

You Can't Roller Skate in a Buffalo Herd

October 2020

Anything but Normal, Alberta

I received my first pension cheque this month. Nothing gets you thinking about your own mortality more than that. Exploring the inevitable crept into my stories this month, for which I apologize in advance.

There are two extreme schools of thought on the subject.

There is the *Jack London Credo*, summarized by his catchline: *I'd rather be ashes than dust.*

On the other hand, there is a biblical take on longevity which says in Psalm 90:10: *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years....*

I am not fond of either interpretation. Psalm 90 goes on to say that, while we might live for seventy or eighty years, *the best of these years are often empty and filled with pain; soon they disappear, and we are gone.*

As for Jack London's version, he died at 40.

According to these two sources, neither longevity option is very appealing. We either burn our candle twice as bright and snuff it out at half time, or live to a ripe old age, filled with pain and emptiness.

By now I am sure you are all thinking; *"this instalment is going to be depressing"*. Bear with me, I promise to keep the morbidity factor to a minimum, if you choose to come along for the journey.



To lighten things up, I have decided to insert *Roger Miller's Credo* into this episode:

You Can't Roller Skate in a Buffalo Herd
But you can be happy if you have a mind to.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KI-8hst0bho>

Thanksgiving French Onion Soup

October 2020
Maligne Canyon Wilderness

A friend told me recently that when he is feeling gloomy, he jots down things he is thankful for. I am feeling a bit flumpy today because we aren't having a Thanksgiving family gathering this year, so I decided to heed the wise man's advice and jotted down some things I am thankful for:

- **Coffee.** Can you imagine waking up to something healthy, like grapefruit juice?



- **Bears.**

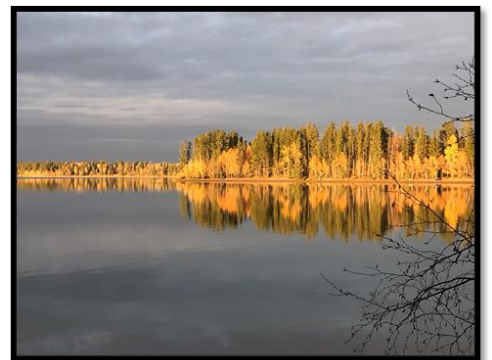
*So meet a bear and take ~~him~~ her out to lunch
with you
And even though your friends may stop and
stare
Just remember that's a bear there in the
bunch with you
And they just don't come no better than a
bear.*

Bears - Lyle Lovett

https://youtu.be/_T4SaNuxZO8



- **Our back yard(s).**



- I am thankful that **Canadian** Thanksgiving happens before America's. We need an early start, there is just so much more to be thankful for.
- **Turkeys**, who invented these adorable creatures anyway?
- **A big family**, and not a bad turkey egg in the bunch.



Speaking of turkeys, someone you know booked a Thanksgiving dinner at *Maligne Canyon Wilderness Kitchen* near Jasper. He made the reservation for Saturday afternoon and he and his Bear drove seven hours to get there. They had fun along the way, but the thought of a

sumptuous feast at the end of the trail never left their minds the entire trip. The couple arrived half an hour early and got a window seat on the canyon side of the restaurant. Beautiful!

The perkier server ever, arrived at the table:

Perky: Hi, my name is Perky, I will be your server today. Where are you folks from?
Turkey: Millarville, south of Calgary.
Perky: I haven't heard of that place.
Turkey: That's not surprising, you are looking at one half of the total population right here. (Points to Bear)
Perky: Well, thanks for coming. Here are your menus – the smoked brisket is our specialty.
Turkey: Sounds nice, but we have come for the Thanksgiving special.
Perky: Sorry, that doesn't start until 5:00pm and the Saturday sittings are all sold out. I can see if they have openings tomorrow.....
Turkey: Gobble!*/%.#!



The Turkey and the Bear enjoyed a nice Thanksgiving ...

