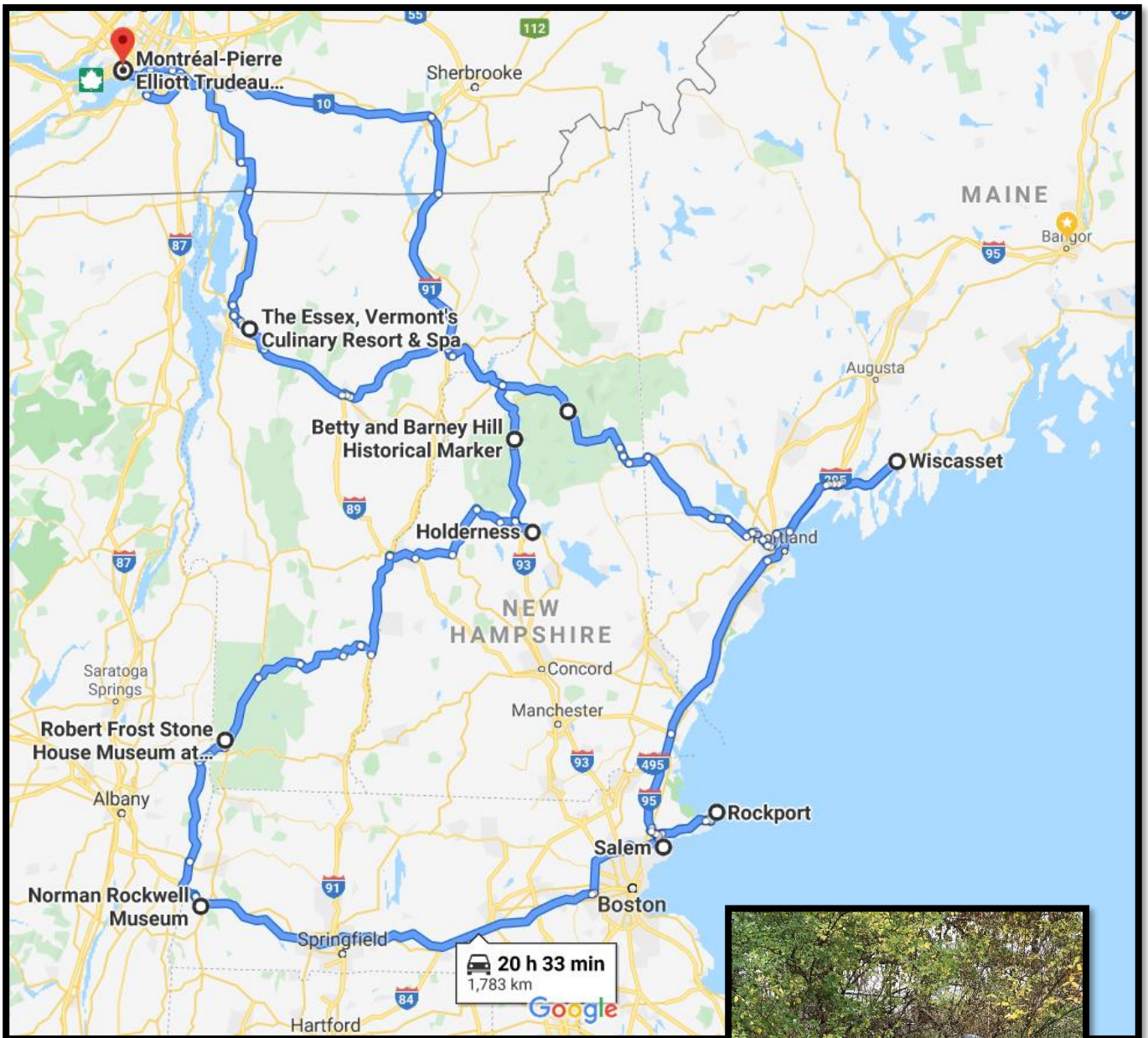


New England 2019



*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

ROBERT FROST



Russ & Terri (Bear) Paton, and Robert Frost, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts

What Scares You

October 16, 2019
Montreal, Quebec

*Monsters are real, and ghosts are real too. They live inside us,
and sometimes, they win.*

Stephen King.

I don't believe in ghosts, aliens among us, fairies, lake monsters, witches, alternate dimensions or God, but a pragmatic mind should remain receptive to otherworld alternatives. Every so often it is prudent to wander through a gate in the paranormal fence, to determine if there is anything worthy of consideration happening on the other side.

Northern New England is a great place to contemplate the supernatural. This is the land of Stephen King, the first reported alien abductions and the Bennington triangle, which has absorbed so many people that "missing" has almost become a banality here. There are more purported ghosts in New England than living flesh – this is the realm of witch trials, ghost ships and clowns that float.



We are on the road to New England for a few days to do some leaf peeping, seafood eating and antique hunting – while we are there, we will open our minds to things that don't pass scientific scrutiny, because.....

...what scares you, excites us.

Open Minded

October 17, 2019

Emily's Bridge - Stowe, Vermont



In medieval times when someone died, the church would ring the tower bell three times – a death knell. The custom prompted poet John Donne to write a line in *Meditation XVII*, which goes:

*And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.*

In other words, don't ask "for whom the bell tolls" – it might be you.

Gold Brook Bridge, otherwise known as Emily's Bridge, is said to be possessed by the spirit of a young woman who hung herself from the rafters. Jilted by a lover, Emily took her own life and is said to haunt the covered bridge ever since. People passing through at night report seeing wispy images of the wretched girl and hearing her boots scraping the roof of their car as they pass through.

Ghost hunters say that they can conjure Emily's phantom to appear by ringing a bell or sounding the car horn three times, between midnight and 3:00AM.

We passed through the bridge around noon and saw no evidence of Emily. During the day it is easy not to believe in ghosts.

