

# My Glasses

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November 2020

Can't Remember Where, AB

One of these cheery little birds came for a visit today. He landed on my empty bird feeder, cocked his head twenty degrees to the left, and flew off in disgust.

I quit filling the feeders because the seeds were attracting more squirrels than feathered visitors. I miss watching the birds - I don't miss digging dead rodents out of the attic.

I pulled out my bird book and made several interesting discoveries about Black-capped Chickadees. For instance, did you know that Chickadees can remember hundreds of locations where they cache food items? Their little brain is able to process food storage information for up to a month. I don't know how the book authors know this, but they say that Chickadees can remember the relative quality of the food in each location.



*Photographs courtesy Gervais Goodman*



There is a lot going on beneath that black cap.

I don't want you to read anything into this but, before I could study the chickadee article, I had trouble remembering where I put **my glasses**.

# In the Right Place

November 2020

Nashville, Tennessee

When I think of Dolly Parton, two things stand out as her defining features.

Get your mind out of the gutter! *Music* and *Philanthropy* are what I am referring to. What were you thinking?



Whenever I hear a Dolly song the *Hokey Meter* starts beeping, and the needle moves deep into the Red zone.

*Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene  
I'm begging of you please don't take my man*

While her lyrics and stage presence might be on the cheesy side there is no denying Dolly's success. She has been cranking out hit after hit for sixty years.

Whenever a news article appears about her it usually involves some award or an announcement about her latest artistic achievement, usually accompanied by a bedazzling picture of the mega-star.

When I saw Dolly's picture in a Washington Post article this morning, I assumed that she must be launching a new album, or starring in a movie, but that was not the story at all. This was the headline:

***Dolly Parton helped fund Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine research.***

The Post article reports that the entertainer donated \$1.0 million to the Vanderbilt Research Centre in the early stages of Corona Virus research. Through her philanthropy, Dolly Parton has been instrumental in helping Moderna develop a vaccine that could save humanity.

Dolly's heart may be buried deep in that chest, but it is ....

... in the right place.

*Vaccine, Vaccine, Vaccine, Vaccine  
Please don't take it just because you can*

# Brain Works

November 2020

Sub-Saharan Millarville

I mentioned the other day that our bird feeder attracts squirrels and other pests. Well, guess what, things just got worse.



I had a dream last night that I was in the detached garage / garden shed by the house. I was fixing something on the bench when a rhinoceros appeared at the window.

I was terrified but Riley, who was with me at the time, remained very calm. In the dream my daughter was quite young, maybe a pre-teenager. Riley went toward the window for a better look. I tried to pull her back toward a hiding place.

I remember thinking that the rhino was too big to get in the window, but I was concerned that it might crash through. I had visions of confronting that big horn.

And then I woke up.

Where does this stuff come from? There were no drugs or alcohol involved. The dream happened about 5:00am after a good night's sleep. I talked to Riley earlier in the week. We had a nice chat, about many things, but rhinoceroses were not on the list of topics. In fact, I haven't thought much about a rhino since I watched *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* on a black and white TV.

There is just no logical path from my quiet life in semi-isolation Alberta, to an African beast at the window of the garden shed.

There are a few medical professionals on this broadcast list. If any of you care to weigh in with a dream interpretation, please don't. I am afraid to find out how my ...

... **brain works.**

# Colosseum

**November 80 CE**

**Roma**

*“As long as the Colossus stands, so shall Rome; when the Colossus falls, Rome shall fall; when Rome falls, so falls the world.” – Bede the Venerable*



**Built:** 80 CE

**Seats:** 65,000

**Purpose:** *Sporting Events (Gladiatorial, Re-enactment of Battles), Public Spectacles, Drama.*

**Cost:** *Spoils of the Siege of Jerusalem.*

**Major Disasters:** *Fire 217 CE, Earthquake 443 CE.*

**Public Seating:** *Tier 1 – Senators, Tier 2 – Nobles and Knights, Tier 3 – Wealthy Citizens, Tier 4 – Plebeians and Women. Special Boxes: Emperor and Vestal Virgins.*

**Year Elton John Performed:** 2005 CE.

**Years Active:** 1,940 and counting.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sand* in Italian is *La rena*. Sand was poured on the floor of the Colosseum and the area became known as an **arena**.

