

**A Tip O' the Hat:
Doug Bell's Rambling Compendium**



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Foreword

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The late Doug Bell was a friend of mine. I had known Doug for most of my life as a friend of my parents, but after my dad (Ken Snider) died in 2013, Doug and I became friends. Doug and I filled our visits gabbing nonstop about grief and loss, gratitude and life. We also talked about writing, our mutual passion.

Caroline Bell, Doug's daughter-in-law, with the help of family and friends, has created this document, 'A Tip O' the Hat: Doug Bell's Rambling Compendium.' This compendium is made up of the best of Doug's weekly 'Rambling' columns that were originally published in the Yukon News from 1986—when Doug was the publisher of that newspaper—until his final column in 2009.

'A Tip O' the Hat: Doug Bell's Rambling Compendium' is a companion to Doug's posthumously published memoir, 'Sky Road North' (Yukon Transportation Museum, 2021) which is available in print form. This compendium is available on-line for free as a PDF, and is not available in print form.

On behalf of Doug's family and friends, I hope you enjoy hearing Doug's voice once again through the best of his 'Rambling.' I know I do. A big thank you to Wyatt Tremblay for creating the tip o' the hat image of Doug for this project.

For further information, please contact Caroline Bell at bellc424@gmail.com.

As usual, I'll let Doug have the final word.

Once upon a time, a man said to me, "I could write a column like yours, you often use other people's words." I agreed. I have not been everywhere, man, I have not read it all, heard it all, nor seen it all.

And, we must not forget, everyone is unique. There is no other human being like you. Millions have two eyes, a nose, a mouth, but not like you. None have your traits, none think like you and none speak like you. Your individuality is your one unique possession, and your only real claim to importance. (Doug Bell, 'Rambling,' October 14, 2009)

Grace Snider
Whitehorse, Yukon

INTRODUCTION - 20 AUGUST, 1986 YUKON NEWS

PUBLISHER'S CORNER

Readers will notice many changes beginning this week that are all part of our decision to concentrate our efforts on Yukon-oriented news and features.

Two of them are worthy of special mention, as they help reflect our goals.

*Few will be surprised that **Doug Bell**, our popular former Commissioner, has a long list of memories and happenings from his many years in the Yukon. I am very happy to say that, beginning this week, he will become a regular contributor to the paper.*

Doug's career has exposed him to all the flavours of the territory, and he may well have met almost every Yukoner personally, so active has he been over these many years.

I welcome him to the News and look forward as eagerly as everyone else to what he will be bringing to these pages.

***Jane Gaffin** also has a long and varied career in the Yukon. As a mining historian, she has gained an international reputation and enthusiastic following, so it is with intense pleasure that I can announce that we have arranged to publish her Yukon mining book, **Cashing In**, in serial form in the many weeks to come. The book is, of course, available almost everywhere books are sold, and is as entertaining as it is historically accurate.*

I hope, in the months and years to come, to be able to bring more of the significant works by Yukoners to the attention of our readers in this way. It is a fitting and pleasurable way in which to inaugurate our return to a totally Yukon orientation.

On a sad note for me this week is the retirement and departure from the Yukon of a long-time friend of the Yukon, Sid Gautier, the familiar face at NorthwesTel who seemed to always end up with everyone's telephone problems. Sid and Betty are headed for Edmonton, so in a way they are staying in the Klondike.

Dave Robertson

**THE VERY FIRST 'RAMBLING' COLUMN -
20 AUGUST, 1986**

OPINION

BEHIND THE SCENES

By Doug Bell

Almost three decades ago, in a coffee room at the Watson Lake Airport, I sat alone finishing my coffee, idly looking around the uninspiring room. About to leave, I set my cup down on the coffee-stained paper and as I did, a word on the page caught my attention - "craftsmanship". The essay began with these words: "A man may hide himself from you, or misrepresent himself to you every other way, but he cannot do so in his work. His imagination, his perseverance, his impatience, his clumsiness, his cleverness - everything is there to be seen in a man's work. For example if stonework is well put together, it means a thoughtful man planned it, a careful man cut it, and an honest man cemented it."

This title, and it is still that in my mind, does not apply to a particular occupation, it applies instead to the special way that an individual carries out his job - whatever that job might be. Certainly some jobs are more interesting than others. That we can accept as truth. But it is not nearly as true as that one mind is more interested than another. There is no job in the world so dull that it would not present fascinating angles to some minds. The writings of Carl Sandburg lend us an example, when he reminded us of a fish crier in a fish market whose face "is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, terribly glad that God made fish and customers to whom he may call his wares from a push cart."

Similarly, no material with which we work, be it cabbage or gold, asks us to be content with it as we find it. It asks us to take it in hand and change it by putting value into it — values of ourselves, our skill, our craftsmanship.

From time to time, in my search for background material, that coffee-stained paper would surface and I'd reflect upon it again, and those reflections always centred around whether I had, in the ensuing time between readings, met a true craftsman.

Usually I had, but they seemed rare. Too rare! So I often wondered how many there are, behind the scenes. People who care; people who give good service and then a little extra; people who add themselves and a pleasant manner, and crown it all with a smile.

At this moment of reflection four stand out, their deeds and personality still strong in my memory: a trapper, a cab driver, a waitress and a ditch digger. And only one can I name, but that matters not as much as the gift they gave me in the short time I knew them - in two cases, less than an hour. Every one a craftsman. People who wear this description from that coffee-stained essay so well. "The craftsman achieves a happy state by putting something of himself into what he is doing, and in so doing, his skill and ideals affect not only the material with which he works, but it affects too those who purchase the finished product and use it."

Such a man was the ditch digger. Bent and stooped from his trade, yet still standing proud as he surveyed the task he was to do. A machine couldn't do it - too many electronic cables in the ground. "I'll do it in four hours, and I'll take four hours' pay!" was his firm response to my promise of eight hours' pay, because the engineers had calculated it. He repeated his remarks. We set the time. At 8 a.m. on the agreed morning, he started. His long-handled shovel, worn and shiny from use, was as sharp as a razor. The only other tool was a file in his pocket. At noon the trench was finished, as straight as an arrow, as clean and straight as a well, through over 150 feet of tough prairie sod and pavement. I took him home and gave him four hours' pay.

A ditch digger! In my youth, that was the curse that was laid upon you if you failed to work in school, or in any other way. "Do you want to grow up to be a ditch digger?" Until I met this man, I believed it. He put new meaning for me into words such as dignity, pride, skill, reputation and above all, honesty. A true professional. A craftsman.

Much was learned from that brief encounter behind the scenes. The least of which is that craftsmanship comes not just from the hands, but from the head and the heart and the soul that guides those hands.

“In every man there is something wherein I may learn of him, and in that I am his pupil.” - R.W. Emerson



THE LAST COLUMN OF 1986

DECEMBER 22, 1986 - RAMBLING

Dear Santa,

I know I haven't written you for a long time, but you've been doing so well by me that I just began to expect it, I guess. More's the pity, as they used to say, for I know one should acknowledge good works, even more than bad works; although today it seems we tend to find lots of time to criticize, but little time to reach out with compliments. So here's to you! And in whatever form you decide to take, your value is underestimated by the cynics, and perhaps a tad overestimated by we optimists. But then, no one has ever been blinded by looking on the bright side of life, have they?

The Yukon has received many gifts early this year: a glorious summer, a bounty of tourists, Faro, a year-round road to Skagway, and this bit from the Yukon Visitors Association newsletter: "Congratulations to the Yukon Government for making a stand on "THE Yukon". From what we understand, we can use "THE" when referring to The Yukon without getting our wrists slapped!" Frankly, Santa, I was going to buy some wristbands and keep on using it anyway. I think a lot of us were.

Perchance do you have a ruler that on water would draw a line, out on the Beaufort this Christmastime? Say, now that I've started, if you

don't mind I will go to rhyme; it's easier for me and it will take you less time:

Bring us a THE, and a line on water
And neighbours too that'll act like they oughtta,
A dash or two of uncommon common sense,
For those politicians sitting on the fence,
And laws, like our clothes, make 'em fit,
Followed too with some brevity and wit.

Ah! The open road, followed now by open skies,
A gift we hope that'll buy lots of apple pies.
The big orange is up and away, but PW's here on the range,
May seat sales continue, tho' the name may change.

Say Santa, if you've drag with people afar,
Melt that glacier down there and give us Tarr;
Lionel's you carry, ours is nearly down the drain;
Maybe you could give us back our White Pass train!

Now if you're inclined to help just a few folk,
A good puff though - blow away that Riverdale smoke,
Or if that's too much of a difficult feat,
Help rid us of those 3-block-long, 4-way streets!
People drive here to get away from it all ...
So why try to be big, when we're really small!

By the way, this letter'll probably cost me .39;
Methinks it'll all too soon hit .99!
So maybe you could gift them with an elf or two,
'Cause those super mailboxes will just never do!

Oh and say, Santa, a retired man I am,
And there's times when I'm really in a jam,

A gift of knowledge for this li'l old man -
I never know whether to say "Sorry sir" or "Thank you ma'am!"

Oh, I must thank you from this northern haven,
For the gift of our very own bird, the mischievous raven,
Our crest and our husky wherever it may tower,
And of course that tall and beautiful fireweed flower.
'Tis good to know we have wolf, moose and deer,
For THE Yukon, its glory, and you, we cheer!

"Outside" Santa, thousands abound who need be taught,
About this Yukon, where we are, what we've got,
But a present that would here entrench your fame,
If from your bag came a settled land claim!

Santa, keep government to government, and you've a prize,
From all those people abounding in private enterprise.
But if too much we ask, we'd give a cheer
For a simple gift like - drop the price of beer!

As you've noted, there's those who blather and bind,
May I suggest you pay them no never mind,
Your attention, please, to they who silently suffer,
Discrimination, loneliness, and some we won't even utter,
If those you can help, forge we who huff 'n' puff,
We've got lots, especially of things 'n' stuff!

Actually, Santa - forget all but the last of the above:
From that first Christmas, bring us compassion and love.
And from your gift bag, bring a large magic pen,
On the sky to write, PEACE ON EARTH AND GOOD WILL TO ALL MEN!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1987

JANUARY 7, 1987 - RAMBLING

When you begin building a house, you think, you plan, and finally you build. Then you move in, and you change a bit, add some more, and that continues for a while. But there comes a time when you must simply live in it. That is also the way with life. I am at that stage now: the building, the changes, the renovations are over. I'm simply going to live my life.

My words, Omar Sharif's thoughts, during an interview I watched in '86. "As a bee gathers pollen from a thousand flowers we gather thoughts, impressions, even values, from others, as we move through our time. Unlike the bee, though, we have the ability to savour the fragrance, the beauty, the meaning and the worth of our encounters. There are meaningful relationships to be had, even in brief encounters.'

Consider the image of a man standing before you, holding out a vessel - a vessel of gold. The man is old, he exudes peace and serenity. The vessel has a beautiful, flowing shape, an open top and a gently curving spout. No words are spoken, yet the message seems clear: Fill the vessel with love, and love flows out the spout to others. Fill the vessel with power, and power flows out the spout, and so it goes. It was a friend's dream, shared with me sometime in '86.

Laughter came leaping from the vessel as we exchanged "Irish" expressions in Edmonton: "a modest wee man, mind ye, but he has a lot to be modest about"; "she just opens her mouth and lets it say what it wants"; and the father comforting his son just before his marriage, saying "you've nothing to worry about, son" and the reply: "it was alright for you, Dad, you married my Ma, I'm marrying a stranger!"

A barber in Smithers, B.C. telling of his time in Tanzania, meeting a "wealthy" man. The man owned a bicycle repair shop, and a Land Rover repair shop. (A very small garage, actually, but Land Rovers were the only vehicles around, hence the name.) The Tanzanian government,

discovering the man had two grinding machines, simply came and took one. “It’s against the law to have two of any item.” And following that anecdote with descriptions of the desert dwellers scouring the sands for wood, essentially roots of ancient trees, which were sold in the town by the pound. A desert that was perhaps once a forest.

Soot on the car told the tale of our visit to the Big City. It reminded one of noise — all-encompassing, enveloping noise, day and night. Traffic sounds penetrating your bedroom at 5 a.m., through closed windows, as clearly as at 5 p.m., and the smell that hits your nostrils the first day, yet is accepted by the second, and the soot tells you why your throat was a bit sore that first two days. All forgotten in the delights of Expo, the discovery of Lumpia and Casava cake at the Philippine Pavilion, and the compliments about the Yukon Pavilion.

A seafood dinner with an 80-year-old concerned about the number of ladies that want him to come to tea, the old-timer remembering using heels for hockey pucks in the Thirties, tipping his shoe to show his hockey puck heels that he designed and now rotates when worn too much, and the exception to the rule in the city, the little boy who smiled and cheerily said, “Hi!” And his mother smiled too, and the very next visual image, a sign scrawled on a bridge abutment, “of lilies and death said she” ... but most memorable of all, the friend we stayed with who had been 27 times, at that point, to Canada Place, observing “I love the Canada Day show, it makes me feel so doggone proud to be a Canadian!”

We met someone I never expected to meet, and that’s a person who does not like Nana Mouskouri! Her friend observed: “Hmm, her father played the “oompah” and she thinks she’s a critic!”

A Happy Hour at a senior citizens’ home filled with “straight” talk that seems to come only from our elders; “You wanted to eat, you worked!” “The working man has never been helped by either party!” “They come and say ‘vote for me’ and go back and live in luxury. It’s the working man that puts ‘em there and keeps ‘em there!”

“The most boring thing on TV has to be those interviews with ‘stars’ talking about themselves, and themselves, and themselves!”

Ten thousand times, ten thousand times, ten thousand thoughts filled my vessel in 1986. These are but a beginning, but once again I look into a New Year, and agree with our friend in Vancouver: "I too am doggone proud of Canada, and remain happy that this is where I begin another year!"

A Tip of the Hat to our Service Clubs, who add to our community every year with their material contributions, but especially the personal time they donate to others.



LAST COLUMN OF 1987

DECEMBER 23, 1987 - RAMBLING

"Gosh, the winter of '42 was something when the Army spent their first winter here. Why, they burnt down most of the buildings, it was a real cold winter and they'd leave stoves going full-blast with drafts wide open, they didn't understand these simple stoves, I guess. They burned the warehouse that had all the turkeys in it, so not many people had turkey that Christmas. It actually got to be a joke. Every time the fire whistle blew, someone would say, "I wonder what they're burning down now?"

Baking: "If you wanted it, you baked it."

Shopping: Well, there were a few stores; the footsteps crunching on the snow of the board sidewalks was a nice sound, but a lot of the shopping was from Eaton's catalogue and that had to be done weeks in advance, or you didn't get it. Sometimes the train didn't get through and you had to make do with what you had. Most children got one gift, not like today where some get too many. I remember getting skis one year, and I think they were the only skis in town, boy was I popular!

Mom would always have the old bachelors in for Christmas dinner. Even on Christmas Day we carried water from the river, and usually had to

chop a new hole to get it; it was a quarter mile from home. And we walked everywhere in those days, why we walked to school at sixty below. Now they close them. And the Christmas concert was the event of the season - everybody went.

Christmas Past, Whitehorse, Yukon. A slower pace, less money around, not as rich or as mobile, yet as you listen to someone from that time reminiscing, the feeling of peace comes forth. A feeling that, yes, there is much to be said for some of the aspects of "the good old days".

Christmas: a time for reminiscence, for remembering.

It was a raw December day, a shopper coming from a store was touched by the sight of an unshaven old man sitting on a bench, his jacket threadbare and a paper bag about his neck to keep out the cold. As she sorrowed for the man, a girl of about 12 came by and stopped too. From around her neck she took a bright red wooden scarf and silently wrapped it around the man's neck and slipped away.

Christmas: a time for love!

All year long, a retired novelty salesman visited flea markets and garage sales, buying up toys and Christmas items. He lived in a sparsely furnished apartment, but he enjoyed stacking the brightly wrapped gifts almost to the ceiling and then, dressed as Santa, distributing them to poor children on Christmas Day. Said a neighbour, "He enjoyed making kids happy!"

Christmas: a time for giving!