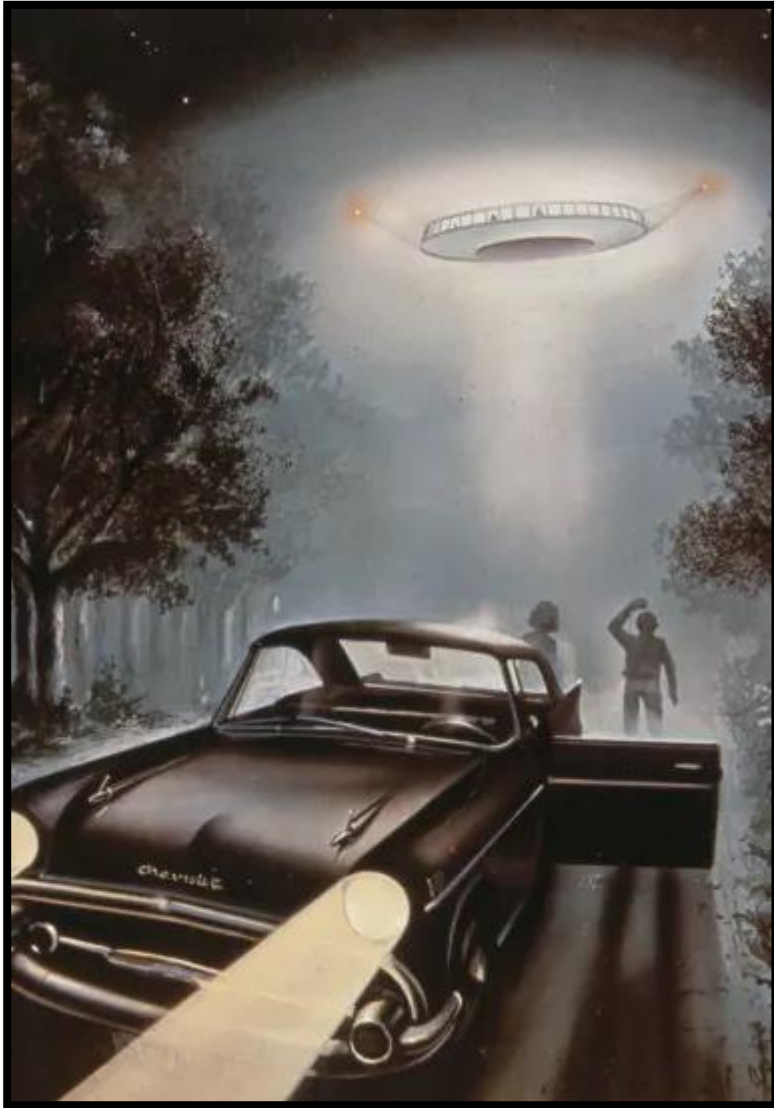
At night, I'm a little more open-minded.



Strange, but True

October 17, 2019

Route 3 near Lincoln, New Hampshire



Betty.

At that point, both Betty and Barney Hill lost consciousness. Later, under hypnosis, they both relayed similar versions of this story:

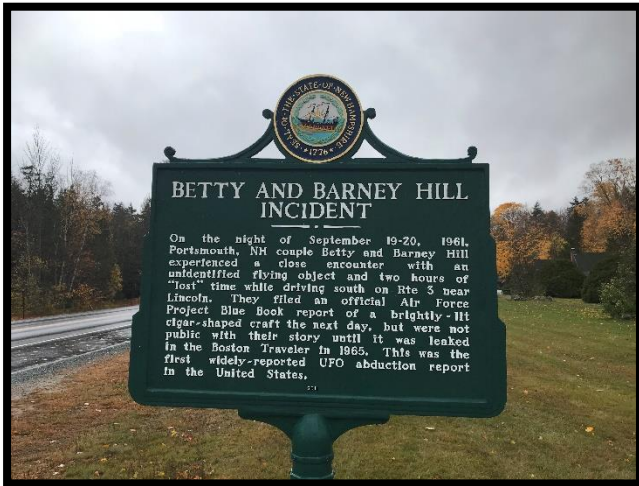
The vessel hovered over the Hill's car and put them to sleep. Grey beings then sleepwalked them up a long ramp and into the spacecraft. Once inside, the Hills were separated, taking turns in an examination room that had curved walls and a large light hanging from the ceiling.

On the night of September 19–20, 1961, Portsmouth, NH couple Betty and Barney Hill had a close encounter with an unidentified flying object while driving south on Route 3 near Lincoln. They experienced two hours of 'lost' time and the first widely reported UFO abduction in the United States.

The Hills reported that they were traveling home from a vacation in Canada. The tired couple sipped coffee in a New Hampshire diner to recharge, near the mid-point of their journey. They left the diner around 10 p.m., estimating they could reach their home in Portsmouth between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. at the latest.

About 70 miles past the diner, an iridescent object hovered just above the treetops on the side of the road. Barney stopped the car, keeping the engine running. He crept into a dark field, leaving Betty in the car. Barney reported seeing an object "as big as a jet but round and flat like a pancake". Barney hurried back to his vehicle and

During their examinations, the beings removed Betty and Barney's clothes, plucked strands of their hair, took clippings of their nails and scraped their skin. Needles, connected to long wires, probed their heads, arms, legs and spines. One large needle, about 4 to 6 inches long, was inserted into Betty's belly. She reported that this test left her twisting in pain. Throughout the ordeal, a being Barney and Betty called "the leader" watched from the side.



Alone with the leader, Betty asked where the craft had come from, admitting she knew little of the universe. The being told her, "If you don't know where you are, there wouldn't be any point in telling you where I am from."

The couple awoke about two hours later, 35 miles down the road. They continued their journey, arriving home at dawn. The Hills reported the incident to the Air Force the next day, on a confidential basis.

The occurrence remained a secret for years, until the story was picked up by a Boston newspaper in 1965, after which the Hills became the first in a long line of celebrity abductees.

The quiet couple's strange story later became the subject of a best-selling book and a movie starring James Earl Jones.



