

# About That

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## November 2020 The Political Arena

I will try to steer away from political commentary in this episode. By now, I am sure you are all sick and tired of hearing about it.

Having said that, I found this image that I think nicely sums up “politics” in November 2020.

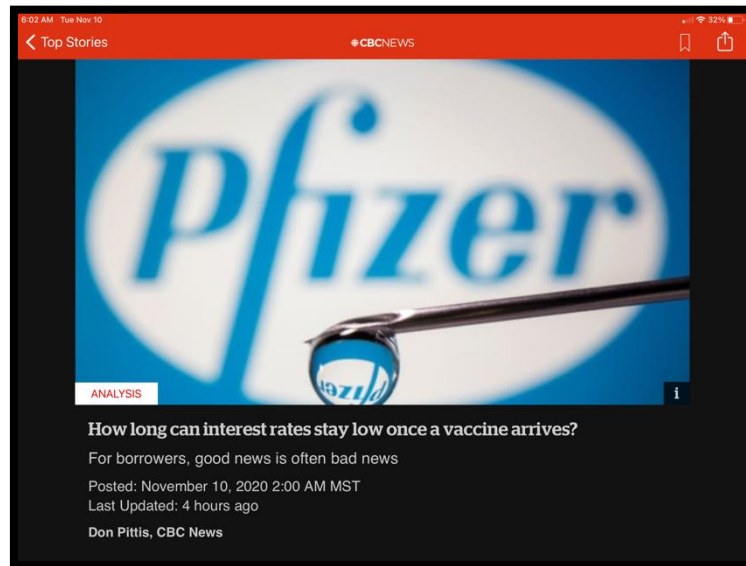


*“And that’s all I have to say **about that**”.*  
Forrest Gump

# Morning Beer

November 10, 2020  
New Normal, Alberta

The best news in months happened today, and this is the CBC morning headline.



Seriously!?! Pfizer has developed a vaccine with the potential to eliminate Covid 19, with a 90% effectivity rate, and the best CBC can come up with is *how it might affect interest rates!?!.*

The headline made me want to switch from morning coffee to ....

.... morning beer.

**Woody:** "Can I pour you a beer Mr. Peterson?"  
**Norm:** "A little early isn't it, Woody?"  
**Woody:** "For a beer?"  
**Norm:** "No, for stupid questions."



# Right Beside the Cowpox

## November 2020 BCE Egyptian Pyramids

My Grandfather immigrated to Canada in 1908, when he was four years old. One of Grandpa's earliest memories was having a tight sweater pulled off over his head, so immigration officials could examine his smallpox vaccination scar.

Smallpox existed when the Egyptian pyramids were being built and was responsible for the death of 300 million people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone. 30% of people who contracted the disease died from it. Many who survived suffered horrific scarring of skin tissue, and often blindness.

In 1796 an English doctor named Edward Jenner observed that milkmaids who had gotten cowpox did not show any symptoms of smallpox. Dr. Jenner took material from a cowpox sore on a patient's arm and injected it into other patients. None of the inoculated patients contracted smallpox – and a vaccine was born!



About the same day, anti-vaxers were also born. This 1802 cartoon depicts vaccinated patients with cows growing inside them.

Most people over a certain age have a smallpox vaccination scar on one of their upper arms. The vaccine that Dr. Jenner discovered, and subsequent vaccines that were even more effective, were used to inoculate billions of people worldwide. By 1953 Smallpox had been eliminated in North America and Europe. In 1977 The World Health Organization declared smallpox eradicated.

Grandpa lived to be 94 years old. The scar on his upper arm may have been one of the reasons for his long and healthy life.

When a vaccine becomes available for Covid, and it has the scrutiny of science behind it, they can stick a pin in my arm, ...

.... right beside the cowpox.

# A One-Horse Town

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**November 2020**  
**Kew, Alberta**

Our address is confusing.

Technically, we live in Foothills, AB but our mail gets sorted in Millarville. If we needed to call 911, we would tell them to send a fire truck to “354130 256 Street West, Foothills, AB”. But, if we want a parcel delivered, we are at “Box 21, Site 8, 354130 256 Street W, Millarville, T0L 1K0.

If you plug our address into Apple Maps it will guide you here. If you put the same coordinates into Google Maps it takes you to a location near Priddis, 25 km away.

As far as Telus is concerned, we are in Turner Valley.

If we pull up our location on The Weather Network or Google Earth, it says we are located at Kew, AB.