.... **French Onion Soup.**

Not Child's Play

October 2020
New Normal, ALberta

*There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile
He found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked stile.
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse,
And they all lived together in a little crooked house.*

Our neighbour (Hi Johanna!) runs horses in our pasture, so we keep the gates closed. We like to walk out there sometimes, so to avoid the problem of opening and closing wire gates, I built this crooked stile. Bears can go through it, horses cannot.

Bear was reminded of the nursery rhyme above, as she wiggled through the gate. She did a little research on *There was a Crooked Man* after our walk.

The poem is about a treaty between England and Scotland in the 1600's. The *crooked stile* represents the alliance between the two parliaments.



There Was a Crooked Man is a relatively benign story. Many nursery rhymes that originated in Medieval Europe had ghastly interpretations. If children knew the true meaning of some of their bedtime stories, they would never sleep at night:

Mary Mary wasn't just *contrary*; she was a murderous psychopath. Catholic Queen Mary (Bloody Mary) beheaded hundreds of Protestants (a.k.a. *Pretty Maids in a Row*) using *Silver bells and cockle shells* (instruments of torture).

Goosey Goosey Gander is another tale of religious persecution, but this time the Protestants were in charge. Catholic priests (Geese) were forbidden to say Latin-based prayers, even in private, and were followed upstairs and downstairs and tortured for their sins....."So I took him by his left leg, And threw him down the stairs".

The Mulberry Bush was a tree in a women's prison. There were no pretty ribbons as the inmates paraded *All Around it*.

Of all the gruesome nursery rhymes, *Ring Around the Rosie* is the ghastliest, because it is currently so relevant.

*Ring around the Rosie,
A pocket full of posies,
Husha! Husha!
We all fall down.*

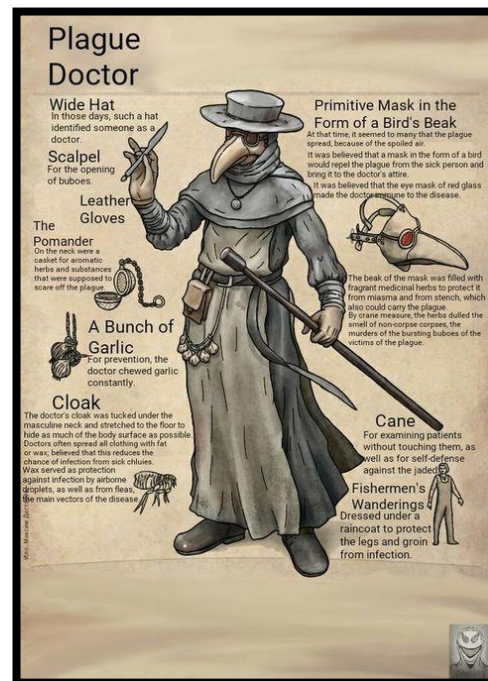
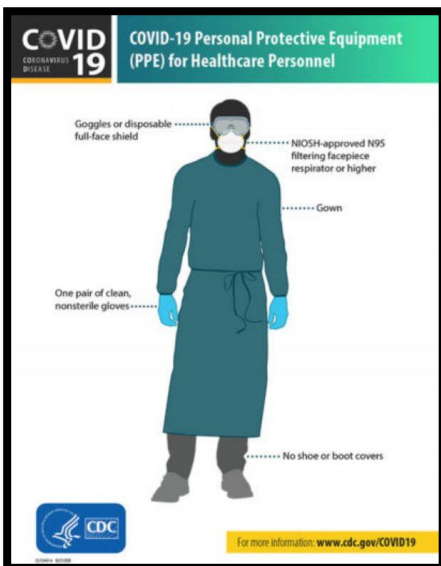
Bubonic plague sufferers developed an inflamed rash (a rosie). People would carry a packet full of dried flowers (posies) to mask the hideous smell of rotting flesh. "Sneeze! Sneeze! We are all dead", is the interpretation of the last lines.