# Saddledome

**November 2020 CE**

**Calgary**

*“Largest arena<sup>1</sup> ever used at the Winter Games” and “the finest international rink in the world” – IOC 1988*  
*“Tear it Down” – Calgary City Council 2020*



**Built:** 1983 CE

**Seats:** 20,000

**Purpose:** *Sporting Events (Ice Hockey, Curling, Figure Skating, Wrestling, Rodeo), Concerts, Cultural Events.*

**Cost:** *CDN\$97.7 million.*

**Major Disaster:** *Flood 2013 CE.*

**Public Seating:** *Tier 1 – The Very Wealthy & Hockey Wives, Tier 2 – Wealthy Citizens, Tier 3 – Citizens, Tier 4 – Plebeians and Kids. Special Boxes: Moguls and Vestal Virgins.*

**Year Elton John Performed:** 2004 CE.

**Years Active:** 38.

***So Falls the World.***

# One from the Other

November 2020

Belfast

**“Anyone who disobeys the cease-fire will be shot” – IRA Bulletin**

This is my favourite line so far in *Say Nothing*, a book about 1970’s Northern Ireland by Patrick Radden Keefe.

For many of Keefe’s readers, the events in the book take place in *the North of Ireland*, which is different from *Northern Ireland*. It sounds like a minor distinction, but not knowing the difference could get you shot in Belfast during the *Troubles*.

I am not equipped to explain the complexities of Irish history or politics, but now that I am halfway down this rabbit hole, I will give it a shot.

*Northern Ireland* is the official name of that portion of the Emerald Isle that is part of the United Kingdom. The southern half is the *Republic of Ireland*, a country independent of the UK.

During the 1970’s there was a movement among some residents (mostly Catholics) in Northern Ireland, to cede from the Union with Britain and join the Republic to the south. These Irish *Republicans* refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the British province of *Northern Ireland*. They called the jurisdiction “*the North of Ireland*” to protest the validity of the union with Britain.



Confused yet?

This picture explains the difference better than I can. Both individuals in the photo live in Belfast. The uniformed man on the left is from *Northern Ireland*. The man on the right calls his home “*the North of Ireland*”.

The two factions killed each other in great numbers during the *Troubles*. *Say Nothing* describes the *North vs. Northern* dispute in vivid detail.

The pity is, if you stripped off their uniforms, took religion out of the equation, and lined these two Irish citizens up against a wall, you couldn’t tell ....

...one from the other.

# Because There Was

January 15, 2018

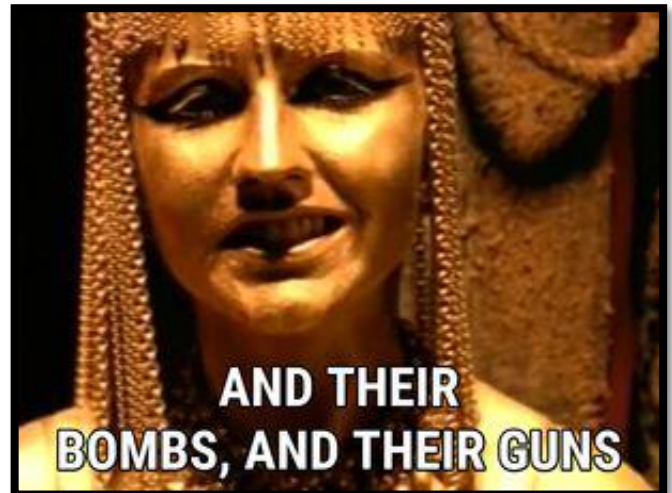
In the DNA

The whole time I have been reading *Say Nothing* I have had this song stuck in my head.

*With their tanks, and their bombs  
And their bombs, and their guns  
In your head, in your head, they are dying*

*Zombie* by the *Cranberries* has more than a billion views on YouTube, I only account for about 100 of them.

Dolores O'Riordan wrote *Zombie* in 1994 in memory of two children who died in an IRA bombing during the *Troubles*. The images in the video, the song lyrics, and O'Riordan's emotional performance became an anthem for change in her native Ireland.



It helped. By the turn of the century the *Troubles* had subsided. The tanks and the bombs and the guns were withdrawn. Peace broke out between the *North* and the *Northern*.