Kew consisted of a rural post office and a one-room school located just west of here. Both buildings have been torn down; there is nothing but an historical marker where the *town* of Kew once stood. And yet, Kew is still a destination recognized by satellite triangulation technology.

Our odd-ball address is confusing for couriers and service people, but I enjoy the concept of existing in four locations at the same time.

To celebrate that fact, I created a slogan for our residence and painted it on this sign.

Come for a visit, I will draw you a map.



# Ten Miles North of Nowhere

November 2020

Nowhere, Saskatchewan

Do you see anybody in this picture?



Do you see a Harvard University Ph.D., Professor of Econometrics? A war hero? A Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus York University (Physics)? Several published authors? A Computer Engineer? A museum curator?

No? Neither do I, but I know that all those people have been at this location.

This is where Senate, Saskatchewan once stood. From 1914 to 1983, Senate was a commercial hub, serving a vibrant ranching community in an area south of the Cypress Hills, in SW Saskatchewan.

The town peaked at population 63 and was torn down completely after the railroad was diverted around it.

Bear's ancestral home, the Shepherd family ranch, is located ten miles north of here, on Battle Creek. William and Fanny Shepherd established the ranch after WWI. They farmed and raised seven children here, each of whom received their primary education at country schoolhouses in the area.

Maybe it was the water in Battle Creek, or the quality of the one-room education, but all the Shepherd children went on to lives of distinction. Some of the family continued the ranching tradition. They became pillars of their community, serving in politics and on the boards of agricultural organizations. Some went on to higher education, *much higher*. I could fill the rest of this page, and two more, with the titles and honours bestowed on Dr. Geoffrey Shepherd and Dr. Gordon Shepherd.



West Plains School - 1923

There is no physical evidence of anyone in the picture above, but unbounded character and achievement took root here...

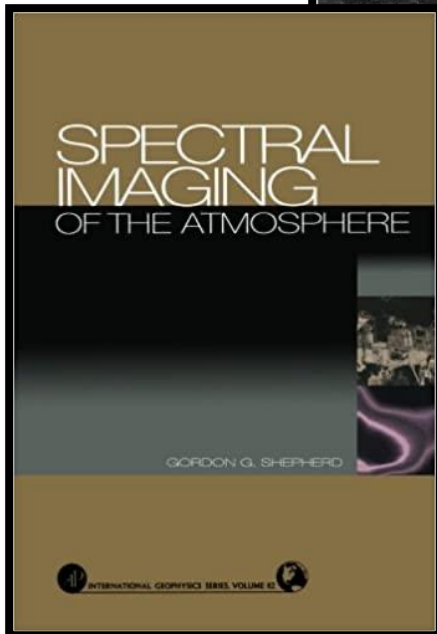
.... ten miles north of nowhere.



The Shepherd Ranch at Battle Creek



Round-up at Battle Creek Community



One of many books authored by Shepherd academics.



George Shepherd (centre) with HRH Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

# Pitchforks

Summer 1930  
Senate and Iowa



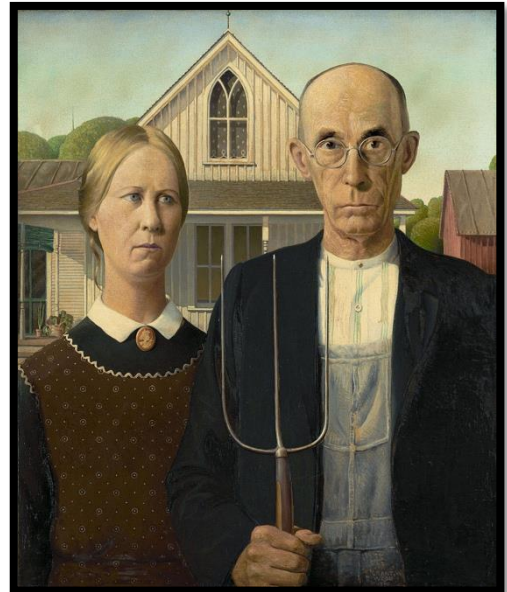
While I was rummaging through Shepherd family history, I found this photo of Charlie and Helen, Bear's paternal grandparents. The photo reminded me of the famous 1930 painting, *American Gothic* by Grant Wood.

Both images elicit a steadfast, pioneer spirit. Hardworking farm people paused for a brief interlude in their labour.

The men's hands in both images are rough. The kind of hands accustomed to work.

Both women wear aprons, a sign that they

too have work to do, once the picture has been taken.