Medieval Nursery Rhymes were

..... Not Child's Play



A medieval doctor's mask worn while treating plague victims. The beak was filled with posies and herbs to mask the smell.



PPE, Then and Now.

She Makes Everything Possible

October 2020
New Normal, USA

There have been protests all over the USA this year, some peaceful, some not. The ideals that are being put forward may be worthy causes, but the principals the protesters are fighting for get lost in the violence. If you want to change the world, you might want to do it the way Helen Reddy did.

Reddy wrote the lyrics to “I am Woman” in 1970. Her song lyrics, coupled with Reddy’s powerful delivery, empowered generations of women. And nobody got hurt.



*Oh yes, I am wise
But it's wisdom born of pain
Yes, I've paid the price
But look how much I gained
If I have to, I can do anything
I am strong
(Strong)
I am invincible
(Invincible)
I am woman*

Reddy’s voice captured the imagination of the burgeoning women’s liberation movement of the 1970’s. *I Am Woman* became a powerful agent for feminism, worldwide. As it climbed the Pop music charts in America, the UK, Canada, and Reddy’s native Australia, *I Am Woman* elevated the feminist movement along with it.

Helen Reddy died on September 29 at the age of 78. Her legacy is peaceful invincibility.

In her Grammy Award acceptance speech Helen Reddy thanked “God, because...

...She makes everything possible.

<https://youtu.be/xwMOC5i2eRk>
I Am Woman – Helen Reddy

That's Where the Og's Are

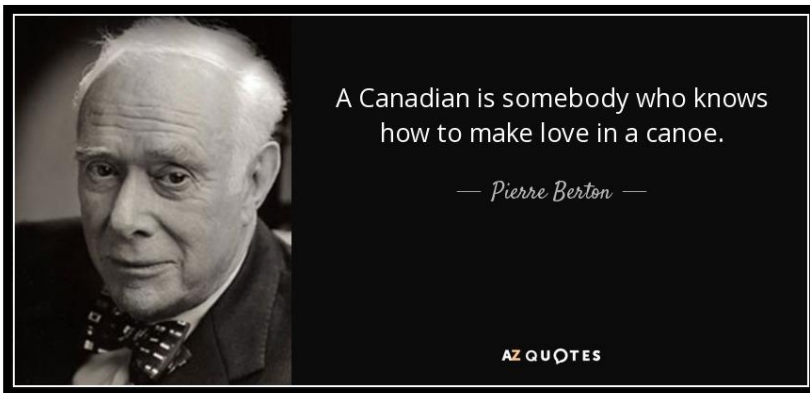
October 2020

Og

I had forgotten about *The Secret World of Og* until I saw this hole in the ground. We don't have badgers around our place, so the hole could only be the back entrance to the *World of Og*.

Pierre Burton's famous children's book was mandatory curriculum for most Canadian school children in the 1960's. One of my primary teachers read it aloud to us, one chapter a week.

I don't remember the whole story (it has been 55+ years), but I recall that there were five children whose names all started with a "P". Penny and Peter and the baby was nicknamed Pollywog - I can't remember the other two. Pollywog crawls through a hatch in the floor of the children's playhouse, into a tunnel that leads to the Secret World of Og. The four older children and an assortment of pets follow the Pollywog through the hatch and down the hole. The family befriends the small green residents of the underground world, whose entire vocabulary consists of the word "og". They have many adventures together.



I have vivid memories of the hatch in the floor, of the playhouse, the eerie first encounter with an Og, and the twisting, turning underground tunnels. I don't remember much after that. I can't recall any specific adventures and I have no idea how the story ends. For all I know, Pollywog and the rest of the "P" family are still down there with the Og's.

Pierre Berton was a Canadian icon. I remember him best from *Front Page Challenge*, the CBC news/game show, which aired from 1957 – 1995. Berton was a panellist for the program's entire 38-year run, always sporting a pin-stripe suit and a flamboyant bow tie. Berton wrote thirty-three

award-winning books about Canadian history (of which I have read exactly none – a tally I promise to remedy, soon).