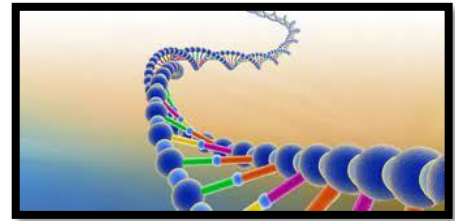
As the conflict subsided the Irish people descended into a collective case of severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The greatest effect was on children and young adults. The *Troubles* left a culture of violence, chronic unemployment, and drug abuse as its legacy to a generation of post-*Troubles* youth. Illegitimate births and drug dependency increased for young women and the divorce rate soared. Teenage alcoholism became a pervasive problem. The dark heritage of the *Troubles* resulted in an alarming suicide rate among Irish youth.



Dolores O'Riordan was a victim of the aftermath of the *Troubles*. On 15 January 2018, she died of an alcohol related drowning in a hotel bathroom.

If I am ill-equipped to explain Irish history, I am even less capable of psychiatry, but that has never stopped me trying:

Dolores O’Riordan was born in 1971 in the thick of the *Troubles*. Her DNA was configured in the same twisted helix as her native Ireland’s. On one side, boundless talent and immense passion, which carried O’Riordan to the very apex of the artistic world. On the other side, a complex mix of *Troubles*; poverty, drug dependency, sexual abuse, and chronic alcoholism.



This Irish corkscrew of talent and troubles collapsed when O’Riordan was 46. On tour in England during a particularly tumultuous time in her life, Dolores drank a bottle of champagne and everything else in the hotel minibar, took a couple of pills, and let her troubles drown.

Dolores O’Riordan’s legacy is this: ***When she died, she carried Ireland’s Troubles with her.***



O’Riordan sang as if there was toxic green acid flowing in her veins, ....

...**Because There Was.**

<https://youtu.be/cWfZjV4i2Nk>



# Hat Rack

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**November 2020**

**Backyard**

After that last heavy article, I am happy to report some good news. Even though there is a hunter on every approach along our road, Buck Hedge Trimmer is alive and well, still living in our backyard.



Buck has moved on from trimming the hedge and is now mowing late-season grass.

Don't you agree that Buck's antlers look far better where they are, than as somebody's ...

**...Hat Rack.**



# Gin-Scented Tears

April 1984

Airstrip one, Oceana

*It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. - Orwell 1984*

The opening line of George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, calls into question everything previously believed - if bells in all clocks are ringing thirteen, something has radically changed.

Orwell challenges every concept humanity aspires to. In *1984* he describes a world where truth is variable, poverty is the objective, torture is an instrument of love, and peace has been replaced by perpetual war.

To achieve these goals Orwell's authoritarian government (a.k.a. Big Brother) surveils and controls every aspect of the lives of the citizenry. Homes are fitted with two-way tele-screens which monitor people's every movement. Microphones are hidden in offices, in public places and in suspected dissident's homes.



Citizens are obliged to observe their neighbours and report unconstitutional behaviour.

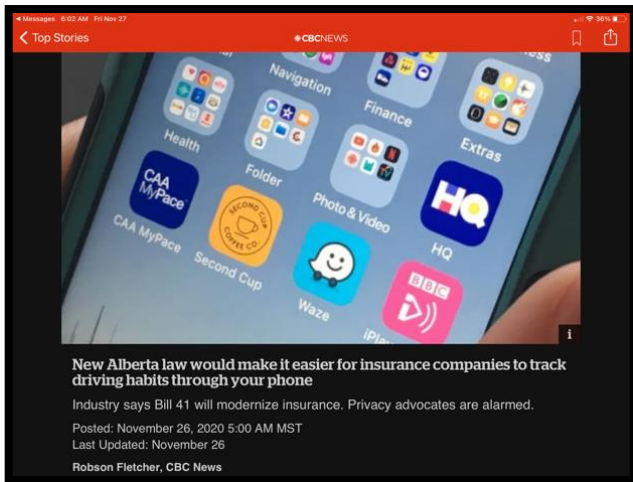
Orwell wrote the book in 1948. Thirty-six years passed, the year 1984 came and went, and Orwell's predictions never came to fruition. Everyone gave a collective sigh of relief.

But then, another thirty-six years passed. It is now 2020, and it is *1984* all over again. We now live in an Orwellian world of alternate facts, post-truth politics, governance by decree rather than collaboration, and *memory holes* where scientific consensus is ground into conspiracy theory.

These dystopian concepts grew first in America and spread worldwide, like a pervasive virus.

The *Thought Police* have now invaded Canada. The concept of monitoring citizens has gained acceptance, even in Alberta. Canada's version of "*Home of the Brave, Land of the Free*", has allowed (nay, invited) *Big Brother* into our lives.

