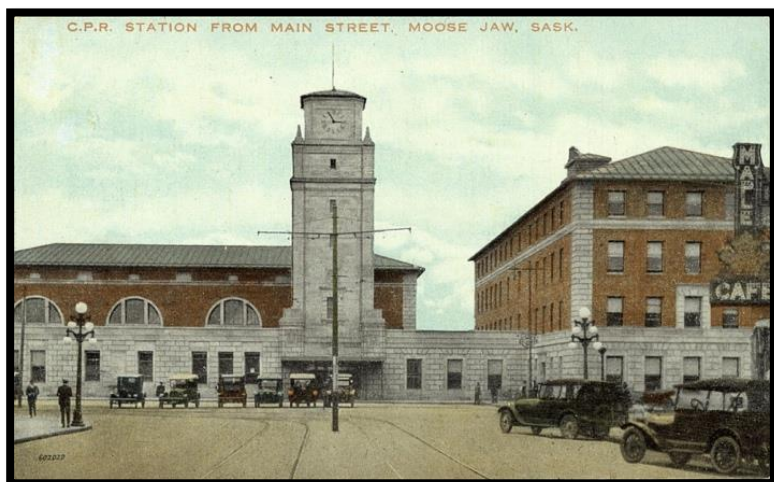
February 2021

Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan

During Saskatchewan's Prohibition years of the early 1920's there was no legal way to get a drink in Moose Jaw - but nobody went thirsty. If you wandered down to River Street and asked around, a bottle might appear on the back seat of your car.

Moose Jaw was a railroad town in the early 20th century. Goods moving east and west on the Canadian Pacific rails converged with north/south traffic on the Soo Line from the American mid-west. Grain moved east, finished commodities came back. Cattle went south, and manufactured goods were transported north. Sometimes, among the boxes of tractor parts from Minneapolis or Chicago, there would be crates with bottles marked "lubricant". These special crates were handled with extreme care and generally overlooked by Police.

The crates found their way into speakeasies along High Street, where the lubricating effect of the liquid soothed the throats, hearts, and minds of thirsty Moose Javian's.



If you take a close look at the man standing outside Moose Jaw Station on the left, you might notice a bulge in his jacket pocket. The man is walking toward a Model "A" Ford, where he will exchange the "bulge" for a small brown envelope the driver has in the palm of his hand.

I wandered down to the train station while I was in Moose Jaw recently. The building is as impressive as it was 100 years ago. There are no passenger trains anymore, but rail-yard sounds are still familiar near the station, at the bottom end of Main Street. Freight trains carry all manner of goods along the rails behind the station, to this day.

The inside of the building has undergone a remarkable transformation. In 1921 this was a bustling passenger terminal, without a drop of alcohol legally available anywhere. Today, the passenger lounge has been converted to a government-run liquor store.

The man selling alcohol in the 1921 picture on the previous page was a criminal, labelled a *Rum Runner*.

I bought a bottle of rum at the train station while I was there. The man who sold it to me is now labelled a *Government Employee*.

Same Beverage ...

... Different Circumstances.



Puppy is in the Bottom

February 2021

Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan

The following story is a fictional account, intertwined with elements of actual historical events and Paton family folklore.

Billy Paton walked out the front door of this house in the summer of 1908. He was four years old, recently arrived in Moose Jaw after a long journey by ship and train from Scotland.

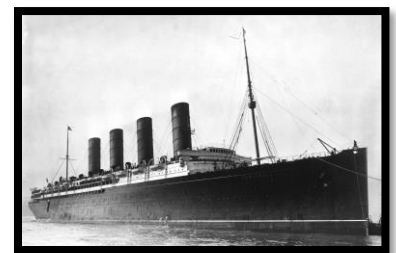


Billy's parents had emigrated to Canada and were on their way to a homestead near Gravelbourg, SK. They were staying in Moose Jaw with relatives, the Hewitsons, until spring. Billy's mother and father, and his grandpa and grandma, were all working at a dairy farm, where Mr. Hewitson also worked. The family awoke early every day and left to milk cows, leaving Billy and his sister Annie with Mrs. Hewitson.

Billy looked southward as he stood on the front step. He was impressed by how big the sky was - brilliant blue, stretching from horizon to horizon. Mrs. Hewitson told Billy not to leave the yard but there was a lot of Canada to explore outside the gate.

286 Tapley Street was the temporary residence our ancestors lived in when they first arrived in Canada in 1908. I was in Moose Jaw recently and decided to walk past the address to see if a connection could be made with Paton's who lived there 113 years ago.

Billy loved ships. He watched them moving up and down the River Clyde from his house at Gavinburn, in Scotland. Last year the Lusitania sailed down the Clyde, right past his house and out to sea!