Berton insisted that *The Secret World of Og* was his favourite book, possibly because the five human characters bear a suspicious resemblance to his own children.

I took a closer look down the hole on the fence line. I didn't see any, but I am pretty sure ...

.....that's where the Og's are.

Speaking of holes in the ground....

A mysterious hole developed in our neighbour's field many years ago. It was about 25" in circumference and about five feet deep. Nobody quite knew what to make of it. There was speculation that it could have been a natural rarity like a sinkhole, or an abandoned root cellar which had collapsed.

My friend Dean S was out from town for a visit and Dad took us over to have a look at the crater. Dean was quite excited about it. He ran around it jabbering about meteors, lost mines, and buried treasure. "It is probably very valuable!" he exclaimed.

Dad, without missing a beat, said; "*It sure is. You could cut it up and sell it for fence post holes.*"

The Good Guy

October 2020

The Sky

The last time I saw Ken Fowler I was digging myself out of my hangar at Rocky Mountain House airport. I was using a *snowblower* that was ten times smaller than the *snowfall* I was attempting to displace. I made one pass up and down the apron, barely exposing a path to another two hours of frigid snowdrift excavation. Then Ken rolled up in the big airport snowplow truck. He swung the plow far off the taxiway, *accidentally* clearing 90% of my projected morning's work.

Technically, Ken was not supposed to use government airport equipment to move private snow, but *technically*, Ken was not a bureaucrat. He was just a good guy.

We had a brief chat, then Ken carried on plowing 5500' of runway, taxiways and airport facilities.

I made a few more sweeps with the little blower and finished clearing the remaining snow off my apron in no time flat. I never saw Ken again that day, but I fully intended to thank him properly the next time I did.



I will never get that chance. Ken and another aerobatic pilot died on September 26 when the Harman Rocket II aircraft they were flying struck a power line, while on a low-level training flight near Edmonton. They both perished instantly.



Ken was the manager of the Rocky Mountain House airport, but that was just a way to pass the time while he wasn't indulging his true passion. Ken was co-founder of Team Rocket Aerobatics, an elite aerobatic aviation squadron. Team Rocket, based in Rocky, was a premiere airshow attraction throughout North America.

On any given day, you could watch the aerobatics team practice in the skies over YRM airport. Ken and the other aerobats made unusual flight attitudes a common sight in the vicinity of Rocky Mountain House. I spent hours watching in awe as aircraft did the impossible, with Ken and his troupe behind the stick.

When Ken wasn't being a good guy in person, he was being an anonymous good guy. On Christmas Eve, Ken would fly his Rocket over Rocky, trailing a string of lights. Every kid in town has memories of watching *Santa's sleigh*, tracing a flight path over their house.

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I will miss the capable and accommodating airport manager - I will miss the expert aviator, but most of all, I will miss