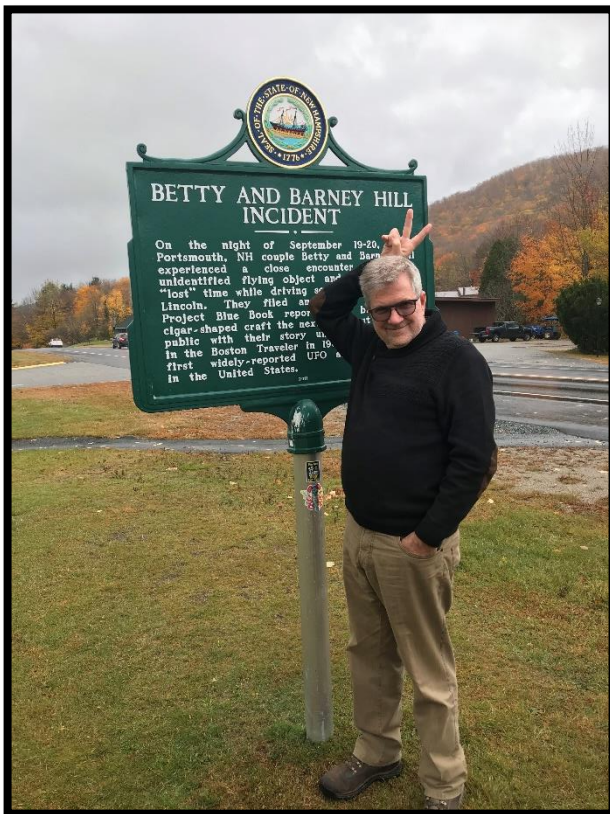
Bear and I took a drive down Route 3 near Lincoln to see if we could attract the attention of any aliens. It was daytime but raining as we approached the site of the reported abduction. We parked, got out of the car and took a few pictures in the gloomy light, then hurried back to the shelter of the vehicle. As we pulled away, the windshield wipers abruptly stopped working, in an upright position. We couldn't continue with rain drenching the windshield, so I pulled over in a vacant lot.

With the rain still pounding down, I popped the hood of the car, got out and opened the fuse box. As I did this, the wipers mysteriously started working again and the radio, which we had never turned on, started blaring classical music. Not really wanting to, I glanced up at the sky.

I saw nothing but a truck stop sign.

We never experienced any loss of space or time, but later that evening I noticed a small patch of hair missing on my left arm, ...

.... strange, but true.



Crafty Son-of-a-Bitch

October 17, 2019

Squam Lake, New Hampshire

If the movie *On Golden Pond* had been named after the lake it was filmed on, it might not have done as well at the box office; *On Squam Lake* doesn't have the same ring to it.

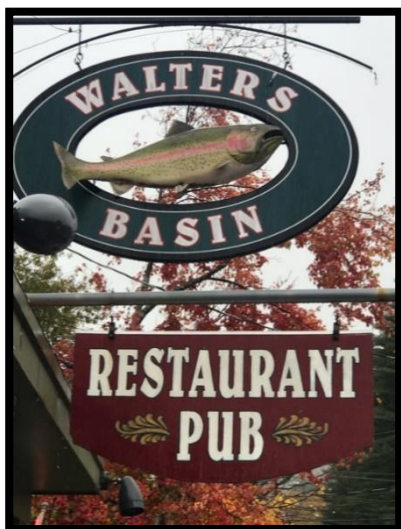
The 1981 film opens with loons welcoming Norman and Ethel Thayer to their cottage on Golden Pond. The same loon was on hand to greet us when we wandered down to the lake today. Of all the sounds in nature, the call of the loon is probably the most haunting - it sends a shiver down my neck every time.



In the movie, 80-year-old Norman (Henry Fonda) is in the early stages of dementia. His affliction is endearing at this stage, but Ethel (Katherine Hepburn) is concerned.

Norman, studying a picture on the mantle: *"Who in the Hell is that?"*

Ethel: *"That's your nephew, you old Poop!"*



Norman and Ethel's daughter (Jane Fonda) and her boyfriend leave his son, thirteen-year-old Billy, with them for a few weeks. Norman and Billy get off to a rocky start, but they eventually connect through fishing. Together, Norman and Billy conspire to catch Walter, a legendary fish on Golden Pond.

The burgeoning teenager and the declining octogenarian find common purpose in catching

....'the crafty son-of-a-bitch'.



So Lucky

October 18, 2019

Bennington, Vermont

The Algonquin people avoided the area around Glastonbury Mountain because a giant man-eating-stone was thought to live there. The only time the Algonquin ventured into the area around the mountain was to bury their dead.

The Bennington triangle, as that area is now known, has not improved its reputation since those ancient times. Dozens of people have mysteriously disappeared over the years, with no apparent cause.

On December 1, 1949, James E. Tedford got on a bus in St. Albans after visiting family. He was still on the bus at the last stop before arriving in Bennington. Somewhere between the last stop and Bennington, Tedford vanished. His belongings were still in the luggage rack and an open bus timetable was on his vacant seat.

Tedford wasn't the first person to disappear in the triangle, and certainly not the last. On October 28, 1950, Frieda Langer disappeared from her campsite near the Somerset Reservoir. A hunter, an 18-year-old student, and an 8-year-old child all went missing and were never found.

Bear and I traversed the Bennington Triangle today, taking back roads in search of the mystery. We made it through with nothing more than a deep sense of foreboding.

The unfortunate fellow on the right, who we met on our journey, ...

... wasn't so Lucky.