One Christmas Eve in Melbourne, Australia, radio announcer Norman Banks caught the strains of a carol coming through an open window. Stopping, he saw an elderly woman holding a candle and singing joyously. He spoke to her and learned that she was celebrating what she knew to be her last Christmas. Inspired by the faith of the dying woman, Banks invited his listeners to join him in caroling at the city riverfront park. The candlelight singing has become a Melbourne tradition, with some 300,000 people joining in each year.

Christmas: a time for remembering, throughout the world!

The church flooded with candlelight, each candle lit by the hands of a child...each child's face serious and solemn, but the twinkle in the eye

brighter than the candle, telling of the delight and joy inside. Traditional Christmas hymns filling the church with voices rich in enthusiasm and pleasure, passing the true Christmas message to the world, Joy to the World, and Peace on Earth.

Christmas: a time of faith!

Gift suggestions from a philosopher: This Christmas, give time, remember an old friend, share a meal with someone lonely. Give hope; raise the spirits of a child. Give peace, forgive an enemy, set differences aside. Give of yourself: perform acts of kindness.

Give love, and Christmas will go on throughout the year.

The delights and stories of this season are as varied as the people who celebrate. To some a time of faith, of love and hope. To others a time of reflection, of renewal, of tradition. And to others, especially the children, a time of wonder and of joy. A time when all that we dream can begin. A time tinged with a touch of sadness for time that has gone; a time when tragedies and cruelties of the past can be remembered and forgiven, to allow new beginnings with renewed vigour and faith.

Christmas: a time of family ... the smaller family in the home, and the larger Family of Man.

Merry Christmas, Yukoners, each and every one!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1988

JANUARY 13, 1988 - RAMBLING

In 1984, trees were being felled throughout the world at a rate of 50 acres per minute. In the three decades before 1984, we had already cut over one-half of the earth's forests. The estimated loss as a result, through erosion, is 75 billion tons of topsoil. We can be certain it has accelerated since 1984. And that assumption is based upon this factual information about our immediate southern neighbours who are big in the forestry world. In B.C, 120,000 acres of mature forest is cut every year, and 50,000 are replanted, not all successfully. It is granted too that forest regeneration occurs naturally on some of the remainder of the forested land, but the total area of land not satisfactorily restocked is over 1,200,000 hectares, and increasing annually. About this an objective observer said: "The economic consequences of overexploitation are disturbing. As our supply of valuable mature wood diminishes, so also does our advantage in the international marketplace, which is full of lower-grade second-growth forest products supplied by far more efficient harvesting and processing technologies from other countries. Following the pattern of the fur trade and the gold rush, forestry has become B.C.'s latest sunset industry.

"Nobody is prepared to take responsibility for this loss, although there are plenty of theories about who should. The public, having seen their old-growth forests disappear, maintain that if an industry gains by removal of a public resource, then surely some of the profits must be returned to the land which provided them. The forest industry, which has beguiled the public for decades with deceptive promises of "sustained yield harvesting" and "multiple resource use", now say it is the public's fault for failing to recognize the trend and demanding that it be corrected by elected officials. The government, finding it politically undesirable to even acknowledge what lies around the corner, has diverted the pathetically small amount of reserves earmarked for silvicultural programs

into dam-building, coal mining, and high tech and anything else that offers to replace the withering forest cash crop.”

It’s fascinating how the mind works. Reading that, I remembered a discussion many years ago; it happened to be in City Council discussing new by-laws, and someone very wisely suggested that you cannot legislate attitudes.

Attitude!

Attitudes that support the various whims and wishes that individuals and groups have; attitudes that apparently grow and are nurtured without full regard for the implications to others, or ignoring the concerns and responsibilities to others. That major problem in a single industry south of us is so much the responsibility of the attitudes of the past; the attitude that there is an unlimited supply of everything forever, that we are too small and too few to affect it; and suppose there isn’t (not that anyone in decision-making roles seemed to consider it), we’ll just get what we can and go, for we are all-important. Eventually someone has to pay the bill; this time it’s all British Columbians, and all Canadians; and of generations that were not even born when those greedy ones were reaping their harvests. And it all seems so simple: had they adopted the attitude “cut one, plant one”, there wouldn’t be much of a problem today.

Attitude. It was apparently one or more individuals with an attitude like that who, one moment, decided they did not, for some reason, like the signs on our highway right of way. Signs that met all the standards we, as a people, had agreed upon through our legislative and government processes. Signs that had been carefully designed and prepared and mounted. Signs that tell visitors about the services we have available; signs that help, in large or small measure, to ensure a few more - or a lot more - customers, and in so doing maybe keep a few more people employed. Granted, they did block the view of a few jackpines, and really we don’t see enough of those rare trees in our territory, no do we? I contend the attitudes are the same ... only the scale is different.

Now I know at first this comparison seems like a quantum leap, from an industry in trouble because of indiscriminate cutting, to a few signs in a small northern city. I am reminded of the story of a man and woman who

knew one another well having a discussion at a dinner one evening. For purposes of illustration, in their discussion they had reached a point where an example was needed. He asked her, "Well now then, would you sleep with me for \$1,000?" She hesitated, considered and finally said, "Yes!" He then asked, "Would you sleep with me for \$10?" She replied, "I certainly would not, what kind of woman do you think I am?" He calmly responded, "We have already established that madame, all we are doing now is haggling over price."



LAST COLUMN OF 1988

DECEMBER 21, 1988 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

Dear Santa:

I've been thinking about you a lot this Christmas, remembering a long time ago when I was one of your most avid supporters. I can recall my total disbelief when my best friend denied your existence. It was during the Depression. My father had a steady job, so we had more than many, but I could not believe my father and mother could afford the new skates that you brought, and the other gifts you left my brothers and sisters that Christmas. I defended your existence like a zealot. In the months to follow, I finally did succumb to the persuasions of my peers, during that teenage period where we figure we have the knowledge and wisdom of the world in our heads - or at least, we *think* we do. Then one day, we find that we have opened the door of knowledge and life, and really have only been bolstering our uncertainty with bravado. Anyway, am I ever glad I believed so vehemently, for now I think I know why.

We needed your myth then. They were the Depression years and there was not much to cling to, but you were there. Your generosity was not as bountiful as it is today, yet it had tremendous strength and power

for those parents who came forth with but one gift and did more than they realized. They did not allow hope to die. Oh, that was so necessary, especially then. I think it was the saving of many.

You are the spirit of this very special time of the year, a time of traditions: national, community and especially family traditions. There are those who still do not believe in you; there are those who delight in trying to destroy belief in you; and there are those like me who still believe. For those of us in the last category, you have become part of our mythology, and we accept you and your symbols for what you mean to our children. We who have left that realm can return to it momentarily through them, and with them.

There are those who take your image and bring that wonder to bloom in every town and village in the land. The celebrations that nurture your image are as diverse as the people who gather, and your image is there, always giving. And that is, of course, the essence that I have finally seen. In the Depression years, giving was difficult for there was little to give; even the gift of self came hard. Yet it was there, and I think it grew, and you sustained it when the soil did not sustain the people, and their spirits were low. Now it is so easy to give materially, as we all have so much. Yet somehow a dimension seems to be missing.

Then they came. They came in rich colours: deep blue, almost black; then brilliant, translucent red; another a mixture of oranges and greens; one is deep maroon, matched by another in dark, variegated pink, finally a layer of smoked orange, reminiscent of autumn colours. The smells were even more enticing - pungent, penetrating, mouth-watering, and the taste ... oh, so heavenly! That is but the beginning of a description of our first Christmas present of 1988. A visit with old and dear friends brought these unexpected treasures: jars of hand-picked and home-made Yukon blueberry and cranberry jam, garden relish, beet pickle, and beet relish, and in their midst, a smoked salmon. Gifts as rich as they come, for they hold the unseen touch of loving hands. They tell of the time and the personal care, personal time and personal toil, all enriched with the heart and the generosity of friendship — like gifts from the past Santa.

That is the dimension that I find is often missing. Or are they simply the musings of an old man? I suppose it is a bit of both.

What I've been leading up to, Santa, is that mythology teaches, if we let it. You are part of our modern mythology. You epitomize giving! You are a symbol of joy! And it all began with the birth of that one man, Jesus Christ. He who gave more than any.

A tip of the hat, and a special Christmas Greeting, to one and all.

And a hearty thanks to all those people who have commented from time to time throughout the year about this column and its contents. Each observation, be it praise or criticism, is accepted by this writer as one of those gifts, for it helps life the spirit or provide insight into thought processes that may need more honing.

And another tip of the hat, high and hearty, to all who will work Christmas Day to ensure that those of us who do not work have a safe, secure holiday.

FIRST COLUMN OF 1989

JANUARY 4, 1989 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

1989. Another blank slate on which the world will write its stories. Not many will approach the year with the same trepidation with which some writers face a blank page of paper. Oh! That is an awesome time when the mind goes as blank as the paper, the pen hangs suspended in clutching fingers, or the fingers rest on the keyboard like a wet Kleenex. But the world never experiences that sensation, for it goes on its merry way hurtling through space, twirling us around and around so delicately that we are never aware of it. The world makes its mark on the days of history with even-handed calm, be it the birth of a child or a devastating earthquake. We, who are part of the blank page, see it not as history but as daily life, though there is no difference. We pause, briefly, on the threshold of a year every December 31st, then plunge ahead, just as the world plunges on into space, for what else can one do?

We lunched earlier this week with some former Yukoners 'home' for a visit. Like many before them, both expressed a desire to return. A story as old as the Yukon perhaps. Nonetheless, it is a story we have all heard before. Yet each time it is new, for the reasons hold slight variations that we may not have considered before. It's the space, the freedom, the beauty, the fishing, the hunting, the air, the brilliant light of summer, the snows of winter, and it is the people.

A long time ago I came across this remark in my readings: "Meaningful relationships can be had in even brief encounters." In the Yukon land, and in Yukon people, I have found the truth of that, but I have also found it reaches out into the vastness and the beauty of this Canada of ours.

Reflecting upon 1988, brief encounters come to mind, none that seemed significant at the time, yet here they are still in my mind, and my heart, months after the moment.

It was the kind of day our summers used to be, filled with brilliant sun, masked playfully and occasionally by lazily drifting, white puffs of cumulus clouds. Tatchun Creek caught the brilliance, splashing the light around as freely as its waters, while the willow and poplars stood serenely, motionless alongside adding abundant leaf shadows, at the whim of those sheep-like clouds. The colour of the water was lost in a kaleidoscope of light and dark. The sounds? Ah, the sounds ... the melody of the water, the occasional hum of bees, bird calls and, sometimes briefly, but for the water, silence. Yukon peace. Suddenly, silently, a flash of red in the water, distorted by the kaleidoscope of light and shadow — a drifting piece of cloth being waved by the stream? Then a second, 'neath a flat segment of water, and the salmon was with you. They sat, almost motionless in the rushing water, one, two, many; resting, we were told. Perhaps. Perhaps they knew; and in that knowledge, chose to hold momentarily onto the moment. One of their final moments.

The Christmas present returned that memory. A brass frame held a small photograph of my grandson kneeling in front of his mother's hands, eyes fixed upon a flower in his own tiny hand. Beside the photograph was typed a quotation from Albert Einstein: "The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms — this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness."

It was gray on the shores of Georgian Bay. The water, the sky, almost everything was gray. Even the cold wind felt gray. Her house was but a few footsteps from the vast, flat, gray waters. She is 97 and frail in body, yet incredibly strong in spirit.

"Let's go to Owen Sound. I want to see Barbara's house and take you to Arby's for lunch!"

It was Pearl's birthday. "Shall we take a pillow in the car?" "What for? I'm not going to sleep and miss something!"

Off we went. She had never been to Arby's where one of her younger friends worked. It was delightful; it was commonplace, and it was memorable. Maud is her name. She's from Ireland.

Another brief encounter. Perhaps the last with Maud.

Endings! — Of the year and lives. Or are they beginnings? In endings are there not beginnings? Beginnings of the transfusion of the spirit, the vitality, the vibrancy, the love of life? I choose to think so, for that was Maud's gift to me from that brief encounter. What better gift could one ask for?



LAST COLUMN OF 1989

DECEMBER 20, 1989 - RAMBLING

'Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat,
Please put a penny in the old man's hat;
If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do,
If you haven't got a ha'penny, God bless you!'

Beggar's rhyme - anonymous

The day had been a day like any other day. It did not fit into the memorable category at all. The sky was gray. The streets were gray. The whole day was gray. Even the wind chimes were silent. The thought came, boy a brief flash of sun would sure help. Then it was dark. It had been just a dull, gray day. Then someone at the door, a smiling face, a visit, a sharing of food and talk, and hot tea, then a kind word about the food. The day was gray no more, it was a good day! Kindness!

"We never know what ripples of healing we set in motion by simply smiling on one another."

~ Henry Drummond

The work had gone well this day. A touch better than the usual, and really they are all pretty good. No complaints at all, so why is this one special? You know, it was Bill's call first thing this morning. He was pleased with the job we had done for him and called to compliment us. Thoughtful!

I shook hands with an old friend yesterday, and then with a new friend. How good it was!

Christmas and an ancient blessing, and I began to imagine a light that is everywhere; a light that reaches into the deepest recesses of our soul. A light that is warm, soft, peaceful; a light that heals wherever it touches, yet so sensitive that it diminishes each time even the tiniest of windows is closed.

Could that light symbolize the spirit of Christmas? Those tiny windows, each kindness, done, or those left undone? The neglected touch; the kind word suppressed; the smile not given; the word of encouragement held back in pride; the helping hand left in a pocket; all of the simple gestures of kindness and love that, we are told time and time again, are in truth the true spirit of Christ and Christmas. Is there not a possibility that these gestures, tiny though they may seem, carry immense power? Are they not like the chisel in the hand of the sculptor, softening an edge here, deepening the meaning there, shaping, always shaping. Each one a gift, no matter when given. Gifts of little cost, yet that carry much; gifts that may be greater than the giver may know, or imagine. The spirit of Christmas, I wonder, are those the ways you carry it through the year?

“To you a Merry Christmastide, a brightly shining star,
No end of greetings from your friends at home, or friends afar;
A lot of fun, good fellowship be yours on Christmas Day —
And if you know a lonely soul, please give some joy away.”

~ The Friendship Book 1965

“I sometimes think we expect too much of Christmas Day. We try to crowd into it the long arrears of kindness and humanity of the whole year. As for me, I like to take my Christmas a little at a time, all through the year. And thus I drift along into the holidays - let them overtake me unexpectedly - waking up some fine morning and suddenly saying to myself: “Why, this is Christmas Day!”

~ David Grayson

To each, this Ancient Blessing:

May the blessed light be on you, light without and light within. May the blessed sunlight shine of you and warm your heart until it glows like a great fire, so that a stranger may come and warm himself at it, and also a friend.

May God always bless you, love you, and keep you.

Be they old words, or new words, Christmas words, the Christmas story, they lose not in time or in the telling. A good Christmas to all. Take care, drive carefully and a tip of the goldpanner’s hat to you all.

FIRST COLUMN OF 1990

JANUARY 3, 1990 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R !

There are at least a thousand oracles out there reflecting upon the last decade and predicting the next. Fascinating though it be, it seems endless.

A reflection of the past decade is unquestionably useful, but let us remember not to let yesterday use up too much of today. The predictions for the '90s leave one to wonder about the question of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Anyway, I have neither the desire, nor the ability, to join them. I turn instead to the wisdom of the centuries to begin the year.

They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother 'Be of good courage'. ~ Isaiah XLI

Today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every morrow a vision of hope.

~ From the Sanskrit of Kali-Das

Friends, books, a cheerful heart, and conscience clear
Are the most choice companions we have here.

~ William Mather 1681

If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair.

~ Samuel Johnson 1755

Happiness is the only good;
The time to be happy is now,
The place to be happy is here,
The way to be happy is make others so.

~ R.G. Ingersoll

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

Ah, the ways we find to celebrate. Some started the year quietly, together and alone; feasting with friends; walking, talking, sharing, meeting, greeting. And then there were those who overindulged.