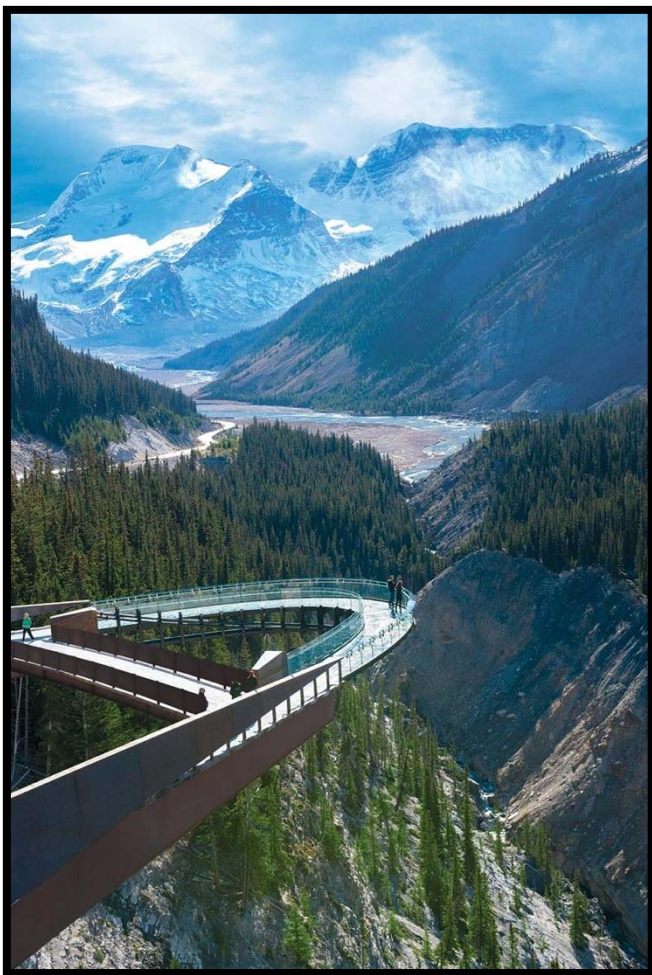


....the good guy.

Oleaginous Bastards!

October 2020
New Normal, Alberta

I went for a walk while I was in Jasper last week. The magnificent scenery was hidden by a thick fog so I did the next best thing – I counted license plates.



Covid has eliminated tourist travel from US destinations and cut down on inter-provincial traffic. The cars parked along Jasper's main drag were predominantly from Alberta – 90 percent would be my guess. Of the approximately 100 plates I saw, one was from Quebec, two from Ontario and six were from BC. There was one Volkswagen van with New Mexico tags on it but it also had a hand-painted sign in the back window that said; "We are Canadian", with a Maple 🍁 Leaf flag prominently displayed – marooned snowbirds, is my guess.

Jasper is only 25km from the B.C. border so it isn't surprising that there were a few vehicles from that province.

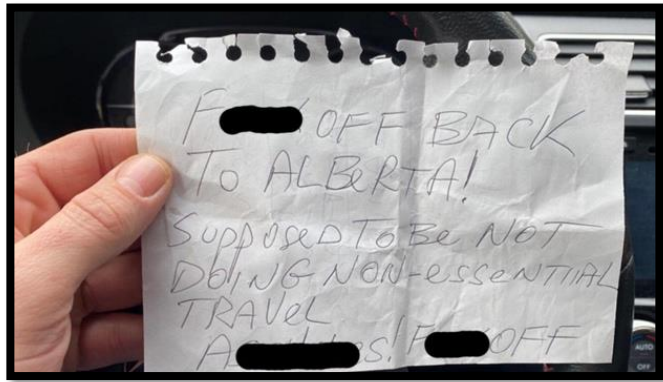
We have all heard stories about vehicles with Alberta plates being ejected from campsites or vandalized while traveling in B.C. this summer. It never occurred to me to put a rude note on any of the BC cars I encountered, and I wondered what would motivate somebody to take that action. My conclusion is that it probably has less to do with Covid and more to do with Politics.

Oleaginous, meaning covered in, or producing oil, is a word most often used to describe smarmy politicians (think, Mike Pence). But it can also refer to people involved in the oil/gas resource industry.

There is a certain segment of the population of B.C. who relate Alberta license plates to oil production, and climate change by extension. To me, the note on the right sounds less like fear of Covid and more like:

Go Home, you

... *Oleaginous Bastards!*



You Can Be Happy If You Have a Mind To

October 2020

New Normal, Alberta

I always end up with some random articles that don't fit in the body of each journal post. Rather than toss them in the dustbin, I have gathered them in a heap below. Enter at your own risk....