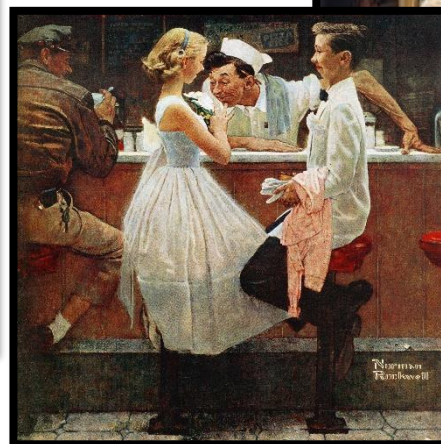
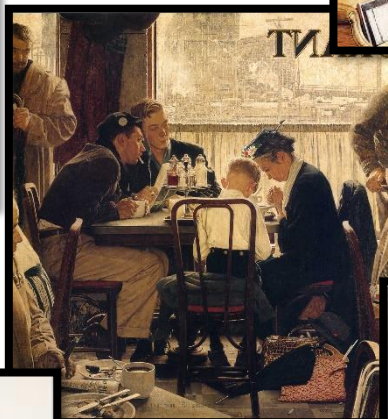
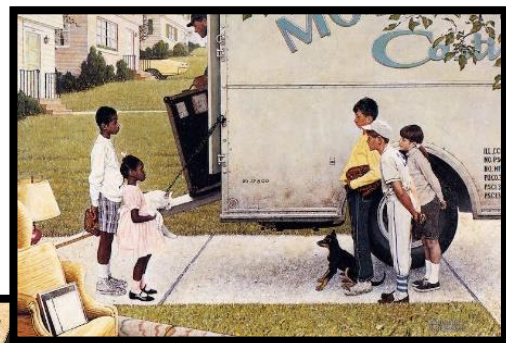


There is no Santa Claus

October 18, 2019

Norman Rockwell Museum - Stockbridge, Massachusetts

One Christmas, when the kids were young, a large book of Norman Rockwell paintings showed up at our house. I remember all of us being enthralled by the idealistic images – this, we thought, was how America once was, and how it ought to be!



We toured the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA today - I felt the tug of nostalgia and a glimmer of hope as we soaked in Rockwell's images, but I didn't get the same *warm and fuzzy* feeling I did browsing through these images twenty-five years ago.

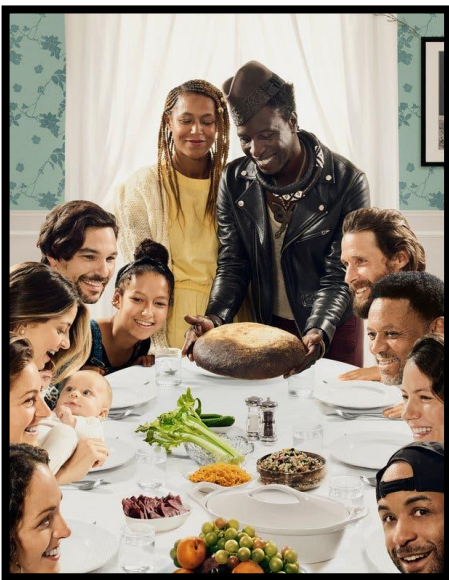
America has lost its innocence and reneged on its promises to the world since then. Rockwell's paintings no longer reflect the truth of America.

The feeling is not unlike discovering....

there is no Santa Claus.



Opinion piece by Conrad Black, in the National Post – September 27, 2019



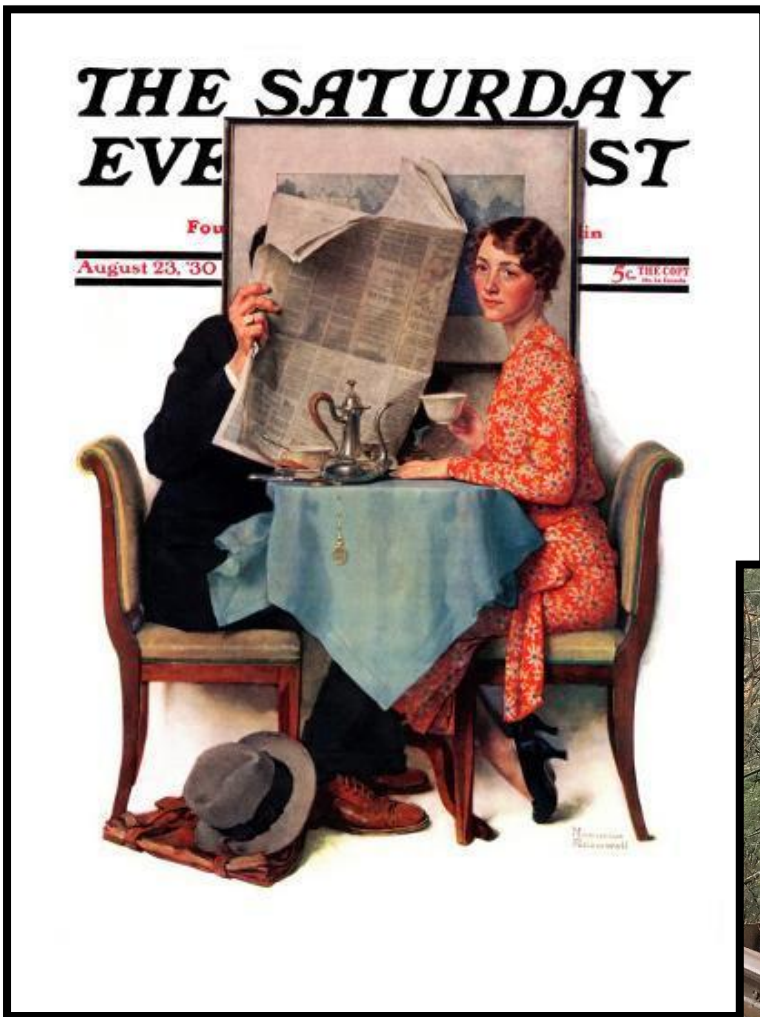
“Beneath the façade of Norman Rockwell and Walt Disney and most of Hollywood’s production before it was taken over by the limousine left, the United States is a jungle, and that is its strength and its weakness. It assures an immensely competitive Darwinian society in constant fermentation with high levels of achievement in practically every field, but it also causes inordinately large numbers of people to be ground to powder. The land of opportunity is the place where anyone can accomplish almost anything, but there is a threadbare safety net, and more than 30 million people live in poverty. It has six to 12 times as many incarcerated people as other large, prosperous democracies, including Canada. And like all jungles, it is run, even if from a little behind the scenes, by the human equivalent of 30-foot constricting snakes and 700-pound cats.”