Everyone has a word for it:

French: Gueule be bois (woody mouth)

German: Katzenjammer (wailing of cats)

Italian: Stonato (out of tune)

Spanish: Resaca (surf of sea)

Swedish: Hont i haret (pain in the roots of the hair)

Norwegian: Jeg har timmerman (workmen in my head)

English: Hangover (he who hoots with the owls by night cannot soar with the eagles by day)

And not a bit of sympathy to be found - anywhere! 'I don't know why your head should hurt this morning; you certainly didn't use it last night!'

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

From an Old Timer's scrap book ...

The most lovable quality any human being possesses is tolerance.

Tolerance is the vision that enables us to see the thing from another person's point of view. It is the generosity that concedes to others the right to their own opinion and peculiarities. It is the bigness that enables us to let people be happy in their own way instead of our way.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A tip of the hat to families. To yours, to your friends, to your friends' friends, and to all families around this shrinking world of ours that we do not know, and never shall. This we do know: there is only this one earth and we share its common future with every other family in the world. I leave you with words of Clare Booth Luce: "Woman knows what man has long forgotten, that the ultimate economic and spiritual unit of any civilization is still the family." May her words carry truth for this decade, and those to follow.



LAST COLUMN OF 1990

DECEMBER 19, 1990 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

Just some Christmas thoughts:

'I have always thought of Christmas as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women seem, by one consent, to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that Christmas has done me good, and will do me good, and I say - "God Bless It!"'

Charles Dickens wrote that. Marvellous, isn't it?

All of our gifts last Christmas came, we know, with fine sentiments. One was "The Beverly Hills Confection Collection". With flourish and fanfare, "Our goal was to create a unique line of original, quality

confections, specially gift-packaged to reflect the world-wide image of Beverly Hills — elegance, style, innovation and exclusivity.” Oh, my!

They were small, meatball-shaped cookies, not all that classy in appearance, each expensively wrapped, and described. For example: “Wilshire” - pure milk chocolate over a scrumptious cookie rich filling; “Rodeo” - fine white chocolate coats this special cookie-rich filling, and on, and on. I can’t for the life of me remember even a hint of that “cookie-rich filling.” In fact, if I hadn’t written this last Christmas, I’d have not even remembered them.

Another gift was labelled simply “With love”. Homemade jams, smoked salmon, and pickles. No hype, no fancy wrap, but oh the memory of them still lingers. My mouth waters, and warm thoughts gather about friends who gave us a touch of their hands, their hearts, and of our land. Gifts unequalled by all but the gift of self.

Then - a handmade afghan. A work of art; a giver of warmth on a winter evening; a story of peaceful times. Along with its own warmth, came warmth from the heart of the gift-giver.

No fanfare, no hype, though their richness diminishes the Beverly Hills Collection to the place where memory fades. These gifts held the gift of time that is always found in home-cooked, handmade gifts - and that other, oh so essential ingredient of life - love!

Comparing these gifts tells me about this society of ours. It reminds me of an almost forgotten dimension of gift-giving. Methinks perhaps we may have lost something along the way?

“Chop your own wood and it will warm you twice.” (American proverb)

On his 21st birthday, which was the week before Christmas, Charles Wesley wrote a hymn - “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Later, a great man said that he would have rather written it than have the power and fame of all the kings that ever ruled upon the earth!

“Christmas Day. The birthday of the Prince of Peace ... and the world is anxious and divided and all of us fear what tomorrow may bring.

Remember the old, old story that when He was born, He first opened His eyes in a stable, because there was no room at the inn?

Is there any room for Him today in the wide world? For He is the spirit of love and humility and service and who cares twopence for these things, and where can we find them?

Friend, if there is no room for the Prince of Peace in high places, will you not welcome Him to your heart, that He may find lodging there?"
(Francis Gay's 1958 Friendship Book)

May the dreams of Christmas past, and the hopes of Christmas future, be yours this Christmas Day, and all your days to come.

FIRST COLUMN OF 1991

JANUARY 4, 1991 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

Some tho'ts to begin the year:

A gift from Christmas 1989 came to an end on the 31st of December. A daily calendar with a quotation for each day. The 31 Dec. quotation came from John Wayne - "Tomorrow is the most important thing in life. It comes to us at midnight very clean. It's perfect when it arrives, and it puts itself in our hands and it hopes we've learnt something from yesterday."

May your next 365 tomorrows be as full of value and promise as that.

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

From the Friendship Books comes the simple story about a millionaire who lost every dollar he had in the 1929 Wall Street crash.

The shock was too much for him, so he decided to make an end of things. He went to the beach to drown himself in the sea.

At the water's edge, he paused; looked around for the last time. As he looked down he noticed, then picked up a tiny, beautiful shell - so fragile that the least pressure from his finger would have shattered it.

"How," he wondered, "has this delicate wonder survived rough seas, storms, the power of the sea? The sea can easily wreck giant ships - yet this light, delicate shell remains unharmed. How?"

Then the light dawned on his agonized mind. Of course, the ships fight the storm, but the shell rocks with the giant, powerful waves, offering no resistance.

With this thought in mind, the ruined millionaire turned his back on the waves, to begin a new life. Not a dramatic strong fight against heavy

odds, but cooperation with life; not the selfish way of living that had been his practice.

Today, the story tells us, he has won his way back to a happiness he never knew before.

P.S. - The shell he found is known as an angel's wing. May you find an 'angel's wing' if ever there is need.

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

There was standing room only. The stage was small; the actors and actresses gaily and brightly dressed. They were also the set. They were all that was on stage.

Their eyes sparkled, nay, they shone. Oh they were nervous, shy, some first-time jitters, a bit awkward at times, a bit frightened, through at others, absolutely brilliant. They tried looking through the spotlight often, seeking a familiar face - but their eyes sparkled, and boy, they were good.

It was the story of a talking snowman - the only Christmas concert we could get to - and as always, it was truly a highlight of the year. Here we remember innocence. Here we see wonder. Here is pure, untouched talent. Here we are hope. Here is pure delight. Here is our future!

Oh, I do hope some of them get to carry that light in their eyes into their own families, and pass it on to their children. That is surely one of the true lights of the world.

Those who put out that light surely commit the gravest sin of all.

May your year be filled with that kind of light and all of the delights that it carries.

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

What a marvellous way to start a new year. A very special *Tip of the Hat* to Yukon's newest member of the Order of Canada - Deaconess Effie Linklater from Old Crow, with another *Tip of the Hat* to Sean Sheardown

and Ralf Sembsmoen, the recipients of the Commissioner's Award - 1 January 1991.

The heartiest congratulations!

HAPPY NEW YEAR



LAST COLUMN OF 1991

DECEMBER 18, 1991 - RAMBLING

Dear Santa,

Watched a movie last night - you were involved, though never seen, well except for your helpers. Anyway, one line of conversation struck home - 'as soon as you have a child of your own, you know that you are not the most important person in the world'. But then, you already knew that; sometimes we forget.

Children and you! A combination. That is surely one of the season's best gifts; a gift of pure joy and delight. They keep the faith - and we help them. We help keep the faith for many reasons I'm sure, but one being that we may join, even momentarily, their sense of wonder and joy. Such rekindling is good for the soul. Sometimes I think we need it more than they. Especially this decade.

I wonder, could you bring, for all of us, a gift to help us rekindle the fresh, child-like joy we once held in this land of ours? It could be the vision to see a future Canada whole and complete, as it is - though barely - this Christmas; not fragmented and torn, as is the way of many nations of our world today.

Our leaders especially need this gift of vision. They approach one another to talk about this land, with their hands and their hearts in the pockets, when instead they should have their hands outstretched, and their hearts on their sleeve, welcoming one another, showing one another and us the joy they have in this land.

A gift of humility, spiced with a sprinkling of unselfishness, would be a nice touch of leavening for them too.

Finally, from a gift of a friend one day a couple of years ago. A book published in 1923 - Elbert Hubbard's Scrap Book. I opened it at random to see if those pages would provide ideas for more gift suggestions, and there they were ... something to go with the Twelve Days of Christmas:

Twelve Things to Remember:

1. The value of time.
2. The success of perseverance.
3. The pleasure of working.
4. The dignity of simplicity.
5. The worth of character.
6. The power of kindness.
7. The influence of example.
8. The obligation of duty.
9. The wisdom of economy.
10. The virtue of patience.
11. The improvement of talent.
12. The joy of originating.

~ Marshall Field.

To that I would add the absolute importance and value of the family. That would complete my list, Santa.

I know that you possess all of these qualities, and those mentioned earlier. Do you suppose you could spend a little extra time in Ottawa, and other capitals of this land and see if some of it would rub off? It would be a big help to us all.

Well, OK, here's one more gift idea:

Friendship is the gift
that goes on giving
and is a gift
to both the person given to
and to the giver as well.
But to really make it work
it isn't enough to
give to another person,
you have also
to let them give to you.

~ Merle Shain.

May your home be too small to hold all your friends this Christmas season, and in the year to come.

FIRST COLUMN OF 1992

JANUARY 8, 1992 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

Well sir, I'm ready for the New Year! Last night I went downstairs and sharpened my jack knife. A prairie kid is not properly dressed unless there's a sharp jack knife in his pocket, and he daren't start the year with a dull blade. That's it! No resolutions to break. Well, okay, one: to keep my jack knife sharp. But that's really a given, so I leave the rest to you.

It's really a nice feeling, to move into a New Year unencumbered by a burden of resolve.

Speaking of nice feelings, our last issue, and some quiet visits with friends, gave me enough for a smooth and positive lift into '92.

Take these words, for example: "You made the effort to get to know and understand me, and I in turn learned to reach out and to trust." You'll find them in our last issue in an open letter to Mrs. Olive Hunnie, along with a lot more, in a very moving letter. Couldn't help but wonder what changes could be wrought in our society if we all made gestures such as that - regularly?

A gentle reminder of what we have in this Yukon of ours came on the same page from Roxanne Livingstone: "Notice the inner calm after a weekend spent camping, or even a twenty-minute walk through a greenbelt." It's good for the kids and it's good for us, and all we have to do is care.

Then there's Rodney. His column in the same issue covered just about all the wishing any New Year needs. Truly inspirational. If we could bring just one of those from wish to fact, we'd be moving one big step in the right direction.

Three positive people making positive statements in a single issue in a small community newspaper in northern Canada. Really refreshing in a world so taken with the negative. And a darn good way to move into another year.

I'm still convinced that over ninety percent of the people out there live positive, uplifting, helpful lives. Maybe we need to find more of them, and listen to them, in '92?

A hearty tip of the hat, and a brand new 1992 thank you to all three writers.

P.S. - I've clipped and kept your words. One or more times this year I'll find them, re-read them, and feel good all over again. A gift, that I'll bet you didn't know you had given.

"Do you know what the largest room in the world is?" a child asked his father.

"No I don't." replied the father.

"The room for improvement!"

One room, for everybody.

I share with you a favourite poem about a favourite subject, communication. Another room for everybody.

You
are swathed
in layers of silly chains
which I may not cut
or burn or wrench away from you
Because, you love them.
To reach you
I must first say
"How beautiful are your chains today."
Then I must kneel
and tap my message on your chains
and hope
that you will hear. ~ Joy Kagawa



LAST COLUMN IN 1992

DECEMBER 23, 1992 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

MERRY CHRISTMAS

“It came upon a midnight clear,
That glorious story of old ...”

Joseph and Mary, Christ, a star, and three wise men from afar ... a tale told time and time again; a tale that is new at each telling.

Of the Babe we know much; of the wise men we know little. We are told they were wise, and that they came to pay homage to the Babe, which tells us of their wisdom.

We know not how they attained their wisdom, though we surely yearn for their like in this “modern” world.

If I could give but one gift this Christmas, it would be that story of old, wrapped in the wisdom to understand it fully, and the common sense to live by its tenets.

Some have! Some will! Some will fail!

And what we do with each tells of the wisdom of our society.

SEASONS GREETINGS

Dad had just gone to bed, when from the next room, a small voice called, “Hello?”

“What do you want?”

Silence for a while, then, “I don’t want anything, ‘cept i just want to know somebody is there.”

GIVE THE GIFT OF SELF

Could we but keep our childhood heart,
Innocent and pure;
Could we but love with childhood's love,
Uncritical and sure;
Could we but watch with wonder the sun's new rise,
And see the world around us through our child's clear eyes.
~ David Hope

GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME

They took an old friend from the Seniors home for a drive in the country. At the friend's farm, they sat at a table groaning beneath cakes and pastries.

All began enjoying the food and tea, until someone noticed Granny sitting with her plate empty, almost in tears.

"Are you unwell?" asked the hostess.

Granny shook her head before answering, "No," she said. "It's just that there are so many things to choose from. Would you pass me something you think I'd like?"

There are still those who have so little to choose from that they have forgotten HOW to choose.

GIVE THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER

At eight years old, Robert was chosen to play Joseph in the school nativity play. Alas, his behaviour wasn't all it should be, so he was demoted to play the innkeeper, a much smaller role. His rival was given the role of Joseph. Robert wasn't pleased, and secretly planned revenge.

Came the night of the performance; all was going well. Joseph and Mary came out of the desert and knocked at the door of the inn. "Have you any room in the inn?" asked Joseph.

"Sure," said Robert. "Come right in!"

The first grade class was having a wonderful time playing with a stray cat that one student had brought into the classroom. Soon a little boy asked if it was a boy or girl cat. The teacher, not wanting to get into that subject, said she couldn't tell. "I know how we can find out," said the little boy.

"All right," said the teacher, cautiously.

"We can vote!" said the little boy.

Forget injuries; never forget kindness.

H A P P Y N E W Y E A R !

FIRST COLUMN OF 1993

JANUARY 6, 1993 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

A QUICK, IRREVERENT LOOK AT CANADA '92

1992 — a year full of blarney, baloney 'n' bluster
And all of the threats our leaders could muster
They hollered, 'n' screamed, 'n' tore up paper,
This year of the Great Canadian Constitutional Caper.
We suggest you listen, but, if it's not quite clear,
We'll mark some more X's in the coming year,
'Til someone we find, someone we know would
Know the true meaning of "the public good".

In case you missed it: "No is in; Yes is out."
That is, if you want any Canadian clout.
Set aside big egos, take up the people's cause,
We no longer believe in your political Santa Claus.
This land is ours, we have a national dream,
We're sick and tired of party, establishment schemes.
Make it a free land from sea to northern sea;
Compete we will, but government, "Let us be!"

They're still there, flopping around on the national stage,
All trying to tap into the people's rage,
Mulroney - the myth peddler supreme,
Chretien dreaming prime ministerial dreams.
A Woman's Place, Audrey, showing them it just ain't so,
All of them seeking that one single place to go.
Forget not they all threatened us with extinction,
But CANADA'S STILL THERE, our land of distinction.

Casualties there are, you know the referendum got 'em,
Airplane seat patterns welded to their bottoms.
And those heroes so many, so bold, and unsung,
With constitutional stretch marks on their tongues.
Golly, shucks, gee whiz, not to worry
Time's on our side, unemployment, the economy - hurry!
Besides, there'll be more of us, all is bound to go well
Madonna invented "Sex" and found that it'll sell.

The Tale of a Bottle of Aspirins

Robert Hill was the boy's name. He'd just read about Dr. Albert Schweitzer's work in Africa. He was so impressed, he told his father he was going to save some of his allowance that week and buy a bottle of aspirins to send to the doctor's jungle hospital.

His father, a Sergeant in the U.S. Air Force in Italy, jokingly said, "Why don't you see the Allied Commander and get him to fly them out for you?"

That's just what Robert did! The Commander, touched by the boy's enthusiasm, told others about it. The news spread and offers of money and supplies for Dr. Schweitzer's hospital poured in.

In the end, as well as Robert's aspirins, four and a half tons of supplies were flown in to Schweitzer, with Robert up front.

"I would never have believed a child could do so much," observed Schweitzer.

~ The Friendship Book of Francis Gay 1962

So if someone says in 1993 that it cannot be done, think of Robert Hill's bottle of aspirins and give it a whirl.

"Let us be of good cheer (throughout the year), remembering that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never come."

~ James Russell Lowell



LAST COLUMN OF 1993

DECEMBER 22, 1993 - RAMBLING BY PUBLISHER DOUG BELL

“If instead of a gem or even a flower, we could cast the gift of a lovely thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give.”

~ George MacDonald

May you have good dreams

Enjoy peace on earth

A 12-year-old girl wrote this in her diary one day. “Had good dreams, and woke now and then to think, and watch the moon. I had a pleasant time with my mind, for it was happy.”