The American painting has funereal aspects, closed curtains, black clothing and sad faces. Charlie and Helen, by comparison, seem much happier, and less puritanical than the Iowa couple.

While there are subtle differences, both images are defined by ...

... Pitchforks

# Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

November 11, 1945

Europe



Bear's uncle Jack Shepherd was comfortable with weapons. He had killed many gophers on the family ranch on Battle Creek, but Jack had never considered pointing a rifle at another man - until 1943.



Charlie and Jack Shepherd  
- Hunting Gophers.

I spent Remembrance Day reading Jack Shepherd's WWII memoir; "*A March to Fear*".

The memoir is difficult to read. Fifty years had transpired, and Jack was getting on in years. Jack writes in a style that can be described as *casual* - dates, people, and places are hazy.

While the diction and chronology are murky, the horrific events of war described by Jack are crystal clear. They roll off the page like they happened yesterday. Here are a few samples:

## First Action, while on a troop ship destined for Italy:

*"The attack came shortly after 6:00 p.m. The planes came in two waves, the first dropping glider bombs, the second launching torpedoes.... There was no loss of life on our Santa Elena. The ship was destroyed but didn't sink until the next day. No chance to recover my baggage.... I now owned exactly what I owned when I came into the world – absolutely nothing.*

## Army Ration shortage on arrival in Italy:

*"Meals were terrible and very irregular... We were hungry most of the time.... One time, in a line-up two or three of us spotted a good-sized piece of chocolate in the dust and made a lunge for it. I can't remember who got it, but it was near riot. Very degrading."*

*"Christmas Day was not much out of the ordinary. The usual diet of dehydrated potatoes and mutton. I think we got a carton of Canadian cigarettes and a bottle of beer each. A real luxury for what we'd been through the last six weeks."*



## The Realities of War:

*"We were well within hearing distance of the big guns. The odd Jeep would go by with three or more stretchers carrying wounded back to somewhere. All in all, the outlook was pretty bleak. A feeling of fear and dread. There was a little bit of comfort that I wasn't the only one."*

*"The Bren gunner had shot a whole magazine into one guy.... two or three days later an Italian civilian removed his boots. We hollered at him, but he paid no attention. Any movement like that would draw shell or mortar fire that would last for three or more minutes, which seemed like hours.*

*"The dread that I experienced at the Hell Fire Crossroads was gone, replaced by fear."*

*"There was a whine like a siren. The bomb hit in an open area not more than thirty feet from the target, which was us. There was a heavy table propped against a window. The blast came through the window and completely shattered the table. Corporal Callahan said: "a miss is as good as a mile."*



*"I came down with a bad case of dysentery. I went on sick parade to see the M.O. at Ortona. He gave me a good dose of castor oil and advised me to stay a couple of days in sick bay. It was a cold, damp place in the basement of some old warehouse, on a hard floor with no blankets. Next day it was one more shot of castor oil and "thank you very much, back to my platoon". After a night in sick bay, 13 Platoon seemed almost a home. There was no place else to go."*

*"One of the guys I trained with at Camp Shiloh kicked a trip wire blowing himself up. He came from the town of Ponteix, SK, near where I was from. The war was over for another good friend.*

## Foxhole philosophy:

*"My dear old mother was not strong on religion, but we went to church and I attended Sunday school on occasion. I can't remember actually praying, stressful as the occasion would get. I didn't think it was fair to ask the Lord to look after me when someone was trying to kill me, when I didn't have much to say to Him when times were good."*

*"About this time, we saw a German soldier go into a house. Some of us made a dash for the house and ran into 22 Germans in various stages of undress. Sheffield hollered "Hands Up!" which they didn't understand, so he fired his "haul lang" at the ceiling. It was deafening – like an elephant coughing into an amplifier. That little Incident got into the press. (The Maple Leaf News*