Better in Retirement

October 18, 2019

Norman Rockwell Museum - Stockbridge, Massachusetts

One Rockwell image I had never seen before (or, conveniently forgot) affected me profoundly. For many years I was the guy “*Behind the Newspaper*”, depicted on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 23, 1930.



The painting made me understand that I owe Bear a deep and profound apology. I will try to be....

Better in Retirement

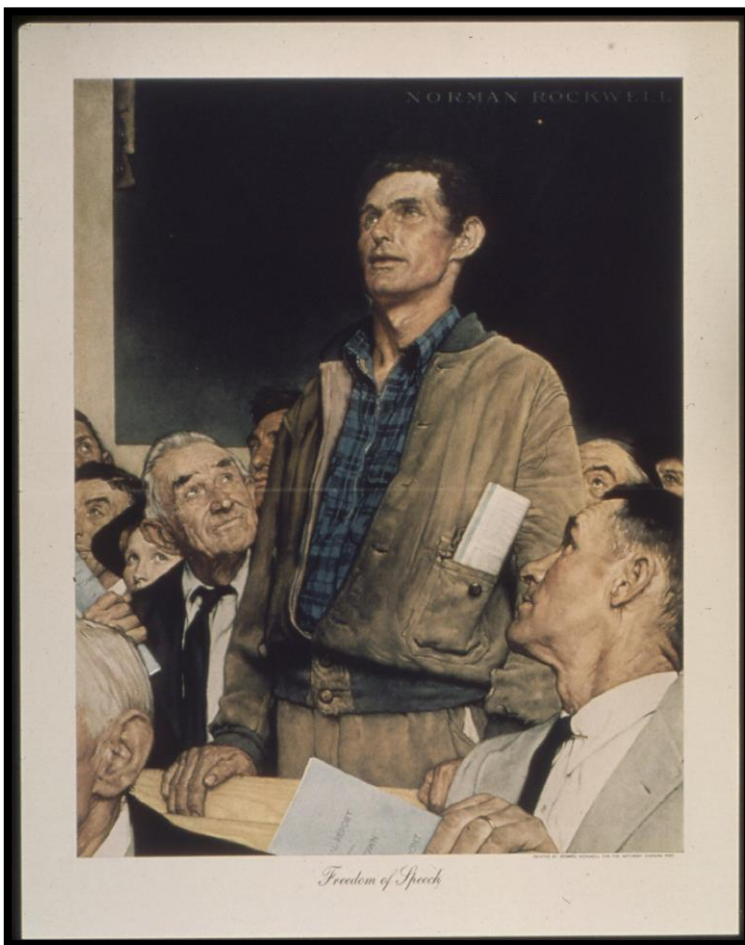


Stand Tall and Be Heard

October 18, 2019

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Rockwell's art will never hang in the Louvre or the Musee d' Orsay, but it has an important place in America. Rockwell's Four Freedoms series should be seen and understood by every American.



This picture needs to be on prominent display - maybe even hung in the Oval Office.

Freedom of Speech depicts a man with Abraham Lincoln-like features, standing tall at a town hall meeting, voicing his opinion. His rough hands and workman's jacket stand out in contrast to the suit and tie crowd, yet everyone in attendance listens, in rapt attention, whether they agree or not, as their fellow American exercises his constitutional right to speak.

Freedom of Speech is under attack in America, by the leader of the free world. Every day he has occupied the office of President, Donald Trump has lied, worked to suppress opinions opposed to his own, bullied the press and belittled Americans who oppose him. Trump ignores the council of others, even his allies. He has spread dangerous conspiracy theories

and used his voice to enrich himself and divide America.

Donald Trump ignores the US Constitution and denies the American people their right to....

stand tall and be heard.

More Weight

October 19, 2019

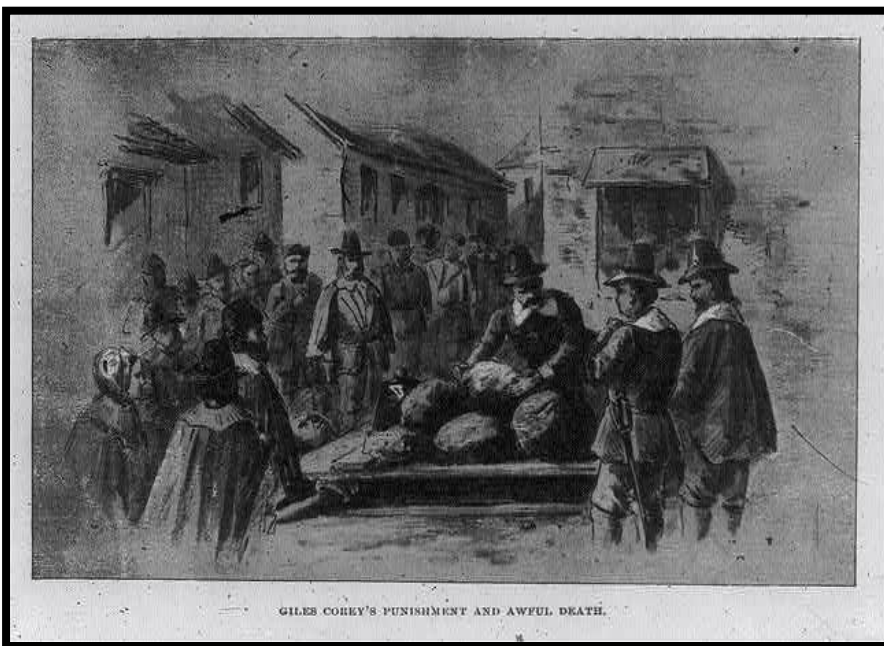
Salem, Massachusetts

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

Exodus 22:18

Every Christian sect gleans its own set of “truths” from selected passages in the Bible. The Puritans of Salem, Massachusetts chose the verse above as one of the primary tenets of their belief, with devastating consequences.