One Boxing Day, four-year-old Trevor picked up Granddad’s camera he’d gotten for Christmas, and was trying to take a picture with it. Granddad, not surprisingly, took it from Trevor and put it in a safe place.

Trevor, a bit annoyed, said, “But Granddad, you must learn to share your toys!”

Spread good will

To all people

From the resolution pile came this one. Elderly Sarah’s was, “I shall resolve never to resent growing old - so many folk are denied the privilege.”

Everywhere on earth

The more you give the more you get,
The more you laugh, the less you fret;
The more you do unselfishly,
The more you live abundantly;
The more of everything you share,
The more you'll always have to spare;
The more you love the more you'll find
That life is good, and friends are kind;
For only what we give away
Enriches us from day to day.

A poor man was in the company of a millionaire who devoted himself to getting richer and richer. The poor man said to him, "I am a richer man than you are."

"How do you figure that?" demanded the millionaire.

"Well, I have got as much money as I want — and you haven't!"

May you have enough

The teacher had asked her students to write about "Why I Like My Grandma". As so often happens, one gave adults food for thought.

"I like my grandma because she doesn't have a watch. When I ask her to tell me a story, she doesn't look at the time and say, "Well, just a short one."

"When we go for a walk, she doesn't say, "We'll have to hurry home for tea." When I go to see her at her house, she doesn't say, "I'm going out in five minutes." Time — a pretty neat gift it is.

Coal, salt, loonies

I'm told it's an old Scottish custom.

A few minutes before midnight, the last day of the year, the man of the house slips out. Then, as the clock is striking twelve, he knocks at the door and hands his wife a small parcel.

It holds a piece of coal, some salt, and an old sixpenny piece.

Not too romantic in itself, though the symbolism is rich.

A warm fireside, money to buy food and clothing, and salt to savor our food.

And good health in 1994!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1994

JANUARY 5, 1994 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL (note the conspicuous absence of the word "Publisher")

"Every first of January that we arrive at is an imaginary milestone on the turnpike track of human life, at once a resting place for thought and meditation, and a starting point for fresh exertion in the performance of our journey."

~ Charles Lamb, Jan. 1994

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centred.

Love them anyway!

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway!

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest person with the smallest ideas.

Think big anyway!

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway!

Although you give the world the best you have, you may still be kicked in the teeth.

Give your best anyway!

~ Bishop Abel Muzarewa to a group of African pastors,
January 12, 1994

It was such a little thing, really, and it was one of my wife's ideas. We had been lucky enough to buy a chicken. The lady of the house boiled it.

Then she said, "There's Mrs. Warcup in Brett Street - she lives alone, you remember, and it's hard making a hot meal for one these days. She's been ailing a long time. I'll take her half a jug of chicken broth."

So she did, and I went with her.

Well, Mrs. Warcup accepted the gift. She asked us in. She sat down. She smiled. She nearly wept. She said it was wonderfully kind of the lady of the house.

Then she got up and kissed her. Then she made a big fuss about it. Then she said that it wasn't so much the chicken broth, though she was glad to have it, but the fact that somebody had thought about her, and bothered to call.

Such a fuss Mrs. Warcup made of a very trifling bit of kindness!

Ah, but such a lesson there is in that tale from Francis Gay, in *The Friendship Book*, 1943 edition. I don't know when Mr. Gay began publishing these books, each one with the theme, A Thought A Day For -- whatever the year happens to be.

Some anecdotes such as Mrs. Warcup's, generously sprinkled with one- and two-line quotes from the Bible. Anyway, we have 37 of them now; 32 through the kindness of a friend, whose husband had collected them over the years.

When he died, she gave them to me saying, "I know, with your interests, that you'll use these." And I have. A sort of the 'lady of the house' gift, only it lasts a lot longer than chicken broth.

The other five have come from my wife as Christmas gifts the last five years. thought I would share a thought or two from this year's Christmas gift, and the earliest I have. Sort of a something old, something new bit to wish you well for 1994.

Why?

Well, I was determined that I should not begin the year, casting about on my favourite stories of the past year, and not the uppers, nor the downers, no resolutions, and not the 'another-day-another-dollar routine' either. All that will probably come. Ergo - friendship, and thoughts about the wonder of it.

We've been truly blessed with some good ones. I have you have too.

To friends, and to friendship!

**"But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end."**

~ Shakespeare



LAST COLUMN OF 1994

DECEMBER 22, 1994

“God doesn’t close doors. People do.”
We do, don’t we?

*We’re trapped it seems, in an impatient world.
We hustle, we bustle, we get twirled --
The social whirlwind; rush, rush, rush,
The smile muscles, often, lost in the crush.
The cheery hello, the wave of a hand,
Relegated perhaps to some far-off land;
Time for tea, shortbread, a reminiscence or two
Oh my goodness no, there’s so many things to do!
A question please, if you have time to sit,
What’s more important, a she, a he - or an IT?
And It can’t smile, reach out, give a warm hug,
Say delightful words that give heartstrings a tug.*

*Oh! The moment is gone - but it’s no big deal, right?
Tho’ - what if they’re not here tomorrow night?
You’ll have all that empty time you saved,
To join your memory of a gift of self you never gave. (db)*

Erich Fromm asks for the materialistic minds among us:
“If I am what I have, and if what I have is lost, who then am I?”

The professor was marking pre-Christmas examination papers. One paper read, “God only knows the answer to this question. Merry Christmas.”

The student received his paper back with the note, “God gets an A, you get an F. Happy New Year!”

“Give your children the gift of time - yours.” A grandparent suggested this recently. Time, a non-materialistic gift. He provoked thoughts of others.

Such as “childlike curiosity”. There isn’t one job - or one life - that cannot be enriched by mental flexibility, some say. (Those are scientific words for childlike curiosity.)

The ability to look with fresh minds at everything. To inject enthusiasm, intense interest, concentration, and joy into what we do.

A strange gift? Studies have found “childlike curiosity” is the most important element the scientific community seeks when hiring a creative scientist. It comes even before intelligence, and persistence.

Time, childlike curiosity, and a third, simplicity, marks a trio of gifts I’d like to be able to give. On simplicity, well, someone asked a religious man one day, what makes a saint - a saint?

“Because they were cheerful, when it was difficult to be cheerful; patient when it was difficult to be patient; they pushed on when they wanted to stand still; kept silent when they wanted to talk; were agreeable, when they wanted to be disagreeable, that was all - it was quite simple, and it always will be.”

Examining those three, we find mixed among them many others: kindness, sincerity, understanding, tolerance, integrity, and of course, love. Lots of love.

Maybe we could wrap it all up with a puppy. A puppy complete with instructions. Simple, easy-to-read instructions, by the way.

“This puppy does not reach full potential (and neither do you), until you get down on the floor and play with it, and your kids. Daily! Warranty void if instructions not followed.”

The wrappings to complete the gift are, perhaps, the real gifts - wonder, and mystery, and hope.

The wonder, and the mystery, of the human condition. The wonder and mystery of this incredible planet, and solar system, we share. The wonder and the mystery of the Christ child and His life.

We’ve come full circle. It is they of the childlike curiosity who seek, find and explain. But then there is hope. The hope that, as we lose mystery and wonder in our lives, we will continually rediscover them with, and in, our children.

A Merry Christmas to children; the hidden child in us all!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1995

JANUARY 4, 1995 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

*Our life is a book of chapters three,
The past, the present, and the yet to be.
The past is gone, it is stowed away,
The present we live with every day.
The future is not for us to see,
It's locked away, and God holds the key.*

From one of my Christmas gifts. *The Friendship Book* of Francis Gay, 1995. A tip of the hat to Mr. Gay for this one, and the previous 50 or more, delightful books!

A faded, battered newspaper clipping surfaced in a pile of papers last week. It's undated, though memory places it at least three decades back, maybe four.

Someone said the past should be a guidepost, not a hitching post. Not a bad thought, I guess, though it seems to me there are some practices, and some words, we could hitch to and it wouldn't hurt us one little bit. This might be one of them. Anyway, here's The Square:

"Square! Another of the good old words has gone the way of love, and modesty, and patriotism. Something to be snickered over, or outright laughed at.

"Why it used to be that there was no higher compliment you could pay a man than to call him a square shooter. The ad man's promise of a 'square deal' was once as binding as an oath on the Bible.

"But today, a square is a guy who volunteers when he doesn't have to. He's a guy who gets his kicks from trying to do a job better than anyone else. He's a boob who gets so lost in his work he has to be reminded to go home.

"A square is a guy who doesn't want to stop at the bar and get all juiced up because he prefers to go to his own home. He hasn't learned to cut corners or goof off. This nut we call square gets all choked up when he hears children singing O Canada. He even believes in God, and says so - in public.

"A square is likely to save some of his own money for a rainy day, rather than count on using yours.

“A square is a guy who reads Scripture when nobody’s watching, and prays when nobody is listening; a guy who thinks Christmas trees should be hand-picked. He wants to see his country first in everything.

“So will all you gooney birds answering this description please stand up, you misfits in this brave new age; you dismally disorganized, improperly apologetic ghosts of the past ... stand up! Stand up, and be counted. You squares who turn the wheels, and dig the fields, and move mountains and put rivets in our dreams; you squares who dignify the human race, you squares who hold the thankless world in place.”

There were no references on the clipping to suggest its origin.

When the little boy came home from Sunday school during the Christmas holidays, he asked his father, “Why does the Bible talk so much about the Children of Israel? Didn’t the grown-ups ever do anything?”

Worth thinking about ...

“We live in the world of privilege, the world of good fortune, the world of prosperity, and this world we are going to have to share with about three to four billion more people of whom at least two-thirds are going to have annual incomes of less than \$250 per year.

“The real issues facing the world are not matters of diplomacy, but daily bread, shelter, water, work ... the ability to live on this planet in such a way that we don’t destroy it.”

Barbara Ward, a British economist and environmentalist, made that observation in the 1960s. Some more of that ‘square’ stuff.

A politically correct New Year’s wish: I hope your holiday season was not differently interesting, and was not chemically inconvenienced.

This includes the chronically gifted, fruitarians, horizontally challenged, chronically deprived, hair disadvantaged, indefinitely idled, knowledge-based non-possessors, chronically challenged.

This greeting comes from a differentially hirsute, genetically oppressive human of the male gender.

Translation - Have a Happy New Year, everybody!



LAST COLUMN OF 1995
DECEMBER 20, 1995 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Christmas is for children, they say. Children are teachers too; often some of the best. Here are some Christmas lessons from children:

Jeannie was six.

She rushed in to Grandma's to take her a surprise.

"Look Grandma, I've brought you a present. I wrote the label myself and I wrapped the ornament in a bit of old newspaper. Mummy said it ought to have been wrapped in pretty coloured paper, but I forgot ... and told her you wouldn't mind because you'd know I put all my love inside!"

*If somewhere there's no Christmas tree,
Some child who'll be forgot,
Lord, guide my feet into that street,
And to that shadowed spot.
There, bid me give a star away
And comfort bring on Christmas Day.*

A group of youngsters was going about singing carols, and using the donations for pocket money. In the same neighbourhood, a choir from the local church was doing the same, raising money for a national children's charity.

Both came to our house. Awhile later, the children returned.

"We want to give the money we collected for those needy children too. Would you see that they get it, please?"

A mother was lecturing her small son, stressing that we are in this world to help others.

He considered this, then asked, "What are the others here for?"

Grandma had come to visit. She was enjoying putting Tommy and brother Peter to bed. While they were undressing, Grandma popped into the bathroom to clean up after them. They knelt to say their prayers and Tommy ended speaking in a loud voice, wanting a pair of roller blades for Christmas.

"Not so loud," said brother Peter, "God isn't deaf."

"I know that," whispered Tommy, "but Grandma is!"

In an old town, there was a legend that whoever brought the most precious gift to the altar of the church on Christmas Eve would hear the bells ring in the belfry.

Year after year, people brought gifts of gold, jewels, their own artwork and writings. The bells did not ring.

One Christmas Eve, there came into the church two children, a brother and a sister. She carried a piece of bread, he his favourite toy.

They knelt and placed their gifts on the altar - and the Christmas bells rang, and rang.

Wee Leah was six, and her Christmas was good with gifts of books, two dolls, a tea set and lots of other things.

On Boxing Day, she remembered a friend down the street who might not have done so well.

She took one of her dolls, a tea set and books.

“Please,” she said to Pat, “I’ve brought you these.”

Pat was delighted, opening the parcels and dancing about ... Leah was right, Santa had missed Pat’s house.

When she got home Leah whispered to her mom, “Mommy, it was lovely getting presents, but it was lovelier giving them!”

Did you reach out a hand?

Did you find him the road?

Or did you just let him go by with his load?

~ James W. Foley

A tip of the Christmas hat and a toast to - truckers one and all, without them on the road in all seasons and in all conditions, we’d not have food on the table, heat in our homes, fuel in our cars, mail from friends, jobs, and towns, and all the other stuff we need to enjoy our time in our Yukon. May it be a good one for you!

Her name was Sarah. Someone asked her her New Year’s resolution. “I shall resolve never to resent growing old; so many folk are denied the privilege.”

A Very Happy New Year to you all, and a tip o’ the Christmas hat to you, and to children everywhere!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1996

JANUARY 3, 1996 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

After the carols had faded
 And the gifts had been tucked away;
And the candles are stubs of formless wax
 And the snow is brownish gray -
After the holly withers,
 And the berries are rusted brown,
And the carpets sparkle with tinselled fir
 Where needles come tumbling down -
After the dream has ended,
 And the embers are burning low;
May the Christ, the Heart of Christmas,
 Still brighten the afterglow.
 ~ Alice Kennelly

A smiling face is the best way to avenge an insult.

About this time a century ago come August, fate was about to play us a card that changed this place forever - 1896, the Year of Gold. A time when the belief that lots of gold will solve everything, was paramount in the minds of all who came, and all who wished they might come.

And so it is, 1996, a century later, another Year of the Gold. This time we celebrate. Of course, now we know it is not necessarily gold itself that will make the year a good one. Some extra will surely help, yet consider if you will, a century later we revel in the statistics of the gold for a moment, and then tell endless stories of the people: who they were, what they did, and the legacy they left.

I wonder, is that not our way? Getting and gathering gold is necessary, yet memories of it seem to become merely statistical memories. The gold-plated memories, those we remember, speak about with pleasure, tell and re-tell others, are stories of family; of friendship; of delightful anecdotes of people helping people; people goofing off; people, people, people.

The year of the gold, the year of the rat, the year of - you know, instead of a year of things and animals, maybe we should try the year of people-helping-people. But then, that's what we're here for, isn't it?

Anyway, a *tip of the hat* to you all. May 1996 be the equal of your best year ever, and a wee bit better than that. May every day of the year bring you, as you journey on, something lovely to remember.

When you go up the hill of Prosperity,
May you never meet any friend coming down!

Here's to our Good Fortune - may we leave more when we die, and spend more while we live, than we inherited when we were born.

Let your life be counted by the milestones of achievement and not by the timepiece of years.

~ Clara Barton

Watch the face of the clock and you'll never be more than one of the hands.

Here's to the bright New Year
And a fond farewell to the old,
Here's to things that are yet to come
And the memories that we hold.

The world is filled with flowers,
The flowers are filled with dew,
The dew is filled with love,
For you and you and you.

Here's to those who'd love us
If we only cared.
Here's to those we'd love
If we only dared.

Though no one can go back and made a brand new start - anyone can start from now and make a brand new end!



LAST COLUMN OF 1996

DATED DECEMBER 11, 1996 IN SCRAPBOOK BUT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DECEMBER 18, 1996 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Some Christmas Potpourri - gift suggestions everyone can afford:

Wisdom comes in packages young and bold,
Here's one from a wee chap fourteen years old,
Obviously a young man who truly cared ...
"A good feeling gets even better when it's shared."

Now we go to the middle of the line,
A lady of 43, doing just fine,
She's crossed the forties threshold without any fuss:
"A strong code of ethics is as reliable as a compass."

Followed by one who's fifty-nine,
With wisdom granted in learning, and time:
"You can make a dime dishonestly by con
But it'll cost you a dollar later on."