Billy wondered if there were ships on the river across Tapley street. He opened the gate and wandered over the road. Billy peered down the riverbank, but he saw no ships. The river in the valley below wasn't much bigger than the burn that flowed past Billy's house back in Scotland.

Billy was disappointed, the Lusitania would never be able to sail to Moose Jaw.

As Billy gazed into the river valley, something else caught his attention. There were tents along the river with people milling around them. The people were a strange clan, wearing unfamiliar

costumes. Billy watched as women tended fires and men sat on the ground smoking pipes. Children played along the riverbank. They all had dark faces, some had feathers in their hair.



Billy rushed back to the house and told Mrs. Hewitson what he had seen. She explained to Billy that the Wakamow people camped in the river valley. She promised to take Billy and Annie into the valley to meet the people after she made lunch.

Many years later, when Billy was a grandfather, he reminisced about his time in Moose Jaw interacting with the indigenous people camped in the Wakamow Valley. Billy played with the native children on the riverbank, they swam and caught garter snakes together.

Mrs Hewitson packed a lunch with a few extra sandwiches. She led Billy and Annie down a steep path to the riverbank, where they enjoyed a picnic. Children from the Wakamow camp wandered by and Mrs Hewitson offered them sandwiches.

Billy and Annie marveled at the curious children from the tent village. One boy showed Billy a garter snake he had wound in his pocket.

The women and girls wore long colorful dresses and bare feet. They tended fires under cooking pots.

The camp was overrun with dogs. Semi-wild creatures living among a semi-wild tribe.



Neither the tent camp nor the children in the pictures above and below are Wakamow people. The photographs were taken elsewhere in southern Saskatchewan, at about the same time Billy lived in Moose Jaw. The circumstances depicted in these images would have been very similar to those of the indigenous people Billy interacted with.

The dogs that roamed the camp were utilitarian. They pulled travois to transport goods for the band, they hunted with the men, and they were a food source.

Billy and the children from the valley interacted over the long, hot summer. They became familiar to the point that the families sometimes shared meals with one another.

There is a family legend about a meal shared with the Wakamow people, that has persisted for more than a century. On one occasion a Wakamow woman invited the Paton family to a meal of stew, cooked in an iron pot, over an open fire.



Billy approached a child about his age.

“I’m Billy. This is Annie, she’s a girl sister. What’s your name?”

“Wakamow”. The fascinating child pointed at his own chest.

The child’s mother handed Billy and Annie bowls, pointed at the stew pot, and said something to them.



Billy never understood what the woman said, but his parents did. Decades later, any time stew was served at the Paton family dinner table, someone would repeat the line.....

... “Dig deep, puppy’s in the bottom”



You Should have Called

February 2021

Brooks, AB

I had a business-friend in Brooks for many years, and then I didn't.

Business owners are a fraternity, we understand one another. Myron¹ and I were like that. Every time we made contact, we would spend a few minutes discussing the business at hand, then the conversation would turn to common interests; possibilities for growth, government bureaucracy, how to manage people, how to prosper in an uncertain economy. From there we branched out into personal things. We had a business relationship, but we became close enough that I knew his hobbies and he knew mine. I knew where he went on vacation and he knew where I did.

Myron and I interacted over many years; unflinching trust grew between us. We became familiar to the point that we were able to dispense with many conventional business protocols. We exchanged goods and services without much formal paperwork - it drove our accountants nuts.

And then one sunny February morning, I received a call from a mutual friend saying that Myron had died. And not just died, he loaded his pickup truck full of fuel containers and drove it at top speed into a bridge abutment, on purpose.



The reason Myron took his own life had nothing to do with business, he had family issues the details of which I know nothing, and I don't want to know.

It's been five years since I ventured down this highway for Myron's funeral. I am still trying to make sense of it. Why would he do that? If Myron had a problem so big, why didn't he talk to somebody about it? It didn't need to be me. Myron had countless friends; they filled a hockey arena for his funeral.

Myron made the decision to take his own life like he made all his business decisions. I wouldn't call him reckless or even spontaneous, but he had a propensity for making decisions on the spot. Myron ran a dynamic company; he had no fear of responsibility. He took calculated risks, and his *made-on-the-fly* decisions were usually sound. Until this one.

I don't know how to conclude this little rant. Brooks is in my rearview mirror now. I'm looking out at that beautiful prairie sky, endless possibilities, nature, people. There is happiness in the windshield.

¹ Not his real name.

Myron, you should have called.



Decades in the Sun

February 18, 2021

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

The chances of each of us coming into existence are infinitesimally small, and even though we shall all die someday, we should count ourselves fantastically lucky to get our decades in the sun.

- Richard Dawkins

Ayden Valerie Jane Guillemin came into the world today. This is the first photo of Ayden with her happy Grandparents.

If the chance of any of us coming into existence is infinitesimally small, the probability of Ayden being here is even more remote. And yet she is.