Between February 1692 and May 1693, Salem experienced a case of mass hysteria only religion is capable of inducing. Religious frenzy, coupled with human vices of greed and ignorance, resulted in the prosecution of more than 200 people accused of witchcraft. Fourteen women and five men were executed by hanging; many more died in captivity or committed suicide.



One man, Giles Corey, refused to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty to the charge of witchcraft. As a result, he was subjected to the cruel and unusual sanction of pressing. Corey was stripped naked, laid on the ground with boards over his body while rocks were piled upon him. Corey bore the pain of his torture for two days, as more and more rocks were applied - he never once cried out in pain. Corey was asked three times to enter a plea but each time he replied - “More Weight”.

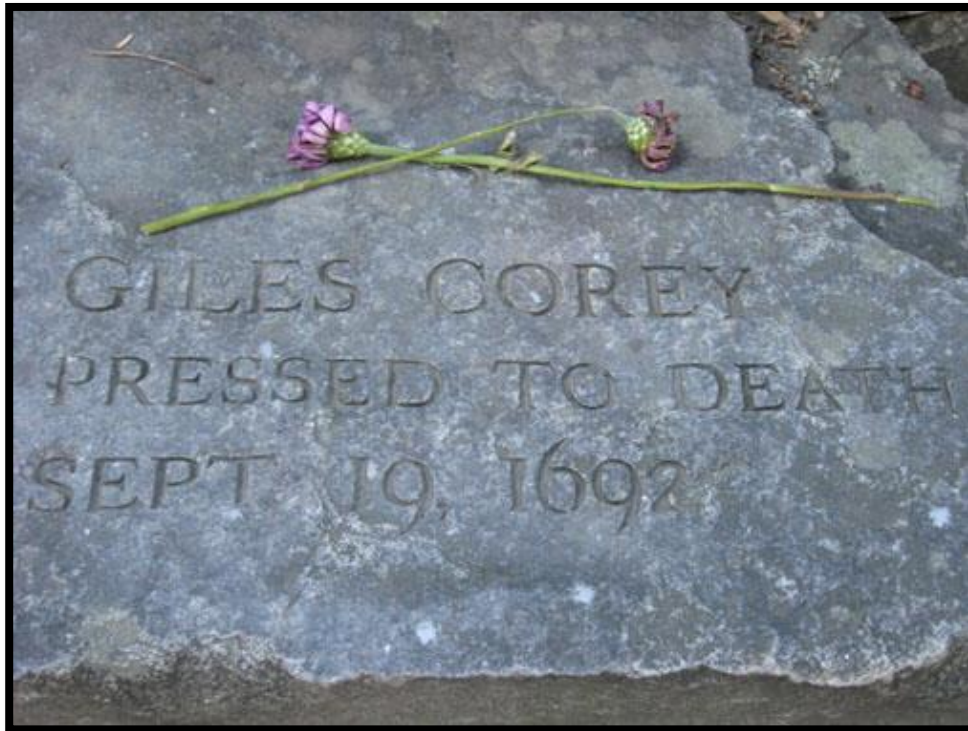
Corey died on the third day, thereby avoiding a conviction of witchcraft. Not to be outdone, the Puritans hung his wife three days later, after convicting her of the same charge.

Of all the paranormal phenomena we have encountered so far in New England; ghosts, aliens, witches and the like, the most distressing is God. How could a loving God, creator of the Universe

and the source of all moral authority, stand idly by with arms folded and watch as creatures he created - pious followers of his inerrant word, crush another man to death with stones for refusing to plead to a charge of witchcraft? If God does exist, his indifference is the essence of evil.

If God is compelled to punish me for these words, my response will be.....

More Weight



The Girl Next Door

October 20, 2019

Rockport, Massachusetts

The Yankee Clipper Inn sits on a granite outcropping in Rockport, Massachusetts, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.



Built in 1929, the Yankee Clipper was a holiday resort for the rich and famous in the mid-20th century. John F. Kennedy, John Lennon, Paul Newman, Bette Midler and a woman I had never heard of, June Allyson, all stayed here.

All the suites in the Inn are named after Clipper ships. Bear and I spent Sunday afternoon relaxing in the Ariel Suite on the third floor. Curious, I Googled “June Allyson” to see why she was on the “rich and famous” list. Turns out, Allyson was a moderately successful movie actress with a “girl next door” reputation. Despite her rising stardom and wholesome stage presence, Allyson struggled with alcohol and relationships. She married, divorced and remarried several times – twice to the same man. One of her earliest relationships was with John F. Kennedy.

Hey, wait a minute, wasn't JFK on the guest list at this hotel? A little research told me that John Kennedy stayed in the Flying Cloud Suite across the hall. What do you bet, June Allyson stayed in the suite we occupy.

The Girl Next Door, Indeed

A Blind Eye

October 21, 2019

Essex, Massachusetts

Ever wonder why so many sailors and pirates wore an eye patch? It is not what you think – I will explain later.

Goodman's Razor: "retirement is like being ten years old again; with money."

Our friends Gervais and Janice invited us to the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory a few weeks ago. I felt like a kid again as we played with the giant telescopes and gazed star-struck at the cosmos. I have always had a fascination with things big and small - telescopes and microscopes were part of my childhood. I have had a 50-year interruption from playing with those things, but it is time to start again.



I decided to combine micro/macro-observation with another passion – primitive navigation. I am determined to own a sextant and learn how to use it.

I did a little research on the internet on the use of a sextant and where to find them. The instrument looks complicated, but, according to the Google, it is quite easy to use, at a basic level.



Ship's captains relied on this misconception. Common sailors were never taught how to use the instrument – there was less likelihood of mutiny on the open seas if the crew couldn't find their way back to port.