Back now to nineteen twenty and three,
For all who've just been on a Christmas spending spree:
"It's good to have money and the things that money can buy
But it's good, too, to check up once in a while and try,
To make sure you haven't lost the things that money can't buy."
~ George Lorimer

Step back with me and meet someone who's gone,
Though her fame holds, she's someone who shone,
"It's the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.
They won't mind the chimney climb, and all that clatter."
~ Marlene Dietrich

And from one who did it with more than the usual verve,
"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know:
The only ones among you who will be really happy and show,
Are those who have sought and found how to serve."
~ Albert Schweitzer

We haven't yet heard from one who makes absolutely no fuss,
Everyone's friend and companion, good old Anonymous.
"Kind hearts are the garden, kind thoughts are the roots,
Kind words are the flowers, kind deeds are the fruits."

On we go to one of the saints,
Some good advice he does paint.
For this season where giving ranks:
"No duty is more urgent than of returning thanks."
~ St. Ambrose

Put them together, 'tis a medley worthy of a big *tip of the hat*,
To Christmas gifts from those who've laid out their wisdom mat,
For kindness, sharing, ethics, honesty, service, friends, and home.
May the Yukon hold your heart, where'ere you may roam.
Take care my friends, may your Christmas be merry,
And the year ahead, like a big bowlful of cherries.
Wherever you may go, whatever you say,
May all of your friends call you during the day.
And all of your guests come and go on time,
Not one looking to make a dishonest dime.
And though it may seem like a lot of nerve,
A wish - all public servants you meet are ready to serve.
As you can see, there's no end to these rhymes,
I'll cut it off now - gotta meet editor's deadlines!
It's been fun, it's been heavy, it's been a real gas,
Nowhere will you find people with such a variety of class.
A final observation, probably caused by my lack of curls,
Everybody has anatomy, but it still looks better on girls!

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT!

FIRST COLUMN OF 1997

JANUARY 8, 1997 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

“A house with daffodils in it is a house lit up, whether or not the sun be shining outside. Daffodils in a green bowl - and let it snow if it will.”

I guess A. A. Milne, who came out with that, favoured daffodils. Surely all flowers fit, especially those blossoming at Christmas.

There, midst the daffodils, came a knock on the door; and Christmas 96 became a Christmas to remember.

Gifts flowed about the house between mother and son, son and father, father and mother, brother and sister, sister and grandmother, and grandmother and grandfather, and they were all good.

And all were happy.

Yet the knock on the door became the best gift of all.

The phone rang first. She came away from the phone, “he’s coming to see us,” she said, with wonder in her voice.

And he came.

Eighteen hundred miles driving through the snow and the cold, he came.

He came and he was not alone. He brought his wife, his daughter, and his son; his family.

The knock on the door came at three a.m. for they had not stopped once the journey began.

The door opened, and there were hugs, and tears, and talk, and talk, and more talk. And more hugs, and holding, and beginning to meet again, to know one another - once more. The years began to melt away, twenty six years, one story at a time, until for a moment or two at least, the thought that maybe, just maybe, they’d never been apart.

But only for a moment.

Twenty-six years ago a son was born. Twenty-five years and ten months ago, a child was adopted; the separation had begun.

A separation of years; of decades. Decades of wondering, wishing, hoping, questioning, getting-on-with-life, wondering some more, thoughts and memories, emotions always tinged with sadness.

A separation heightened by political and bureaucratic decisions - legislation saying there’s no need they know, nor find each other; we know what’s best, our laws shall make it so.

Wisdom and common sense prevail, the legislative door is opened, the decade of search began. Maiden name, married name, wrong name, lost in the system, sorry about that, work, move, search some more, is he alright?, where is she? I wonder what he's like? I wonder what she's like; she wonders, he wonders. The years pass. It's 23 December 1996.

A Christmas gift one would be tempted to call the meeting, yet 'tis surely more, much, much more.

Is it not the gift of life, and love, and family?

Together at last!

Days filled with more tears, hugs, questions, answers, photographs, stories, laughter, tears, children playing, laughing, crying, men and women sipping, remembering, all sharing - a family, together, fulfilled.

Beautiful daffodils, Christmas plants with new blossoms, gayly decorated trees, presents, the whole of Christmas, all wonderful, yet not one can begin to compare to that knock on the door, and the joy that followed.

And it happened in the Yukon, in Whitehorse at Christmas.

A Christmas to remember!

The true meaning of Christmas came with that knock on the door.

May 1997 be as wonderful and as memorable for you and your family!

What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity.

~ Joseph Addison

There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society are created, strengthened and sustained.

~ Winston Churchill



LAST COLUMN OF 1997

DECEMBER 24, 1997 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

“As to Santa Claus:

So full of love doth he appear
For all our countless human legions,
I'm not at all surprised to hear
He lives up in the Heartic Regions!” ~
~ John Kendrick Bangs

“Christmas comes but once a year,
But for that once we all pay dear!”

Some 1908 Christmas philosophy, from Henry Waldorf Francis:

“Christmas is when you make your friends Christmas presents,
expecting to receive gifts twice as valuable from them;

And when you discover that you have more friends than it is temporary
convenient to have, and that race suicide is a myth;

And think how much better you might be than you are, and how much
better you are than you believe you were, and how much better, also, the
other fellow is than you gave him credit for being, and how much better
the world is than you thought it was;

And feel that there is something more of you than the purely physical
and material;

And that a Home and Family are worth having and the Heart is a reality;

And when a dollar seems to be less than a cent, and it's a greater
puzzle than ever how to make one dollar do the work of ten;

And when everything looks different and sweeter than it does at any
other time;

And when anyone who does not feel the Christmas Spirit must be
insane, or an iceberg;

And when you think how glorious it would be if we all felt and practiced
the Christmas Spirit 365 days a year instead of only one;

And can't give any good reason why we shouldn't

Except that desiring continuous happiness, we haven't sense enough
to take the only road to it.

Suspicious.

Nurse - "Here is a little brother for Christmas."

Johnny - "You sure? Looks like it's one someone got last year!"

A Purple Thought -

I never saw a Santa Claus,
I never hope to see one;
But from the way kids act to-day,
Dissatisfied with the grand array,
I'd rather see than be one.

(Joe Cone)

Omni-present:

Funny fellow, that Santa Claus; he leaves presents in our presence, and leaves without having made known his presence.

From the "Santa Claus Bugle" this concern:

"Society has been much excited by rumoured failure of the mistletoe crop, but the thoughtful act of the administration ordering that any sprig of green hung in the right place will carry with it all the usual mistletoe privileges has done much to allay the fears of the younger set that some of the cherished customs of the season would have to be abandoned."

Making for Husband-ry:

She stood beneath the mistletoe,
The maiden fair, like one enchanted;
Though naught of farming knew her beau,
He showed how kisses could be planted

A friend sent us a card with these words handwritten

May the spirit of Christmas which is Peace, the beauty of Christmas which is Hope, and the blessing of Christmas which is Joy, be yours in abundance, today & always.

We send the same wishes to you with a tip of the hat to Yukoners one and all!

Did you hear about the new doll, not the one everyone is rushing out to buy. No, this is the "JC Teflon Doll." They're certain it will be a best seller, but they haven't been able to pin it down long enough to make copies.

Christmas Heroes:

The parent who trundles a load of presents home at midnight, so that the children won't see them.

The host who carves the turkey of all the choice parts and then looks happy while he eats what is left.

The young man who starts for a bunch of girls under the mistletoe and kisses the one who is too old to run away.

The kid who won't ask Santa Claus for a bobsled and pair of skates because his mother is afraid he will break his neck or get drowned.

The newlywed who will pretend to like his wife's first mince pie and ask for another piece.

The fond parent who will work all night with an axe and saw to adapt the Christmas tree to the modern flat.

The married man who wears the neckties and smokes the cigars his wife gave him.

The good natured man who rigs himself up to impersonate Santa Claus at the children's entertainment.

The present-givers who stint themselves the rest of the year in order to keep up appearances.

A Christmas Acrostic:

Alluring associations.

Mistleonian merriment.

Essential enthusiasm.

Restless rejoicing,

Relished refreshment,

Yuletide yearnings,

Cheerful congeniality,

Holiday heartiness,

Remunerative regard,

Irresistible invitations,

Seasonable sentiment,

Thoughtful tenderness,

Monetary magnanimity,

Affectionate affability,

Successful surprises

FIRST COLUMN OF 1998

JANUARY 7, 1998 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

A V E R Y H A P P Y N E W Y E A R

A toast — Here's to them that are here; here's to them that are there; and here's to the rest of us everywhere!

**No man should fret in case his hair
Turns silver in his prime;
He's fortunate that some was there
To turn at turning time.**

It's resolution time again. Mine's the same as last year, and the year before that. Actually, it began in 1980.

My grandson drew me a picture, framed it too, so it still hangs on my office wall as a reminder all year, every year.

Garfield was his favourite at the time, so it depicts me, as Garfield, standing before a lectern, hand raised to the sky, pontificating, "This year I resolve to grow hair!"

Still brings me a warm feeling, and a smile.

Good gift, good kid! Good resolution, I guess. For someone else. It's all attitude anyway, right? I don't look upon myself as bald. I look upon the rest of you as being awfully bloody hairy.

So, if hair's your thing, may you have a hairy, Happy New Year!

Here's to good old whiskey — may those who use it never abuse it!

Fortune cookies, and/or comments overheard at cocktail parties:

... A man has never been shot doing dishes... You certainly surprised me with that gift. Did you break your piggy bank? ... The hot hors d'oeuvres were terrific. Too bad we didn't get here yesterday when they were hot! ... I love your dress. I shows how creative designers can be with very little fabric! ... I hate crowds, don't you? There's nobody at my place! ... I wouldn't say they've watered down the scotch, but I've gotten a better high on Pepsi-Cola! ... The only self-cleaning item in my house is the cat! ... Actually I can't stay at this cocktail party too long. My chauffeur is double-parked! ... I really shouldn't talk to a girl like you, with

your lovely face and great figure. After all, I'm a man with a bad heart! ... I've been around the world this year. Next year, I hope to go someplace new. ... So you're the girl in Apartment 6B. We've never met, but I've certainly enjoyed listening to your Neil Diamond records! ... They're perfect for each other; they're both in love with him! ... You should've been at our office Christmas party. Three girls were promoted to vice-president before the party was over! ... One of the fellows was telling me that he and Arnold Palmer have very similar golf games. They both use golf clubs! ... He has occasional flashes of silence that make his conversation perfectly delightful!

May the best day you've seen, be worse than the worst that is to come.

A little more kindness and a little less creed;
A little more money and a little less greed;
A little more smile and a little less frown;
A little less kicking a man when he's down;
A little more "we" and a little less "I";
A little more laugh and a little less cry;
A little more flowers on the pathway of life;
And a fewer on graves at the end of the strife.

The difference between the politician and the statesman is that the former worries about the next election, whereas the latter is concerned with the next generation. (P.E.T.)

May we be blessed with some true political statesmen in our future, along with some poor but honest, hard-working senators ... if there is such a beast.

Here's to the youth of Canada. They are the hope of yesterday; the joy of today; and the guarantee of a better tomorrow.

A tip of the hat to everybody, everywhere!



LAST COLUMN OF 1998

DECEMBER 23, 1998 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Enough of my words for '98. Here are some from Henry Van Dyke. All I can tell you about him is he's from back aways. His words speak well of him.

“It is a good thing to observe Christmas Day. The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom.

“It helps one to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity which runs on sun time.

“But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas Day, and that is keeping Christmas.

“Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and remember what other people have done for you?

“To ignore what the world owes you, and to think of what you owe the world;

“To put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground;

“To see that your fellow men are just as real as you are, and try to look behind your faces to their hearts hungry for joy;

“To own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but that you are going to give life;

“To close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around for a place where you can sew some seeds of happiness.

“Are you willing to do these things, even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

“Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world — stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death — and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love?

“And if you keep it for a day, why not always?

“But you can never keep it alone.”

A tip of the hat to those men and women - and there are a lot of them - in many special fields, who will work Christmas Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas night, New Year's Day, New Year's Eve and all the other holidays of the year..

Been there, done that, and the camaraderie of those times were good, and despite them being a drag, in retrospect, they come out as a sort of gift to the community we serve.

Thanks very much to each and every one! 'Tis indeed a fine gift.

FIRST COLUMN OF 1999

JANUARY 6, 1999 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

“Just sink back in an easy chair
For forty winks or so,
And fold your hands as if in prayer,
---That helps a lot you know.
Forget you are you awhile,
And pliable as wax,
Just beautifully smile . . .
Relax, relax, relax.”

(from Robert W. Service’s poem “Relax”)

Relax with us as we celebrate his birthday on the 125th year since his birth 16 January 1999 at the Westmark. It’s our annual celebration of the Yukon, with song, & dance, poetry, pictures, first edition door prizes, and characters galore.

“Start off each day with a smile and get it over with.”
(W.C. Fields)

“Open the book of memories
Whenever you feel sad,
And take a look at happiness,
The good times that you’ve had.
Be cheered by those small loving acts,
The unexpected treat,
The word of praise, the forgiving kiss,
That makes one’s life complete.”

May your 1999 book of memories overflow with more of those.

“A chuckle a day may not keep the doctor away, but it sure does make those times in life’s waiting room a little more bearable.”
(Anne Schaefer)

May you have some nonsense to entertain you, once in a while, in 1999, such as:

Two melons had an argument:
A lovers' quarrel, too.
One melon said, "I cantaloupe";
The other, "Honeydew!"

The poetry on 16 January is as much fun, and better than that!

Cheerfulness is like money well expended in charity: the more we dispense of it, the greater our possession.

(V. Hugo)

May you meet none of these in the next 359 days:

Actress Tallulah Bankhead once visited a family with a particularly spoiled, obnoxious teenage son. "We just don't know what to make of him," said Mom.

"Well," suggested Bankhead, "how about a nice rug."

Comedy is essentially a miracle. I believe I'm as important to society as a doctor; to create laughter creates magic. These days, nothing is more important.

(Kathleen Freeman)

I bought some powdered water, but I didn't know what to add.

Why does a hummingbird hum?
Because he doesn't know the words!

I don't work out. If God wanted us to bend over, He'd put diamonds on the floor.

(Joan Rivers)

A clown is like an aspirin, only he works twice as fast.

(Groucho Marx)

"It's the big broad land way up yonder,
It's the forests where silence has lease,
It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder,
It's the stillness that fills me with peace."

The last four lines of the Spell of The Yukon, by Robert W. Service.
Who describes it better than he?
Join us 16 Jan 1999 6pm Westmark Hotel, for more.

A tip of the hat, and a happy birthday to all Yukoners of the
Capricorn persuasion (22 Dec - 19 Jan), and all the best in 19Y2K to
everyone!



DECEMBER 24, 1999 - A BACKWARD GLANCE BY DOUG BELL

“Gold seemed to have no value. Grub was the most important asset that winter of 1897.”

A Christmas Past

It's September 1897, Dawson City. Captain Constantine of the N.W.M.P. has posted notices around town, notifying all who did not have sufficient grub to last them through the winter or until the following June to leave at once for Fort Yukon, where provisions were plentiful. Free transportation was provided for those who did not have the necessary means.

A remarkable situation developed from the critical shortage of provisions. There were miners running around town with pokes full of gold and owning rich claims, offering almost any price for grub to keep them alive through the winter.

Gold seemed to have no value. Grub was the most important asset that winter of 1897.

With Christmas in the offing, “Ma” Huson decided it would help the morale of the community to have a little Christmas party.

It started humbly enough, inviting a few of her log cabin neighbours to drop in for a bit of Christmas cheer. It seemed everyone who dropped in brought with them some morsel of food or beverage that was thought unavailable.

They had no turkey, chicken, no oranges, cranberries, or other delicacies, but Capt. John Hasen, John Raap and Charlie Debney of the Alaska Commercial Company sent over a half dozen cans of plum pudding, some canned fruit, and some candles. They also sent some candy that was designed to be sold to the Indian children. There were no

children in town, so they decided they would send the plum pudding and the candy to the hospital.

John J. Healy of the N.A.T. & T. Co. sent over a couple of hams, some desiccated potatoes and five gallons of claret.