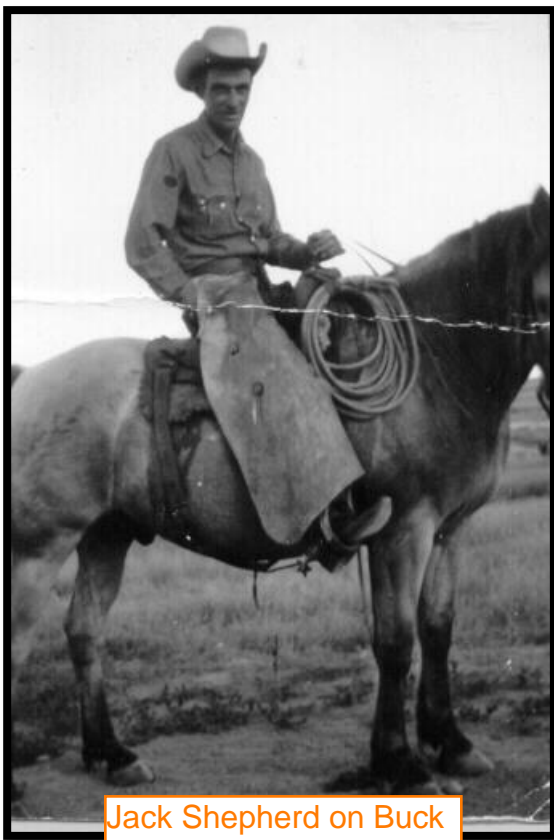
quoted Corporal Shepherd as saying: “You should have seen the bastards reach for the sky!” Jack says in his memoir: “Bastard” was considered a cuss word back home, so I never sent that clipping to my mother.”)

“One could become quite a philosopher studying human behaviour in war time.”

- Jack Shepherd

### Back Home, post-war, and Jack’s *New Normal*:

“Alone on the train back to Saskatchewan, a cloud of gloom settled down and I was becoming morbid. What was home going to be like? Strangely, I was in no hurry to get home.”

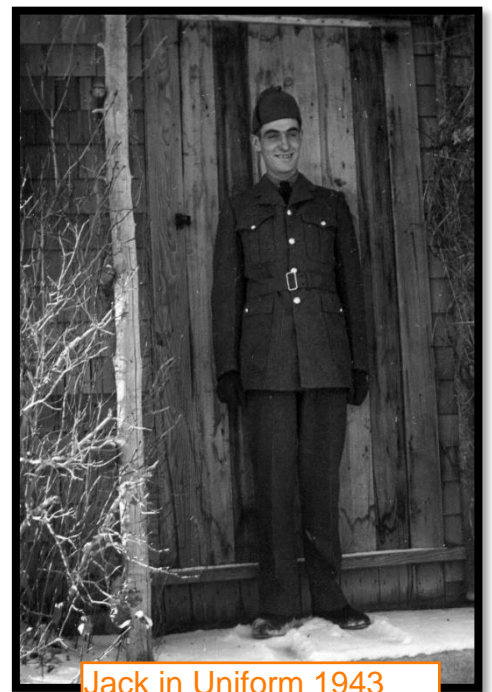


Jack Shepherd on Buck

“When I did get home, my Mother and some others greeted me on the station platform at Maple Creek. She held me in a grip I didn’t know she had, and she shed some tears.”

“**Meanwhile back at the ranch** the country looked flat after the mountains and gullies of the East coast of Spaghetti land. It was fall; harvest was near over. The time of year when it was round-up and cattle would come home. I climbed on a horse, led another with a bed roll, and headed forty miles southeast to the community pasture.

It felt good. There is a future after all. Old friends, familiar customs, this is home right enough.”



Jack in Uniform 1943

# Not Your Grandfather's Watch

November 2020  
Silicon Valley

My watch gave me an award this morning.

For the past year I have not missed a single day of exercise, and somehow my Apple watch knows it. I achieved optimum movement, standing time and elevated heart rate for 366 consecutive days, and received this commendation.

I have a few people to thank for help along the way:

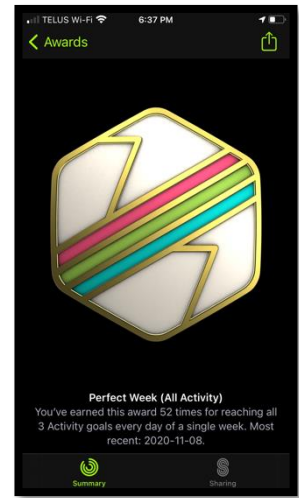
Glen: **Best Brother-in-Law Award**, for getting me started with a fitness challenge last December.

Rhonda P: **Best Sister-in Law Award**, for lending me her Apple watch charger back in July when I forgot mine.

All Journalists: **Worst News Year in History Award**, for giving me an elevated heart rate, and something to watch while I was exercising on the treadmill.

Bear: **Best Bear in the World Award**, for bearing with me while we stopped every couple of hours on long road trips, so I could clock some move/stand/exercise time.

Steve Jobs: **Best Geek Award**, for inventing a device that knows how far I walk, whether I am standing or sitting, and what my heart rate is, and calibrates it all on my left arm.



Apple, ....