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Turning 65 has put me onto much different junk mail distribution lists. In the past week I received e-mail from *The Prostate Clinic*, a distributor of *Viagra*, and a 35-year-old Russian lady named *Anastasia*, who suggested she might like to keep me company. I am sure all these people have my best interests in mind, but I would feel better if they sent ads about *Heli-Skiing*, *Weightlifting Gym Memberships*, or upcoming *Electronic Dance Music* events.



On second thought, maybe I don't need any junk e-mail at all.

*"Makes me wish I'd done things different
Oh, but wishing don't make it so",*

Fifty Years Ago – Ian Tyson

<https://youtu.be/htbDJBRC6Aq>

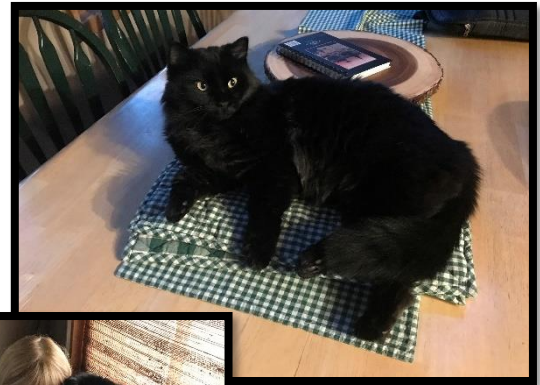


My solution to future Presidential debates:

Sorry about that, Chief.



Some people have a turkey on their table at Thanksgiving...



The thing I enjoy most about Rocky people is that they are subtle, discrete, and Liberal-minded



There are fifty-seven restaurants in Jasper, I'm just sayin'



*You can't take a shower in a parakeet cage
You can't go swimmin' in a baseball pool.
You can't go fishin' in a watermelon patch
But*

.... you can be happy if you have a mind to...

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=KI-8hst0bho>

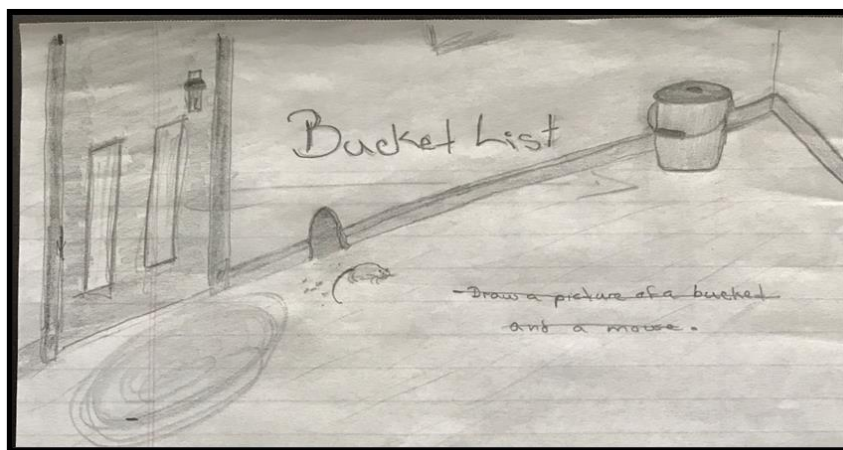
Repeat Item #1

October 2020

The Longevity Trail, Alberta

I started a bucket list a few years ago. This is as far as I got:

1. ~~Draw a picture of a bucket, and a mouse.~~
2. ~~—~~



On my journey along the Longevity Trail this month I happened across a Ted Talk video entitled; *“What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness – Robert Waldinger”*. The twelve-minute video summarized the results of a seventy-five-year study of the lives of 724 men. Harvard University research analysts concluded that the single-most important factor in achieving a good life is *“good relationships keep us happy and healthier”*.

Based upon the fact that I am now a pensioner, it is probably time to get serious about making a proper list of things yet to be accomplished and get busy ticking them off. Building upon Harvard University findings, I have started a new Bucket List:

1. Renew a personal relationship with every person on my contact list.
2. **Repeat Item #1**

To be Continued.....

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jm_9OQIZXGg
What Makes a Good Life?