Among the women who joined wholeheartedly in the party were Mrs. Ralph Boyker, Mrs. Yaeger, Mrs. Laiblin, Mrs. Georgia Grant, and Flo Hamburg.

The Huson cabin was located on Second Avenue about half a block north of the Regina Hotel, and the news of the little party spread like a prairie fire and the place was soon crowded to overflowing. Mrs. Boyker and Tom Fitzpatrick, whose cabins were directly behind the Husons and facing the river, opened their homes, only a few steps away to accommodate the party.

Upon the arrival of the claret from Healy, they decided to have some punch. They used canned fruit juices, citric acid and a little "hootch" that some old sourdough had brought along. The punch bowl was a prize attraction. It had been cut out of a coal oil can - the side cut out. Five gallons of punch did not last long, and a man was kept busy hauling water from the river to keep them supplied. George Appel the tinner came along and soon saw the need for another punch bowl, left for his tinshop and was back in a few minutes with another punch bowl, professionally designed from another coal oil can.

Someone had brought a single lemon, presumably for a single lemonade, but the ladies decided it was too valuable to be used for the punch and that they would save it and later take it to the hospital.

It would be welcome medicine for some poor scurvy patient, and there were quite a few of them at Father Judge's hospital. By mid-afternoon seemingly everyone in town was beating a path to the Huson cabin and taking a keen interest in the party. Even some miners who were down from Bonanza and Eldorado dropped in to help celebrate.

The miners brought liquor in original containers, which was used for the punch.

Mrs. Boyker had cooked the hams in a wash boiler, and they had plenty of coffee so they served sandwiches and coffee in Mrs. Huson's cabin and in Mrs. Boyker's cabin, with Mrs. Yaeger and Mrs. Grant assisting.

Late in the afternoon Howard Hamilton Hart, who had a lease on Carmack's discovery claim on Bonanza, volunteered to take the ladies to the Hospital with his dog team. Too many ladies for one sleigh, so Paul Denhart, who had a cabin close by, furnished the needed transportation with his dog team.

They took along the plum pudding, the candy and the lemon, and some ham sandwiches. They were warmly received by Father Judge.

The hospital was overcrowded with some patients in tents nearby. There was considerable typhoid showing up in camp, and Father Judge was sorely pressed to take care of his patients. He was grateful to the ladies for their kindly gesture. He was particularly anxious that the civic minded citizens should know about the crowded conditions at the little hospital and blessed the ladies for their kindly interest.

“Ma Huson & Flo Hamburg were charitable, kindly souls, and distinguished themselves by taking on the task of helping to buy equipment, rubber boots, mittens and helmets for the fire department in Dawson.

At the first big fire, they arrived with gallons of hot coffee for the fire fighters, and later gave dances and card parties to raise funds for the department.

For their kindly efforts, they were made honorary members of the department.

(from the Bob Coutts collection at the Yukon Archives. David Griffith draft manuscript. The photographs are from the Tidd collection also from the Yukon archives.)

THE FIRST COLUMN OF 2000

JANUARY 5, 2000 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Each day is a page of life — turn it with care.

A letter from home ...

Boy, that was something in those bygone days ... you, alone, among a bunch of other airmen, and then mail call and there it was, a letter from home. Love in an envelope.

Remember the handwritten letter? Hard to read sometimes, written in a hurry perhaps, or - the opposite: beautiful, skillful, careful penmanship, a joy to look at and a pleasure to read.

The writing laying it all out, the mood, the feelings, the care and concern of the writer.

And time, let's not forget time. At the sight of the familiar handwriting on the envelope, you know it's a personal visit on paper.

Your friend, or better still your love, has sat holding you in their mind, remembering, sharing, and now telling you about it.

Some of those letters will rest in specially marked boxes. It's all still there, the mood, the times, the thoughts, the day, even the weather.

A piece of your past, preserved and cherished, yours again whenever you want.

One of my Christmas presents, The Friendship Book of Francis Gay 2000, introduced the handwritten letter with this inscription from long ago (even before typewriters)... the time/distance revealed in the use of capital letters within the thoughts:

Messages of Sympathy and Love
Servant of Parted Friends
Consoler of the Lonely
Bond of the Scattered Family
Enlarger of the Common Life.
Carrier of News and Knowledge.
Instrument of Trade and Industry.
Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance.
Of Peace and Goodwill.

So with Y2K over, and the computer defrocked, do you suppose we'll revert to letter writing again?

Are computers now relegated to tool status, like fountain pens of old? A useful tool, a valuable tool, prestigious but nonetheless a tool for people to manipulate, not one that manipulates us.

Fountain pens were relegated to museums, and now are making a comeback. Are they, do you suppose, revealing the fate of the computer?

Despite the hurry, the hype, the technological marvels, we got here the same way we always do ... one step, one minute and one day at a time. We hurried into the millennium as if it were the be-all, end-all, or cure-all of all the world's ills, known or imagined.

Well, once we got Y2K-O'ed, that is.

Like a rare aurora, the dominant colour today on the faces of the technological gurus should be red, but they're still wagging their technological fingers at us and hollering, "It's not over yet!"

Come on gurus, give it up, it's over!

Your apocalypse couldn't begin to equal Mother Nature when she shrugs her shoulders, despite your attempts to convince us your machines were her equal at causing catastrophe.

She'll still hit us now and then, and we'll do the best we can, and she'll still outdo you every time. You're toast!

Maybe you did a great fixing job; maybe the \$950 or so billions (according to CBC) of fixing was well-spent; but then again, early in the game, maybe you should have scrapped all those IBM platforms and bought Macs?! Might have been cheaper.

But, I suppose, Big Bill and his buddies couldn't 'buy' that.

Anyway, I do hope all the fuss, the fury and the hurrying are over, don't you?

Aren't you worn out listening to the rush, rush, rush, hurry, hurry, hurry, buy, buy, buy? We need to know, we need to go, we need to ...

By the way, what's our destination? Where, or what, are we hurrying to?

"The world is full of wonderful things — don't miss them as you hurry by!"

A tip of the hat to the new year and new century, but above all to each and every one of you.

A giant *tip of the hat* to all who worked over the holidays, covering 24 hours a day, some almost as long, so the rest of us could try, buy, sigh, cry, fly, drive, tie, vie, party, say hello and say goodbye, get sick, and get well.

Without you, the Season would not have been so swell.



THE LAST COLUMN OF 2000

DECEMBER 20, 2000 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Ah, Christmas ... the tinkling of bells, choirs heralding the Season like songbirds in spring, the postman loaded with letters from friends, phone calls from family, children laughing and wondering, and parcels full of gifts.

Greyhound brought us a parcel on Saturday.

Inside, 'midst the presents, was a sheet of paper with a photograph, a story, and a question from our daughter: "Isn't this an awesome picture?"

"The Hand of Hope" was the caption of the photo ...

Apparently, it began circulating around North America in November. Many who saw it proclaimed it should be "The Picture of the Year". Or of the decade.

It's a photograph of hands: an unborn child's hand, and a surgeon's hand.

It's not an ultrasound image. The unseen child is still in his mother's womb.

It's Samuel Alexander Armas' hand. At the time, Samuel was a 21-week-old fetus, being operated on by Dr. Joseph Bruner.

Samuel Alexander was diagnosed with spina bifida and his mother, Julie Armas, was an obstetrical nurse in Georgia who knew of Dr. Bruner's surgical procedure.

Dr. Bruner practices at the Vanderbilt University Medical Centre in Nashville, Tennessee. He performs these remarkable operations while the baby is still in the womb.

Apparently, the procedure begins with a caesarean section to expose the uterus, and the doctor then makes a small uterine incision so he can operate on the baby.

"During this surgery on Samuel, the little guy reached his tiny, fully-developed hand through the incision and firmly grasped the surgeon's finger."

Michael Clancy of *USA Today* caught this amazing moment on film.

Samuel's tiny hand is clearly visible firmly grasping the middle finger of Dr. Bruner's left hand.

The editors of the *Nashville Tennessean*, titled the picture 'Hands of Hope'.

Their text explaining the picture begins, "The tiny hand of 21-week-old fetus Samuel Alexander Arnas emerges from the mother's uterus to grasp the finger of Dr. Joseph Bruner as if thanking the doctor for the gift of life ..."

We can't show you the photo for copyright reasons, so go to <http://joseromia.tripod.com/bighand.gif> on the net, and see it in full colour.

The hand of hope is indeed a remarkable photograph, though it pales in significance when one begins to consider meanings to be found in the action of an unborn child.

For some, it may become the picture of the millennium. We all enter it with the same hope that seems to come from an unborn child, do we not?

And a little child shall lead them ...

A ***tip of the hat*** to children: our hope, and our future. Warm greetings to Samuel Alexander Arnas, who we shall never know, though I for one am grateful for his special gift of wonder this Christmas 2000.

FIRST COLUMN OF 2001

JANUARY 3, 2001 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

As the Irish are won't to wish you, "May your right hand always be stretched out in friendship, and never in want," in this year and those to come.

"What's the most important thing you've learned in life?"

A small book from a Christmas stocking is filled with answers from people everywhere, to the question posed above.

Life is about sharing, one said, so I share a few of the replies from the book by 16-year-old Beau Bauman.

His mom was giving him her answers to the question one day and he said to her, "Mom, why don't you write a book about it?"

He was 13 years old at the time.

She replied, "Oh, why don't you write the book?" ... and as he says, "I don't know why, but I took her seriously."

Three years later, he had a book. Here's a taste:

"Listen."

"Read."

"Care."

"Show up."

"Count your change."

"Hate incompetence."

"Don't hit other people."

"Appreciate drycleaning."

"Don't eat on a full stomach."

"The biggest disease in life is jealousy."

"Don't get carried away by the applause."

"The paramount importance of family, friendship and loyalty."

"Get an education, get a job, get a receipt."

"If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

"When kindness or understanding happens unexpectedly, there is no greater delight."

"Ambition may make you rich, but only people can make you happy."

The following are the sages, in order of appearance: Bill Price, town justice; P. Labalme, educator; Sidney Sheldon, novelist; Victor Neufeld, producer, 20/20; Joel Farb, comic, England; Ben Foti, videotape editor; Kyle van Duzer, kindergartener; Irving Greenblatt, hotel owner, Puerto Rico; Ray Dillman, attorney; Paul Sheldon, taxi driver; Sebastian Mertz, Guardian Angles; Mrs. Dzednkowski, librarian; James Bond III; William Bolcom, musician; Andrew Heyward, producer.

The penultimate page of the book holds these thoughts from a fellow Canadian, Richard Mattessich, professor of accounting, UBC: "Health is more important than wealth.

"A harmonious marriage is better than the richest dowry. A genuine calling ranks above the loftiest office. Dedication to work is more rewarding than a high salary.

"A simple lifestyle is worth more than the greatest luxury. Contemplation and meditation have a better yield than restless diversion. Tranquility of mind is a safe guarantee of peace than the strongest international accord. "A happy home, good health and a fulfilling profession - I consider these the greatest rewards one can expect in this world.

"To be cheerful, one may also need the humility to believe in a higher creative force, the wisdom to accept the inevitable, the confidence to trust one's own judgment and the luck to have another person in whom to confide."

This small book is, as well as a fine piece of work, a lesson in itself: Age doesn't matter; get an idea, run with it and ask.

People will help. The majority are willing, generous and eager to help. The rest we see on TV, 'cause they never seem to tell us about the good gals and guys anymore!

What I've learned is, it's better to share the wisdom of many, not just a few. That people are not waiting with bated breath for my opinion. And never forget to give credit where credit is due.

When needed, may you be blessed with the determination, the wisdom and the patience of the old man who had to cross a hill every day.

Each day he took a stone in each hand from the top of the hill to the bottom. Asked why, he said, "I'm moving this hill. Not in my lifetime, or in my son's lifetime, but in time the hill will be gone."

By the way, be careful of the new pet rock scheme. It's Rojo the rock — it says, just pick up a stone, ask permission and it will want to be with you!

May the face of all good news, and the back of all bad news, be toward us.

If you're looking for some fun and frolic about mid-month, consider coming to a **Celebration of the Yukon**, a tribute to the place we live, by people who live here and love the place. It's all there at the **Robert Service dinner January 20th at the Westmark!**



LAST COLUMN OF 2001

DECEMBER 19, 2001 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

One gift ...

One gift per kid marked Christmas Day in the Dirty Thirties ... providing Mom and Dad had a good year, and your expectations weren't too high.

If you thought well, and got your wish, it was pretty good. Half or more of our stores would crash today if we stepped back into that kind of shopping practice.

But what if - just once - a bunch of us returned to an even older practice, a real non-consumer, non-material gift, such as - the gift of time.

Imagine kicking off our high-tech dancing shoes, and doing some soft-shoe dancing with time.

And throwing time, like a blanket, all over one another, especially our kids, with no regard for self.

I mean, for example, pretend you're one of those people that some kids believe have all the time in the world - a grandparent! Time to read to them, to walk with them, talk with them, tell them tales of Dad and Mom when they were kids.

Imagine walking to school with your kids - their way. Learn again the art of dawdling. How to have half an hour to walk three blocks to school, and still be late!

It probably includes catching snowflakes on your tongue; flopping into a snowbank full of snow diamonds, arms and legs flailing out a snow angel.

Or taking an hour to get home, wandering 'midst long afternoon shadows, watching twilight fade, ravens settle, and the moon and the stars enter from stage west. Just standing, looking, wondering and revelling together in the sound of silence.

See if you can make a whistle out of a winter willow twig, or wait till spring, and do it again. Then one could fish with a willow pole, a string and a worm.

OK, worms are hard to come by in the bush, so a black gnat fly is OK, but that's as high-tech as you're allowed.

Gather round a fire, a table, anywhere ... just gather: let thoughts free, tying together a family bouquet of fantasy, fact and foibles. Memories melding minds like flowers entwined in a Christmas bouquet.

Walk on the trail of the wolf and let wilderness have its way with you. Listen to it, let it pour over you, talk only when there is need. Do as the man said, "Go to the bush to smooth it, not to rough it."

What I'm on about is that simplicity is good. The so-called small, day-to-day kindnesses, which are not at all small, and courtesies, thoughtful acts and gestures, got us through the Great Depression and Second World War.

Neither event was great in the exact meaning of the word, but they were Big-Time in that they got almost everybody in one way or another, but people sure reached out a lot.

Sometimes I think we've got too much help out there. Gurus by the dozen giving us advice on how to cut our hair, what jeans to wear or tear, what to pierce and what not to pierce, how to bolster body parts, what foods to chomp or not chomp, what liquid to guzzle or not guzzle, how to live forever — it is truly endless. Endless, repetitive and, eventually, meaningless.

I think they might be winning. Have they convinced too many of us not to listen to our inner selves anymore? That's where a lot of the good stuff is, if we let it out.

Isn't one of the greatest feelings in the world to see the ones you love happy?

And what is so neat about giving them the gift of self is, it settles all over you too. It's like the cold that has settled on us this December, getting into every nook and cranny of northern life, just like it did in the old days.

Cold caused us to bunch up although we were the distraction. No box in the corner with moving pictures and talking heads, just a bit of music maybe from a tiny radio; something hot in hand, and fish stories, bear stories, hunting stories, cold stories, summer stories, all over the room.

The only visions we got were from reflections in one another's eyes, and minds, and boy, talk about colourful, man; we had some dandies!

Just dreaming out loud, folks, but maybe it'd be fun to shut down all our high-tech distractions and see what else is out there.

Anyway, may your Christmas be full of family and loved ones. In 2002, may you be in the right place at the right time to do the right thing for someone else whenever there is need, and for yourself even when there is not.

Merry 2001 Christmas, and Happy 2002 New Year!

FIRST COLUMN OF 2002

JANUARY 9, 2002 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Reflections on 2001 ...

We have basked in the beauty, and spirit of the land
We have touched hands,
We have brushed minds,
We have shared joy; embraced grief.
We have joined hearts, and yet
We are still apart.

We must continue the quest
To find and define the gold,
To step in the trail of the wolf,
To follow the waters of the salmon,
Soar in the realm of the eagle,
Listen to the raven
and walk softly in a wondrous land
Each footprint testimony to peoples of our yesterday
and the promise of our tomorrow.
At journey's end, the measure will not be what we have
done,
But what, and how, we have loved.
May your trail speak well of you;
May it be a trail your children will want to follow.

db

A note from a stranger to the Gilberts at Jake's Corner:

"From just out of Florida, Georgia, through the Carolinas, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Alberta, BC to the Yukon.