.... not your Grandfather's watch

# A Fire Hazard

November 14, 2020  
Millarville, Alberta

It is Bear's birthday.

HBDTYou.... HBDTYou.... HBDDBeaar.... HBDTYooooooooo!

I picked up some cinnamon buns in lieu of a cake but decided against candles. Lighting that many incendiary devices in a confined space could be a **fire hazard**.



Have you noticed that all Bears have trouble with spelling? *Smoky* doesn't have an "e" and *Terri* is traditionally (and I say, *correctly*) spelled with a "y". Don't get me started on *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

# Fu-Go

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**November 15, 2020**

**Honshu, Japan**

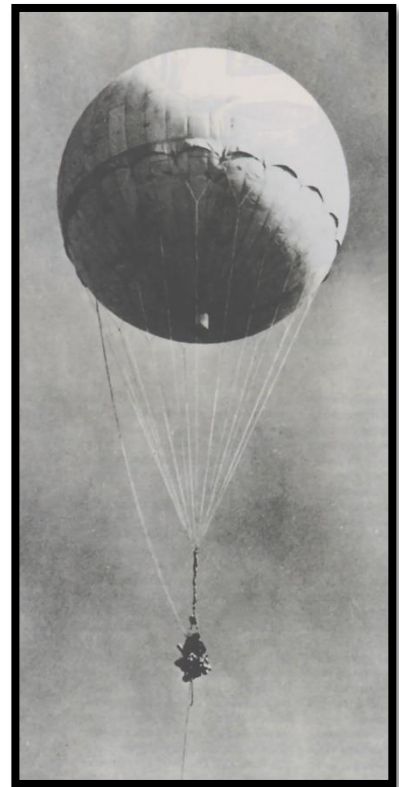
You just never know where this research is going to take us.

Yesterday, when I was looking for a picture of *Smokey the Bear*, I came across an article on *forest fires*, which led to *intentional fires as an act of war*, which led to **Fu-Go**.

In 1944, the Japanese airforce launched 9300 hydrogen balloons with firebombs (“Fu-Go”) attached. The balloons were sent aloft from Honshu, Japan into the Pacific jet stream in the hope that at least 10% of them would land in the United States and ignite. The Japanese hoped to start massive forest fires, and cause civilian panic, at a time when many American firefighters were overseas serving in the military.

Fu-Go was the first successful intercontinental weapon. Wartime propoganda being what it was, only 300 balloons *officially* made it to the continental USA. Many more landed in Canada and Mexico. In fact, as many as 1100 of the intercontinental weapons reached North America, just as the Japanese airforce intended.

Fortunately, destruction of property and forests was minimal. The balloons were launched in November and December to take advantage of optimal jet stream drift. Most of North America was snow covered at that time of year, so bombs that landed and ignited were largely ineffectual.



Some of the bombs did not ignite on initial impact. That factor resulted in the only American casualties associated with the Fu-Go attack.

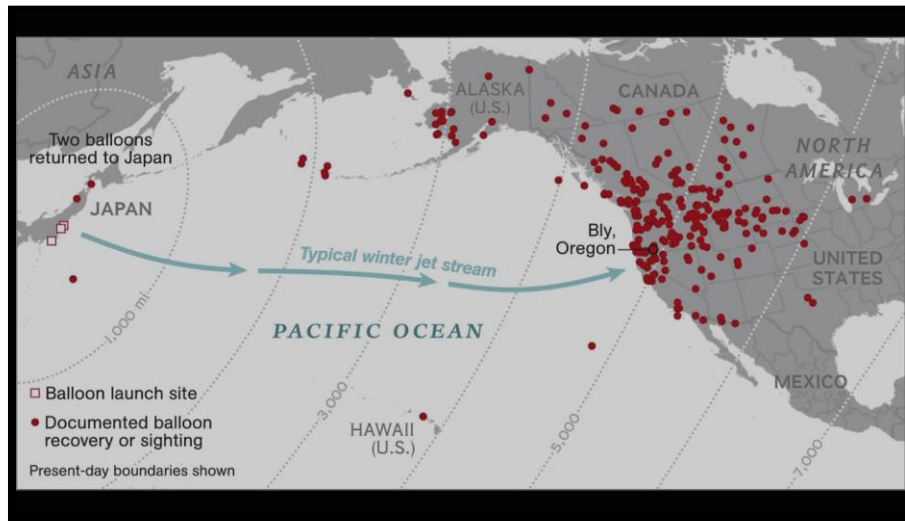
On May 5, 1945, a pregnant woman and five children were killed when they discovered a balloon bomb in a forest in Southern Oregon. The woman and her husband took five Sunday school students on a picnic. They stopped at a site near Bly, Oregon and Archie went to park the car. His pregnant wife Elsie, and the five children went to find a good picnic spot. The group saw a strange balloon on the ground. One of the students walked up to it and touched it with his foot.