The little girl in the photograph below is Ayden's great grandmother Patricia, seated between her parents, Eleanor and Robert Wells.



Pat was the youngest of eight children born to Bob and Nellie Wells. She was nine years younger than her next youngest sibling. Her parents were 47 years old at the time of Pat's birth and already grandparents themselves.

Great Grandma Pat was *unintentional*.

Despite the accidental nature of her arrival in the world, Pat is the matriarch of a significant family lineage. Her four children have eleven grandchildren and fourteen great grandchildren (so far). Ayden is the 29th person lucky enough to defy our family's extreme odds of

existence.

May she enjoy many happy **decades in the sun**,

Uncle Russ

Ms. Terri

March 17, 2021

JR Houston's Calgary, AB



Bear and I met the old-fashioned way – in a bar. She was in JR Houston's saloon with a girlfriend celebrating St. Patrick's Day; I was there with a friend celebrating Monday night.

It was a delirious evening, supercharged with music, alcohol, and youthful exuberance. We connected, danced to *Dire Straits*, and laughed uninhibited, into the wee hours. 35 years later, I still consider that night the high point of my life.

Terri - 1986

I don't have words to describe it, but I can relay a story that lends perspective on just how lucky I am to have met Bear at JR Houston's, on St. Patrick's Day, 1986.



We are getting older. We have a big shack and we need help cleaning it. We employ a lovely lady named Juanith to help us out. Juanith sometimes brings her late-teen-age daughter Maria along to assist. The duo has been coming to our house regularly for about five years and we have grown very close to them.

Juanith recently relayed a story that exemplifies just how lucky I am to have Bear in my life.

Juanith told us that she and Maria were having a quiet moment at home, discussing the future. They were talking about objectives and who Maria would become as an adult. Maria told her mom that, when she is older, she wants to be "just like Ms. Terri".

Bear is so unpretentious and kind. She exudes unbounded joy. She gives, she consoles, she encourages, and yet she expects so little in return.

Maria and I know a good thing when we see it.

Happy Anniversary Ms. Terri!

https://youtu.be/wTP2RUD_cL0

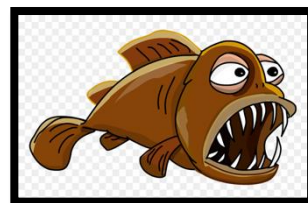
Beef and Chicken

March 2021
The Fishbowl

Covid has been an enlightening controlled experiment in a fishbowl. We have had a year-long opportunity to watch individual reactions as the shark entered the water.

I came away from it not wanting to have much to do with several species of fish:

- **Cerb Fish**, fish who signed up for handouts, but could have worked.
- **High and Mahi Mahi**, who placed their elevated expectations ahead of the common good.
- **Glamper Groupers**, who bought holiday campers, snowmobiles, bicycles, and other luxury goods with their CERB benefits.
- **Piranha**, fish who used Covid limitations placed on the rest of us, to *improve* their situation.
- **Common Carp**, fish who bullied their way to the front of both toilet paper, and vaccination lineups.



- **Angler Fish**, who had access to the same news we all did and came away with alternate facts.
- **Wholly Mackerels**, fish with limited training who are certain they know things professionals don't.
- **Blue-Blood Fish**, who used Covid to stoke their prejudices.
- **Political Bottom-Feeders**, who printed money to bolster their popularity, in a crisis.
- **Sucker-Mouth Catfish**, who disparaged the messengers. Fauchi, Lam, Henshaw, seriously? They were just doing their job, tirelessly, and,
- **Dullfish**, who never learned a damn thing during this crisis.



Post-Covid, I am going to limit my diet to...

... Beef and Chicken

The Side Effect is Happiness

March 2021
Foothills, Alberta

I am in the queue for a Covid vaccination next week. It will be Moderna, the one Dolly Parton helped research with a large donation. I hope it doesn't have any unusual side effects.



Unless ...

... the side effect is happiness.

*People always say, 'But you always look so happy.' Well, that's Botox!"
"Nobody's happy all the time. But I work hard at it. – Dolly Parton*

Covid has been great! It has given me a world of things to write about, and time to do it. I have been able to connect with you and about 100 other fine people through the process. I won't q the dangerous or restrictive aspects of it but, overall, I have found happiness the past year. Thank you for sharing, for being the *one in a hundred!*

Safeway Pharmacy says we will get a "vaccination passport" once we get the second shot. Bear and I are going to stick that *passport* in our Canadian passport and see some of the world with it.

I can't help myself, so I will be writing about things that crawl out from under rocks wherever we go. I hope you don't mind if I send you scribbles from time to time.

I hope that our paths cross regularly as we venture back out into the world.

Happy Trails,
Russ



Adrian, teaching Russell and Brad how to read, c1960.

To Be Continued.....