"I've never had anyone pump my gas, help me haul my stuff to my room, never had such spacious and warm quarters. I've never had anyone even notice I looked tired.

"I've never even written a note like this before. I wish I had more cash to give; thanks for making me feel special!

"You have done yourselves proud."

A summer junco

It was quiet; the weekend traffic hadn't begun. The white house grabbed the western sun, flung it into the white fence, highlighting a young grey junco balancing on the tip of a fireweed rooted by the fence.

The junco swayed with the grace of a ballet dancer; a flower dance choreographed by a vagrant breeze, and the whimsey of the flower stalk.

The nature dance ended abruptly when a cheeky squirrel dashed by atop the fence a few inches from the flower dancer, frightening her into flight.

A moment without meaning? Dare I seek meaning where there may be none? It speaks of the watcher and, I suppose, it's like watching a mountain. If you watch it long enough, it moves.

So, if we think long enough, does meaning come?

The junco may no longer be, yet its fleeting brushstroke holds in memory.

She'd done herself proud, too!

*A **tip of the hat** to you, and you, and you!
Every single one of you in this year, 2002!
May your days be full, may you sleep well too!
And at January One, Two Thousand and Three,
May we greet one another, just happy to be!*



LAST COLUMN OF 2002

DECEMBER 18, 2002 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Another Yukon Christmas story ...

The bitter cold deepened mile by mile as three young prospectors munched along the Dawson Trail toward their home cabin on Eldorado Creek.

They had 30 miles behind them when December's late-afternoon darkness was dismissed by an awesome display of northern lights.

The miners paid little heed, being more interested in talking about home with a roaring fire, a hot meal and a hot rum.

It was Christmas Eve, 1897.

Just then the narrow dog trail widened and they saw a cabin, enveloped in frost, with a faint wisp of smoke drifting from the stovepipe.

The frost of the cabin gathered the lights of the aurora, joining earth and sky, creating a mystical scene, stopping them dead in their tracks.

“They must’ve gone into Dawson for Christmas,” said Johnny Lind. “Let’s go in, stoke up the fire and warm up.”

They unlatched the door and tramped in. Dave Mitchell took a candle from his pocket, and in the dim light they began searching for the source of some piteous moans coming from the darkness of the cabin.

In the flickering candlelight, Johnny Lind and Bill Wilkinson beheld a sight they remembered for the rest of their lives.

A young woman lay on a bed in the corner, clutching a newborn baby to her breast. A weak smile replaced her faint cries as Dave knelt at her side.

Her pain-filled eyes opened wide for a moment, a look of great relief flickering there, then fluttered weakly and closed in death.

The three young men stared at each other in stunned silence, a silence pierced by the shrill, life-filled cry of the baby.

Johnny Lind built up the fire, Bill Wilkinson stripped off his clothes, removed his new wooden underwear and wrapped the baby in it. As he was wrapping the baby, the door burst open and two men entered.

The younger man ran to the bed. “Jen!” he cried, “I’ve got the doctor!” and collapsed on the floor.

The doctor knelt and examined the woman, and then the young man. “Both dead,” he exclaimed.

“He probably froze his lungs coming for me. It’s 45 below outside, and the mother ... dang it, these people should never have come north. Is there a woman around here you can take the baby to?”

“No,” said Bill, now dressed, and holding the baby in his arms.

“I’ve got to go; you’ll take care of it somehow,” the doctor said as he left.

They tucked the baby into a packing box, added all the blankets they could find, lashed it to the sleigh and mused without stopping to their own cabin.

There they fed the child bear-stew broth, with a touch of brandy added, using a whiskey bottle and the finger of a glove for a nipple.

The babe slept peacefully in the box while the young men sang carols, and gave thanks to whatever god they believed in.

On Christmas morning, Dave Mitchell left to find a mother for their Christmas child. The news spread quickly, and soon a dozen women were in the cabin, clamouring to adopt the baby girl.

Everyone was talking at once and they were getting nowhere fast, when the only silent person in the bunch, an older woman, exclaimed, "You bloody fools, give me that baby!"

"Dave, take up a collection, get into Dawson and get some canned milk, clean blankets, and diapers too!"

As she was speaking, she picked up the baby so naturally that the boys knew the right decision had just been made.

They later learned that the forceful Mrs. Brock had lost a baby in Nova Scotia; and here, in the Yukon's Klondike gold fields, by a near miracle of events, had found another.

The baby wintered well with Mrs. Brock, becoming the centre of attention in the valley. When the crocuses flowered, the miners and Mrs. Brock found a minister to baptize her.

After much talk, she was christened Edna Eldorado. It is said gifts of gold were piled around her in her crib, and the toughest miners in the North cried like babies themselves when the final blessing was given.

This story has been told time and again, in newspapers and magazines, including this one ... because it's true, and bears retelling now and then. This version has been shortened to fit my space. Later, with some research and luck, maybe we'll find and share the rest of Edna's story.

Have a good Christmas everyone, and a healthy 2003!

FIRST COLUMN OF 2003

JANUARY 8, 2003 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

A tip of the hat to you, and to 2003 ...

An internet pundit tells us the celebration of the new year is the oldest of all holidays. He says the Babylonians popped corks for 11 days around this time of year some 4,000 years ago, making us pikers in comparison.

Other cultures believe new year's foods bring good luck, especially anything in the shape of a ring, because it symbolizes 'coming full circle'.

The Dutch, for example, believe that eating doughnuts on New Year's Day will bring good fortune. So, if nothing else, the police who were on duty on January 1st should be blessed with good luck this year.

In the meantime, today's national pundits promote a parade of people of the year. Politicians and business giants at the forefront, followed by the military mighty, sports luminaries, and an occasional humanitarian thrown in to the mix.

The last seems, at times, to be an afterthought.

None of my heroes ever make the list. They're unknown in higher echelons of the land, yet they're everywhere.

They live all over this land. They live in small towns, in cities, in the bush. They're our neighbours, they're volunteers, and they share one thing in common — they give!

They give much of their lives to others.

They're nameless, yet we can name them, because they live down the street.

The men and women who keep foster homes for children whose lives have been struck with tragedy.

Some we have known have seldom had two nickels to rub together, as granddad would say, yet they reach out a helping hand and a loving heart to hundreds of kids during their lives.

The teenager, fighting a debilitating disease, and instead of succumbing to it, she becomes a leader among her peers, a role model, a fighter, a fine example for us all.

The woman diagnosed with terminal lung cancer from smoking, spending her last days, and energy, talking to thousands of school children about the idiocy of taking up the habit.

Single moms and dads everywhere achieving the impossible, sustaining children with their diverse needs and desires, and doing it alone.

The elderly veteran living on a pittance pension, neglected - or forgotten - by the very government which sent him to war, yet watch his stooped back straighten slightly, standing tall for the November 11th parade.

He speaks volumes with that gesture. He speaks of pride in his land and recognition of fallen friends, and the results of, and yes, the idiocy, of war.

Maybe these people, and the millions like them all around the world, do not have the total answer to the dilemmas we face daily, but they are surely people on the right trail, leading the way to a distant, very distant new year, when the world achieves the promise of Christmas — Peace on Earth!

Maybe we focus too much on the foam and froth of the society, and too little on the real foundation of every nation - the 'salt of the earth' people.

Anyway, I'm one who finds the thought of them all around us more comforting than those high on the new year's lists. They are, I think, where the promise of our future lies.

May 2003 be brim-full of good health for one and all! With that, you can do the rest. Oh yes, I hope you had a very **Merry Christmas!**



LAST COLUMN OF 2003

DECEMBER 24, 2003 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Teachers, teachers everywhere ...

There were nine runners at the starting line for the Olympics 100-yard dash.

The starting gun fired and they were off, but it wasn't the usual cluster of runners all evenly matched, although they all wanted to win.

Then one of the contestants stumbled on the pavement, tumbled over and began to cry.

The other eight runners heard his cry, slowed down and looked back. Then, as one, they turned around and came back - every one of them.

It was the Seattle Special Olympics a few years ago according to Randy, who sent the story from Regina.

A young girl with Down syndrome reached the fallen runner first, bent down, kissed him and said, "This will make it better."

Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

'Tis told the audience stood cheering for many minutes, and it is they who were there, who are still telling the story.

Good friends are like stars; you don't always see them, but you always know they're there.

Four-year-old Linda said, "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired."

Love remembers, as did nurse Debbie telling of this encounter: "It was a busy morning, about 8:30 a.m., when an elderly gentleman came to have the sutures removed from his thumb.

"He said he had an appointment at 9 a.m., and asked if it could be done quickly.

"I took his vital signs and had him take a seat, knowing it would be an hour before someone would be able to see him.

"I saw him looking at his watch, and since I wasn't busy, I decided to evaluate his wound.

"It was well-healed, so I talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound.

"While taking care of his wound, we talked. I asked him if he had a doctor's appointment this morning, as he was in such a hurry.

"He said no, he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife.

"I asked about her health. He told me she had Alzheimer's and had been there for a few years.

"As I finished dressing his wound, I asked if she would be worried if he was a bit late.

"He replied that she no longer knew who he was; she hadn't recognized him for the last five years.

"I was surprised and asked him, 'And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?'

"He smiled, patted my hand and said, 'She doesn't know me, but I still know her.'

"I had to hold back tears as he left. I had goosebumps on my arm and said, 'That is the kind of love I want in my life.'"

No doubt random acts of kindness have been around as long as people have.

Does it follow that the number of acts of kindness is a measure of the kind of society we have?

A tip of the hat to friends, friendship, Christmas and the year ahead. May your year be full of people like those we have talked about today.

FIRST COLUMN OF 2004

JANUARY 7, 2004 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Happy 2004 to one and all!

There it was under the tree ... the ultimate gift. It's got everything going for it.

You can't wear it out in normal use.

No instructions are required.

No assembly required.

It seldom needs repair.

It can be turned on and off at will, and there are no switches or moving parts.

It can be taken with you wherever you go.

It does not set off alarms in airport security checks.

It's entertainment in a bag or pocket.

You don't have to plug it in, you can use it anywhere.

No batteries are needed — ever!

You are the working parts.

It is not fragile but should be handled with care — it can cause thinking.

You can give it away, still have it, and not offend the giver.

It can be held in your hands, yet its dimensions are limitless. It can transport you in and around and beyond this world, into places limited only by the imaginations involved.

It can take you on a high, or you can get lost in it, although caution is recommended. Remember, a mind stretched by a new idea never returns to its original dimension.

Yep, just a package of thoughts and ideas. A trail into other minds ... a book!

My ultimate gift this year was Rex Murphy's Point of View.

His dances with words were sometimes minuets, finely dressed and exquisitely danced, and then with a new partner, it's the vigour of a polka.

Whatever, his dances with words usually hit his target with the legendary accuracy of Robin Hood's arrows piercing the bulls-eye, and are a delight for the ear when read aloud, as they come alive in another dimension.

"We are not defined by the exceptional and the rare," he suggests. "We are grooved and coloured by a million

commonplaces. It is by this understanding that journalism is a kind of diary of 'the all of us'."

His use of words, at times, challenge the computer spellcheckers and syntax reader, although I've no idea if that's a compliment or an insult. Do you?

His first essay strikes a chord. Titled 'An Ode to a Leader (Huh? Where?)' - he chooses as true leaders, Martin Luther King Jr., Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Pope John Paul II.

He supports his choices with this thought: "To speak of leadership in reference to Mr. King, Mr. Trudeau or John Paul II, and then use the same word to canvass the ructions of Paul Martin and Jean Chretien, or Mr. Manning and Mr. Day, brings a little of the same uneasy chill as when we speak of the novels of Jacqueline Susann and then, staying more or less on the same planet, speak of the novels of James Joyce.

"The words may be the same, but they've clearly crossed some invisible and frightening frontier.

"Leadership, as we speak of it now, is a much-shrunken concept. With the Liberals, it is not much more than changing seats at a table, and aside from its spare dividends as political gossip, has little to offer a bemused or indifferent public."

He concludes a rather short but pungent essay with something I can relate to, well that's why this is here today, it strikes a common chord, belated perhaps, certainly not new, but one that echoed continually in the discussions through 2003 whenever the conversation turned to political leadership, which was often.

"I don't think Canadians are waiting for an 'I have a dream' speech from any leader. Something more spacious than 'My turn' or 'Hey, I'm new' might charm them, however."

As one Canadian I join him and dare to hope, and to dream, that 2004 might bring us, as Rex says, someone more 'spacious'?

It is not that I am against Mr. Martin and his merry band, it is just that I am for Canada, and for Canadians, not just a chosen few, and that darn question about a leopard changing or not changing its spots keeps flashing through my mind.

An old favourite Irish wish to one and all for 2004: May those who love us, love us. And those who don't love us, may God turn their hearts.

And if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles, so we'll know them by their limping.



LAST COLUMN OF 2004

DECEMBER 22, 2004

8 THE YUKON NEWS WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2004

Northern Tutchone: ut'óhudinch'i dzenú Tlingit: gu.àlshé yá yis tákw i jiyis wùk'è

Rambling
by Doug Bell

We travel together passengers in a little spaceship dependent on its vulnerable resources of air and soil, all committed for our safety to its security and peace preserved from annihilation only by the care of the world and I will say the love we give our fragile world.
(Will Steiner)

Greetings from around the world. These are not random choices. Our last census reported every language listed here is spoken by some Yukoner's. Our First Nations languages are used as a frame for they were our beginnings, and have generously embraced all the others.

Merry Christmas Joyeux Noël

Kaska: kuyéh dege kénegwats'et Tagish: jesus kòhdlini dzenes kut'eh

May future generations become the generation who take the first steps toward world harmony and peace and achieve what we have not — the end of war and strife.

Southern Tutchone: nán Áwu nákwitsh Át dá'yé sháw káulé jé

Gwi'chin: drin tsal zhit shòh ohfli Han: drin tsul zhit shò Ahlay

Serbian: Hristos se rodi
Croatian: Sretan Božić
Dutch: Vrolijk kerstfeest
Danish: Glædelig Jul og glø
Italian: Buon Capodanno lo
Tahitian: Ia ora i te Noere e ia ora na i te matahiti 'api
Slovak: Čiud Wanaagsun Iyo Samad Cusub Oo Fiican
Gaelic Irish: Bliadhna Nua Fe Mhaise Dhuit
Malayan: Selamat Tahun Baru
Finnish: Onnellista Uutta Vuotta
Hindi: Shubh Naya Baras
Hungarian: Boldog Ujvet Kivanak
German: Ein glückliches Neues Jahr!
Tamil: Nathar Puthu Varuda Valthgukkal
Slovene: Vesele Bozicne. Srečno Novo Leto
Mandarin: Kung His Hsin Nien bing Chu Shen Tan
Hawaiian: Mele Kalikimaka & Hououli Makahiki Hou
Japanese: Shinnen omedeto. Kurisumasu Omedeto
Arabic: Mah Saadan Wa Samah Jaddidat
Ojibway: O jin de win ki ji kut
Cree: Mihsa Mahosi Kocikami
Spanish: Feliz año Nuevo

Thai: Swako Bepce Mai
Yiddish: Gute Vaymakhtn
Norwegian: Godt Nyttar
Tagalog: Maligayang Pasko
Swedish: God helgelselig nyttar
Vietnamese: Chúc mừng năm mới
Russian: Поздравляю с праздником Рождества и Новим Годом
Portuguese: Boas Festas e um feliz Ano Novo
Eskimo: Jutdlime pivluarit wkiortame pivluarit
Bulgarian: Vesele Koleda i chesita nova godina!
Punjabi: Nawane Sai Di Vadhae
Greek: Evtikhes To Neon Etos
Korean: Sahe Bakmanee Buteuseyo
Ukrainian: Srozhdestvom Kristovym
Chinese: (Cantonese) Sun nien fai lok
Tamil: Nathar Puthu Varuda Valthgukkal
Czech: Stastne a vesele vianoce a stastny nový rok!
Polish: Wesołych Świąt. Borego Narodzenia or Boze Narodzenie
Estonian: Rõõmusaid jõulupäivi ja head uut aastat!
Farsi: Cristmas-e shoma mobarak bashad
Gaelic Scots: Bliadhna Mhath U
Welsh: Blwyddym Newydd Dda
Romanian: La Astea Ana

FIRST COLUMN OF 2005

JANUARY 12, 2005 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

And a good one 2 U 2 ...