The downside of being one of the few people on board capable of using the marine sextant is that captains and navigators were constantly peering at the sun through the instrument. Sextants have dark lenses to shield the user's eye, but bright sunlight often spilled over the lens directly into their naked eye. Captains would wear a patch between observations to allow the eye to recover or, in a worst-case scenario, to cover...

... a blind eye.

State Cat

October 16, 2019

Wiscasset, Maine

Before she was executed in 1793, French Queen Marie Antoinette attempted to escape to America. She packed her most prized possessions onto a ship, including six of her favourite Turkish Angora cats. The Queen's cats and possessions landed in the new world, but poor Marie was arrested in Paris, tried and convicted of high treason. 226 years ago, today - October 16, 1793, Marie Antoinette was executed by guillotine.

Antoinette's cats fared much better than she did. They reached Wiscasset, Maine where they bred with other short-haired breeds, and developed into the modern Maine Coon cat.

The breed has a spooky appearance; a robust face, large, pointed ears and a prominent ruff around its neck. The Maine Coon cat's features seem to reflect the dark history of the breed's benefactor.



Not surprisingly, the Maine Coon Cat is

.... the official state cat of Maine.

If the Axe Don't Fit...

October 21, 2019

Fall River, Massachusetts

*Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one*
Children's Skipping Rhyme – Anonymous

The theme of this little poem is dark by murder mystery standards, as a playground rhyme it is horrific. But it gets worse - the seldom repeated final stanza is the true horror of the story:

*Lizzie Borden got away
For her crime she did not pay.*

On the morning of August 4, 1892, Lizzie Borden's father Andrew and stepmother Abby were hacked to death in their home near Fall River, Massachusetts. Lizzie had both motive and opportunity to commit the murders, but there were no eyewitnesses. Lizzie was charged with the crimes but was acquitted at trial by a combination of bungled police work, skilful legal defence, and by exploiting Victorian attitudes toward femininity.



Council for the defence explained that a woman couldn't execute the crimes, physically or mentally. The lawyer then entered the skulls of the dearly departed Bordens into evidence and attempted to show that the hatchet the Prosecution had produced as the murder weapon didn't fit the gashes in the bone.

Lizzie Borden fainted as this evidence was presented, thereby affirming the defence's proposition that she was incapable of committing the murders. The jury agreed.

Lizzie Borden's trial and the celebrity trial of O.J. Simpson 100 years later have much in common. In fact, if "axe" is exchanged for "glove", their grounds for walking free are almost the same.

"If the axe don't fit, you must acquit."

An Axe Handle for Lunch

October 21, 2019

Bangor, Maine

Both Minnesota and Maine claim the mythical Paul Bunyan as their own, but the truth is Bunyan originated in Quebec. Bon Jean, as he was first known, was a French-Canadian.

Loggers of the mid-nineteenth century were rough, tough men. When they weren't bucking trees with a double-bladed axe, they spent their idle time engaging in feats of strength. One of the more bizarre tests of manly brawniness was the ability to chew off the end of an axe handle.

Many Canadian loggers migrated to the US northeast after the American Civil War, for higher pay. One of the biggest, toughest men to make the trek south was Fabian "Bon Jean" Fournier. Bon Jean was one of the burliest men the industry had ever seen – he had hands like hams and was reported to have two rows of upper teeth. This physical aberration made him a master of axe chewing contests. After he chewed the butt off his axe, the French contingent in the camp would exclaim; "Bon Yenne!", an expression of astonishment.



After Bon Jean's death (by murder – but that is another story), the phrase "Bon Yenne" morphed into "Bunyan". Legends sprang up about a giant logger named Paul Bunyan. Retold over ages and fuelled by the exaggeration of long, lonely winter nights in the bush, the stories grew grandiose.

Tales of Paul Bunyan and his giant Blue Ox live on in Northern New England.

The story above is almost complete ox-shit. I made it up from snippets of information I picked up in Maine – which demonstrates how legends get started.

We are off to a restaurant now, maybe I will order

.... **an axe handle for lunch.**

The Realm of Possibility

October 22, 2019

Portland, Maine

Sasquatch, mermaids, lake monsters, abominable snowmen; before we travelled to Maine, I had no idea that all these creatures had the dubious legitimacy of a biological species named for them, Cryptids. That shortcoming in my education was resolved at *The International Cryptozoology Museum* in Portland Maine.

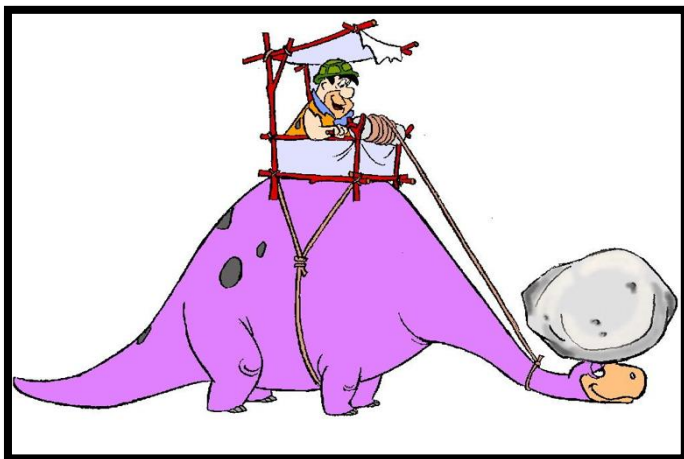
We paid the \$13 admittance fee but stayed less than half an hour. A cursory look around was enough to fulfil my cryptozoological aspirations.

There was a list of the museum's board of directors on the wall at the entrance, but no picture. If there had been, I think it might look much like the bar scene from *Star Wars*.



I did take encouragement from one item in the museum. The "science" of Young Earth Creationism is given the same amount of shelf space as the Yeti exhibit.

"A subset of cryptozoology promotes the pseudoscience of Young Earth creationism, rejecting conventional science in favour of a Biblical interpretation and promoting concepts such as "living dinosaurs".