There were two explosions, resulting in six civilian deaths.

A monument is located at the site of the Oregon explosion. In 2001 the monument was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Several Japanese citizens have visited the site. They planted cherry trees as an act of apology, and as a symbol of peace.

Two balloon bombs were discovered recently in British Columbia. A live bomb turned up in Lumley, BC in 2014. It was detonated by a Royal Canadian Navy ordinance disposal team.

Last October (2019) a hunter came across evidence of an old forest fire near McBride, BC. At the centre of that clearing authorities uncovered the remains of a balloon bomb.



Smokey the Bear was born in 1944, the same year the Japanese launched ...

...Fu-Go.

Smokey Bear's 1944 debut Poster



# Licking Your Finger

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November 2020

Reality, Alberta

**Top Ten Things I have learned about living in a pandemic:**

**10:** You can tell when someone is smiling, even when they wear a mask.

**9:** Playing on-line cribbage while listening to music is the new *Multitasking*.

**8:** The traits that make us most human are killing us.

**7:** Covid is economical – my *Visa* bill arrived on a single sheet.

**6:** Really getting to know people works both ways.

**5:** There are a wide range of theories on what constitutes a *Bubble*.

**4:** Being a human during Covid is tough, being a Mink is worse.

**3:** Relationships rank equally with oxygen on the *necessaries of life* list.

**2:** Everything is strange for the first few months, then after a while normal existence seems odd.

**And the #1 thing I have learned about living in a pandemic:**

**1:** It is difficult to open a plastic bag without **licking your finger**.

**Bonus round:**

**0:** People who lick their finger are more likely to have voted Republican.



# A Barrel of Monkeys

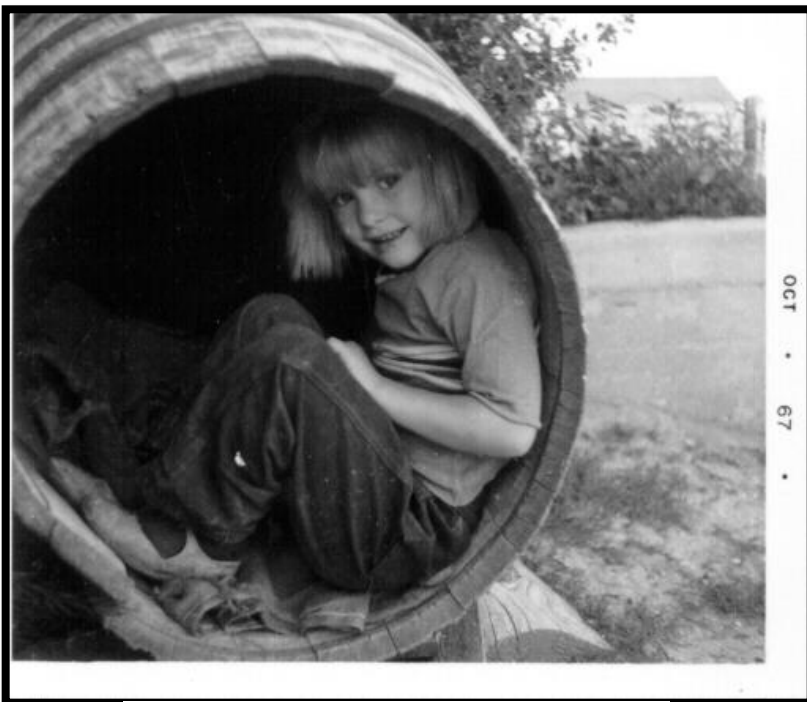
November 15, 2020

Millarville, Alberta

I promised not to make any political comments in this episode. I was doing pretty well, then on the very last line, I made a snippy comment about voters of a particular American political party.

Sorry about that.

I am not deeply entwined in either US political party - I stand by my claim at the beginning of this installment that they all act like a bunch of chimpanzees.



A Shepherd Cousin- in a barrel

I learned a lot about Bear's side of the family the past few weeks. It was fun looking through family photographs, reading Jack's war memories and doing research on prominent family members.

Turns out, the Shepherds are way more fun than ...

.... a Barrel of Monkeys.

To Be Continued .....