This CBC Alberta article could have been published in Orwell's *Newspeak*.



If passed, Bill 41 will give insurance companies the right to monitor our driving behaviour by collecting detailed data through devices embedded in our vehicles or software installed on our smartphones.

Finance Minister Toews said in the article: *The new law will allow greater ability for industry to provide innovative insurance options ... and greater flexibility in applying usage-based insurance.*"

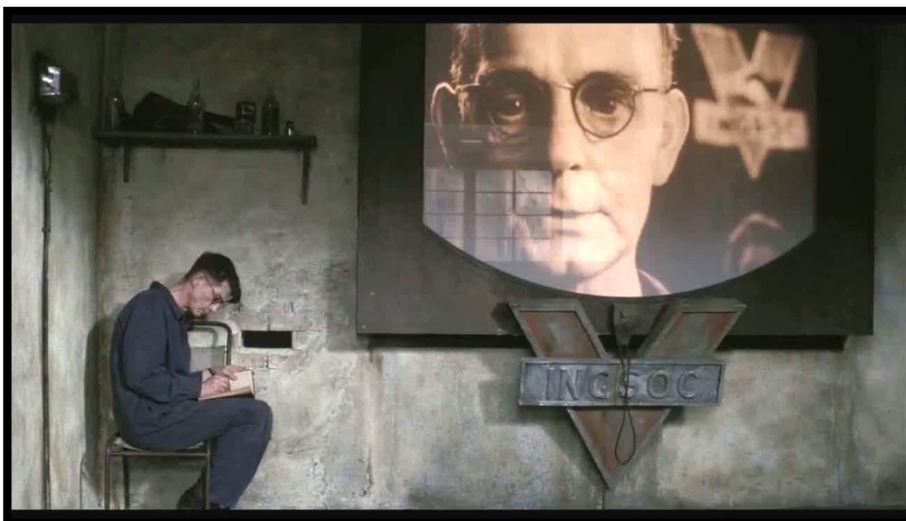
*Doublespeak, if ever I heard it!*

As a citizen with a previously described "heavy foot", I am outraged. Big Brother can now tap into my truck's onboard computer and assess insurance premiums based upon my (safe, but speedy) driving habits. What is next? If I disparage a politician on my iPad will I be smuggling you the next journal, written on strips of toilet paper, from a Gulag cell?

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The first line of *1984* was ominous. Surely, I thought, the last line will leave readers with some hope. Not so:

**"Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."**



The fact that we have become complacent about freedom makes me want to shed ....

**... Gin-Scented Tears.**

# Homegrown Tomatoes

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November 2020

Anywhere

Covid paid a visit on some of my favourite people this week. So far, only one has tested positive; results are pending for others in the group.

Neither Bear nor I have been in contact with anyone in this cohort the past month - which is a mixed bag of good fortune and bad news. We won't have contracted the virus, but we do miss their company.

The person who caught the virus is very healthy otherwise so I am sure Bobby<sup>2</sup> will not suffer any serious effects. In fact, if positive attitude plays a roll, Bobby will pull through nicely.



Bobby has always maintained a healthy diet of homegrown garden veggies, which bodes well for recovery.

I am sending this song out to Bobby and wish him/her well, on behalf of all of us.

<https://youtu.be/6TWwyhCVBDg>

*Homegrown Tomatoes* – Guy Clark



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<sup>2</sup> Not his/her real name.

# Bernoulli's Fault

November 2020  
Foothills, Alberta

Bear grew up in Lethbridge and I was raised in southeast Saskatchewan. Wind is part of our heritage.

While Bear and I have wind in common, it is the source of our one and only incompatibility. I love it, Bear hates the wind. Bear suffers from pressure differential migraines, and I suffer from an affliction with windmills and airplanes. We just do not see eye-to-eye where air currents are concerned.



Actually, *wind* isn't the problem, it's Bernoulli. In 1738 Daniel Bernoulli discovered that air, flowing over an object, increases speed and reduces pressure. This principal is what causes lift on an airplane wing, and air pressure changes during a Chinook.

If Bear and I have a spat, it is usually...  
... **Bernoulli's fault.**

*That wind's gonna blow tomorrow  
Just like it blow'd today  
But someday when your bones turn to dust  
That wind's gonna blow you away*

*Wind's Gonna Blow You Away – Joe Ely*

The Lethbridge wind gauge.  
20 degrees indicates a light breeze, when the  
chain breaks it is windy.



To Be Continued.....