Four in ten Americans believe that the earth was created in six days, less than 10,000 years ago. A significant percentage of Young Earthers believe that humans and dinosaurs roamed the planet at the same time.

For millions of Americans, the image on the left is within

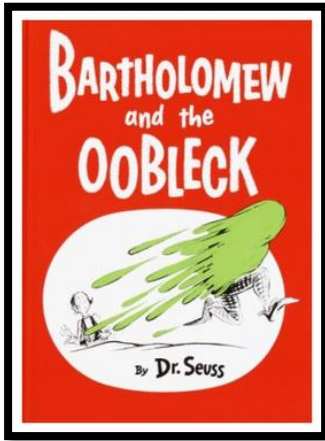
...the realm of possibility.

Not Dumb Enough

October 22, 2019

MIT News

I took a break from the paranormal today and read a Massachusetts Institute of Technology online newspaper. Turns out, *normal* can be as peculiar as the paranormal. Here are two examples:



MIT researchers have developed a substance that instantly transitions from liquid to solid and back again depending on how it is physically manipulated. Applications could range from temporary pothole filling, to lining for bulletproof vests.

The scientific name for the substance is “non-Newtonian fluid”, but the research group named their test material Oobleck, after a sticky green goo in a Dr. Seuss book.

In November 2018, engineers at MIT demonstrated the first ever flight of a heavier-than-air aircraft with no moving parts. Think about that – a silent, working aircraft that doesn’t rely on fossil fuel, with no engine, no propeller or any other moving mechanisms!



The research team described how the aircraft works in an article in the campus newspaper *MIT News*. They *dumbed it down* for consumption by the general public:

The team’s final design resembles a large, lightweight glider. The aircraft, which weighs about 5 pounds and has a 5-meter wingspan, carries an array of thin wires, which are strung like horizontal fencing along and beneath the front end of the plane’s wing. The wires act as positively charged electrodes, while similarly arranged thicker wires, running along the back end of the plane’s wing, serve as negative electrodes.

The fuselage of the plane holds a stack of lithium-polymer batteries. Barrett’s ion plane team included members of Professor David Perreault’s Power Electronics Research Group in the Research Laboratory of Electronics, who designed a power supply that would convert the batteries’ output to a sufficiently high voltage to propel the plane. In this

way, the batteries supply electricity at 40,000 volts to positively charge the wires via a lightweight power converter.

Once the wires are energized, they act to attract and strip away negatively charged electrons from the surrounding air molecules, like a giant magnet attracting iron filings. The air molecules that are left behind are newly ionized and are in turn attracted to the negatively charged electrodes at the back of the plane.

As the newly formed cloud of ions flows toward the negatively charged wires, each ion collides millions of times with other air molecules, creating a thrust that propels the aircraft forward.

Sorry MIT, not dumb enough yet.

Finger in a Light Socket

October 23, 2019

Not at the summit of Mount Washington

Me: Hey Bear, I have an idea for tomorrow.

Bear: Ya? This ought to be good...

Me: There is a weather station on top of Mt. Washington that has the world's most extreme weather. They get the wildest pressure and temperature fluctuations which result in winds that can reach 230 MPH.

Bear: I see a migraine in my future.

Me: There can be high humidity and temperatures low enough to form rime ice. The wind causes the ice to form horizontally, in beautiful patterns.

Bear: Sounds delightful.

Me: And here is the best part – we can ride up to the top on a cog railway.

Bear: A what?

Me: Cog railway – it is an antique steam engine that ratchets a passenger car up the steep grade.

Bear: With us in it?

Me: Ya! Doesn't that sound great!

Bear: I tell you what – you go ahead. I'll stay here, and....

... stick my finger in a light socket.



Close Encounters

October 23, 2019
The Road Home



The scenery in New England reminded me of the pictures on Grandma's jig-saw puzzles - magnificent fall colours and dramatic seascapes, which seem almost supernatural.

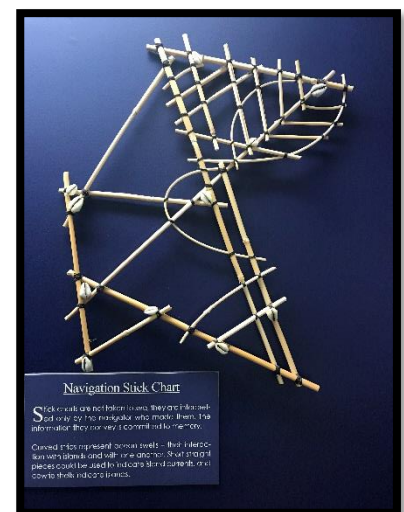


The food didn't disappoint either. New England is a hub for culinary arts schools and we were delighted to let students experiment on us.



Antique hunting was a bit of a disappointment. We found oodles of shops in the "flea" category, and one or two high-end furniture establishments, but not much found its way into our suitcases.

There were interesting artifacts on display in museums, but they weren't eager to part with them.



A Stick GPS: I was on a mission to find a sextant - the closest I came was this primitive marine 'navigation stick chart' in The Fairbanks Museum. Ancient Pacific Islanders used the instrument to guide them from island to island at a time when the world was still flat.

Part of our mission was to study mystic phenomena in New England. The *witch hunt* was entertaining for a while but, as we neared the end of the trip, I grew tired of observing the make-believe.



Mysticism is a tourist attraction in New England. Every town has its ghost, monster or alien and tourist boards exploit them for all they are worth. The epicenter of psychic-tourism is Salem, where long lines of otherwise intelligent people spend their time and financial resources in search of witches - which are no more real today than they were in the 1690's.

Alien abductions were a trend in the 1960's and 1970's and towns all over New England exploit the phenomenon, but the aliens seem to have moved on to find intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

Twenty-five-foot-high plastic Sasquatch's and fictional lumberjacks tarnish the landscape.

By day six I was exhausted with all things paranormal. I was having way more fun reading real-life science articles and exploring the consequential history of New England.



Turns out, I am more entertained by.....

Close Encounters of the *Nerd* Kind.