Wee Mary asked her mother if she could go outside and play with the boys.

“No, you can’t play with the boys, they’re too rough,” Mom replied.

After a moment of thought, Mary asked, “If I can find a smooth one, can I play with him?”

May 2005 be a smooth one for you!

Canadians are indeed some of the luckiest people on Earth. I think it was Rex Murphy, of CBC renown, or someone on his program recently, who said, “If you’re born in Canada, you’ve already won the biggest lottery of all.”

How right you are, whoever you are, and thanks for the thought of the year. A happy new year, fellow Canadians!

Don’t break the chain ...

There’s an Irish wish dashing about the world on the internet this week, with instructions attached: “You HAVE to send this to a friend within an hour of opening it, Or Else!”

It’s the equivalent of the old chain letters. Remember them?

There was enough bad luck floating around in the Dirty Thirties, when we first met chain letters, that any promise of good luck falling all over you, like the soft snowballs we’ve had this past couple of weeks, gave you a faint glimmer of hope and, hey, it can’t make things any worse, so it’s worth a shot, right?

This chain email promises a fulfilled wish in three hours if I forward the message to 20 people within the hour. Thirty years ago, the luck was come in three months from Tuesday ... which, of course, never came.

Old habits die hard, eh?

We broke the chain every time in the good old days, but hey, today it’s one click and it’s on its way, so here it is:

May there always be work for your hands to do;
May your purse always hold a coin or two;
May the sun always shine on your window pane;
May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain;
May the hand of a friend always be near you;
May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

Not a bad wish for 2005, so I didn't break the chain; but four hours have gone by and my wish hasn't come true... although on second thought, I was born in Canada so all those letter chains we broke in the past had no harmful effects, and neither will this one.

(But you'd be amazed at the number of people who shot it back to me within an hour, so superstition is alive and well in 2005.)

Oh but the Irish missed with their good wishes, which they seldom do. They left out the most vital of all: *May good health fall all over you like a warm spring rain this day, and every day to follow.*

In 2005, the beginnings of this 'enlightened' 21st century, it might do us all well, from top to bottom, to remember Montaigne's observation penned four and a half centuries ago: "Perched on the loftiest throne in the world, man is still sitting on his own behind."

A *tip of the hat* to Myrna Bruns, YTG's Bureau of Stats, for gathering the language information needed for the 22 December Christmas Card, and another big *tip of the hat* to Louise Skookum, of the News, for her computer magic which produced it.

A special *tip of the hat*, with an apology on top, to two Yukon businesses, Cousins Ltd., and Yukon Meat & Sausage.

They were among the people who gave generously to the very successful Elks/Lions Seniors celebration dinner on December 11th at the Elks Hall, but I missed mentioning them in my December 13th column.

A Scotsman said, "The best-laid schemes of mice and men, gang aft a-gley," and if you've a hankering for some frolic wi' some Scots, and tatties and meeps, and a wee dram of single malt to toast the haggis, then set aside January 21st. It's at the Legion, and it's only \$20 each.

Your hosts for the 2005 Robbie Burns Night are the Midnight Sun Pipe Band.

P.S. - If your face wants to smile, let it. If it doesn't, make it.



APRIL 21, 2005 - ARTICLE ENTITLED 'TRUCKING ALONG' BY DOUG BELL IN BUSINESS SECTION

'So You Wanna Be a Trucker?' is the headline in a short piece in April's Fifty Plus magazine.

The enticement is brief: "Now that the corny old trucker song Convoy is a country and western hit again, maybe it's time to revisit that fantasy you've kept secret all these years. We're talking about the lure of the long-haul truck.

"Seriously. The industry is desperate for drivers. Younger men and women aren't attracted to trucking; they'd rather stay home with the kids. But empty nesters looking for a second career?"

Frankly, I prefer Johnny Cash's Six Days on the Road for trucking music, though whatever your preference, evidently the romance, the mystique, the pull of the road, whatever it is, holds firm in the Model A generation of Canadians, or Fifty Plus thinks so.

Such songs, and the myths, paint the long-distance trucker as the modern cowboy, a free spirit roaming the land alone. A modern knight of the road, eh?

Yes, like any group of people, most, not all of them would give you the shirt off their back, and many of them have, though sometimes they make judgments too, as this story I came across tells.

"The Lincoln owner misjudged the icy corner, ending up to his windows in snow in the ditch.

"A knight of the road pulled his 70-foot rig to the shoulder, smiled, waved, dragged his chains off the headache rack and was pulling them toward the Lincoln through boot-filling snow when the Lincoln driver zapped his window down, and hollered, 'Be careful of that bumper, boy!'

"Trucker Doug spun on his cowboy-boot heels, hung his chains back on the rack, smiled and waved as he drove away."

Attitude counts on, and off, the road. Actually, it's an essential element.

When you toss in arrogance, it's a mix that begs trouble, somewhere, sometime down the road.

"I've heard that story a hundred times," some truckers say, so it has a life of its own, joining many, far more serious, mind-boggling, true tales of highway idiocy.

Surely a man wouldn't tape his laptop computer to the steering wheel so he could work, on his way to work? He would, and he did. It's in police records in Ontario. The woman eating her morning cornflakes, milk and all, in a bowl on her lap on the 401 is there too.

Out West, another man was spotted from the trucker's high-rise seat, eating his lunch with a fork. So he was minding his manners and the speed limit of course.

There's a word for them, but which one?

Here's some from the dictionary so you can choose your own: Blockhead, boob, cretin, dimwit, donkey, dumbbell, dunce, fool, halfwit, ignoramus, imbecile, jackass, meathead, nitwit, pinhead, simpleton and stupid.

I hasten to add these are stories are from southern Canada, but remember when you're traveling, those people are still out there — somewhere, and I'm told they could be here too.

This list won't offend everyone because, according to sources, there are people driving our highways who can't read road signs.

Which begs the question, which bureaucracy tested these people and issued them licences? Should the list of words be applied here too?

There's only one thing more painful than learning from experience, and that is not learning from experience.

All these terrible tales faded as I fulfilled a boyhood dream, climbed into the cab of a Peterbilt tractor hooked to a super-B, with 2,000 kilometres ahead.

Driving with a pro in a rig almost 20 times heavier, and almost 10 times longer than your average four wheeler puts you in a driving world you've really never seen, nor imagined.

We began the journey fully loaded, in rush-hour traffic. The first shift is smooth, the second, third and fourth smoother, the rig is purring like a kitten, OK, like a big 550-horsepower cat. In five minutes I've counted 16 shifts, up and down; there's 18 gears to choose from, so I have no idea which one he's using, so forget trying to learn that in a few minutes.

He positions the rig in the centre of the three westbound lanes on Edmonton's Yellowhead, a concession to four-wheelers flitting around us. It's like traffic chess, and he times it so well we're stopped by one red light, through the whole city, and I don't think he's used the clutch since the first shift.

Now that's experience, that's timing — that's driving! There's some learning ahead, and it'll be relaxing too, because you've learned one thing, you're in the hands of a pro. A pro working in one of the biggest workplaces in the world — Canada's highways and byways. Real pros have the knack of making their work look easy. Even a cheechako, like me, could do it, I think.

A glance, front and rear at a rig 25.5 metres long, weighing in at 63.5 tonnes, and knowing there's 50,000 litres of fuel behind you, kept from sloshing you off the road by baffles in the tanks, and super-B reality hits home.

It's 64 tonnes of fire moving at 70 to 90 kilometres per hour, and you wonder why all those people around you aren't playing close attention to you?

They don't.

One possibility, the road is merely a way to get to and from work; for the trucker the road, everyone, and everything on it is part of his work, including the weather.

We're an hour west of the pumps on the east side of the city where our weight more than doubled when we filled the tanks with more than 18,000 kilograms of fuel.

That's when the rig settled down like a weightlifter readying for a lift, and now rolls as smoothly and as comfortably as a Cadillac, but the comparison ends there.

You realize weight is the name of the game. He's playing the weight, the length too, but the rolling weight must be under control every minute the rig is rolling.

Truckers partner the transmission, the engine and the "Jake," controlling the weight of their rig like a skilful fisherman plays a fish when the fish is bigger and stronger than his line.

Brakes are a safety line too, but they can't do it alone, as we can in our four-wheelers.

Four-wheelers is truck talk, mainly in truck magazines, describing the rest of us on the roads.

Four-wheelers, they say, seldom use the braking power of the engine. We just hit the ABS brakes for Stop, and put the transmission in D for Go.

Some four-wheelers team them together, but they're apparently a minority.

The safety experts tell us we're missing the use of an essential element in the package of safety gadgets we have.

Maybe that's the difference, and the problem together.

We're proud of our work, but our workplace is stationary and the road is just how we get there.

The truckers are proud of their work, too, but the road is their workplace. A workplace as big as all outdoors, where everything is in motion; a workplace they must know intimately, including how their machine will react to the ups and downs, and the ever-changing conditions and players entering and leaving this unique workplace.

Despite the hard fact that over 90 per cent of everything we need, and use, comes to us by truck, many still curse trucks and truckers, especially on hills.

Four-wheelers are noted for it, and some of our remarks are inane, to say the least.

One woman told a local driver last summer they shouldn't be allowed on the highways in the summer; they interfere with other people's holidays.

Another wanted them banned from all roads during the day, which is a self-fulfilling wish in a way.

I guess he didn't ask the obvious question, Why many truckers drive the midnight shift?

Almost all four-wheelers are in bed!

Pros have attitude. Their attitude is a calm demeanour, with the calmness emanating from experience, knowledge and comfort with their craft.

He's at work, he enjoys it and he's good at it. It's as if he's part of the machine, sensing its moods, its moves, playing the highway traffic chess game, anticipating the moves ahead, reading the sky, the gauges, planning 10, 20, 100 kilometres ahead — where to stop, where to eat, checking with brothers at the wheel on conditions around, ahead and even behind.

It is indeed a fascinating never-ending, ever-changing workplace, with beauty and danger at every corner, variety almost beyond belief.

Canada moves by truck. If it's a mountain you want moved, it'll take time, but one day it'll be where you want it and truckers will have done it.

If you're interested in a job behind the wheel, contact the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council at www.cthrc.ca or write Ste 203, 720 Belfast Rd., Ottawa, ON, K1G 0Z5, phone 613-244-4800. Part of a series.



LAST COLUMN OF 2005

DECEMBER 21, 2005 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

A HAT FULL OF PROVERBS

Proverbs are the daughter of daily experience.

~ Chinese proverb

SOME GOLDEN RULES:

Buddhism - Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

Christianity - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Confucianism - Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

Islam - No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

Judaism - What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

- * Do more, talk less. ~ Jamaica
- * Hold a friend with both your hands.
- * I don't go to the bush to rough it, I go to smooth it!
- * Sweat never drowned no one. ~ Canadian Cowboy
- * He who chatters with you, will chatter of you.
~ Egypt
- * Praise loudly, blame softly.
- * Lonesome makes friends of strangers.
- * Square meals make round people.
- * The eye of a friend is a good looking glass.
- * Perhaps you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.
- * Shallow rivers and shallow minds freeze fast.
- * With all peoples and all beings, we shall be as relatives.
~ First Nations
- * No one can be wise on an empty stomach.
- * What I spent I had,
What I kept I lost,
What I gave I have.
~ Old epitaph
- * He who laughs - lasts!
- * Drowning your sorrows only irrigates them.
~ Yukon Cowboy

Here's to us that are here,
Here's to you that are there,
And here's the rest of us everywhere!
~ Newfie Toast

A Tip o' the Xmas Hat to you and yours! Everyone else too!

FIRST COLUMN OF 2006

JANUARY 11, 2006 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Call me an ogre ...

It's not the best way to begin a new year.
I'm an ogre!

An Ontario woman did it. She was chatting with a political guru and branded Stephen Harper an ogre with a hidden agenda. She also admitted, "I know nothing about Alberta; I've never been there."

A few days later, it hit me. I was born and brought up in the West (I'm using the word West inclusively to mean North as well). I married a western girl, raised a family, again in the West, continually revelling in the wonder of the space and magnificence of the West, have worn out a few western shirts, a turtleneck or two, and even a pair or two of 'cowboy' boots.

Male logic led me to the conclusion that, since Stephen Harper's background makes him an ogre, and mine parallels his somewhat, then I'm an ogre too.

Surely Canadian voters are more astute than that?

Surely the Canadian East-West / West-East thing is part of the past?

Surely Jack Layton and Paul Martin aren't ogres just because they were both born in Quebec, they carry a lot of eastern baggage, we don't know much about them since we rarely see them, and ... hmmm, I guess they are.

Okay let's agree we're all ogres, but we're Canadian ogres, eh?

Maybe it's time for all Canadians to gather at the river, stop mean-mouthing each other and remember what an incredible land we've inherited, and work together to make it even better than we received it.

You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do. (Henry Ford)

Digging in the ground ...

"Earth is so kind, that you just tickle her with a hoe and she laughs with a harvest," suggest D.W. Jerrold, playwright and humourist.

Now a hoe in the ground isn't farming, but it's an important beginning.

In the late eighties, a western wit suggested the latest form of abuse in Saskatchewan is farmers leaving their farms to their children. We often read of small towns and farms dying on the Prairies, so maybe he's on the mark, and that's a lot more worrisome than the reams of chatter about daycare, taxes, guns, same-sex marriage, visions, patriotism, separatism, because talk never put one plate of meat and potatoes on a table.

Only those who tickle the earth with a hoe can do that, so tell me how you're going to stop the exodus of farmers from the land, so I can keep buying the efforts of the muscles of their arms and keep our cupboards from going bare.

It's understandable, though - after all, there are only three people running if you use television as your political information source.

(I say three because Gilles Duceppe heads a provincial party, not a national party. His presence on the national stage is questionable, if not unconstitutional.)

The gurus tell me there are maybe 999 candidates out there, all of them, according to the big city press, facing the trials and tribulations of a typical Canadian winter: "ploughing through snowdrifts deep enough to cover a tall horse, and cold enough to frighten a brass monkey".

So it's a winter campaign, so what? Remember the humble words of veterans from the Second World War: "We had a job to do, and we went and did it."

(Besides, those aren't digitally enhanced photos showing the big three in gas-guzzling SUVs, luxurious buses and jet airplanes, now are they?)

In matters of principle, stand like a rock; in matters of taste, swim with the current. (Thomas Jefferson)

The last word ...

As a *tip of the hat* to candidates everywhere in the land, I present Teddy Roosevelt's admonition in tribute. It's a century old, and edited to meet the politically correct standards of our day:

"It is not the person who sits by the fireplace reading the evening paper and saying how bad our politics and politicians are, who will ever do anything to save us; it is those who go out into the rough, hurly-burly of the caucus, the hustings, the political meeting, and there faces their fellows on equal terms. The real service is not rendered by the critic who stands aloof from the contest, but by those who entered it and bear their part as a person should."

A tip of the hat to all the promises of vision, trust and tax bonuses the election is supposed to bring Canada and Canadians.

Oh, and enjoy your beer and popcorn as you count your tax blessings from whomever, and whenever, they come.



Apr. 12, 2006 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Wisdom from the young and the old, and in between ...

Teachers at an elementary school gave their Grade 2 students the first half of popular sayings and asked them to complete them:

Don't count your chickens — before you cook them.

Don't put all your eggs — in the microwave.

All's fair — in hockey.

If at first you don't succeed — go play.

People who live in glass houses — better not take off their clothes.

Our world media focuses on evildoers so much, it's easy to forget the wonderful world of the young and the old, and their affinity with one another.

Grandparents and grandchildren click, and I wonder if it isn't simplicity itself? Both groups can strip away the chrome and glitter of the material world, and look at it through eyes of simplicity.

Kids know, and take pleasure in the moment, licking an ice cream cone, smelling a flower, hugging a friend, kissing Mom and Dad goodnight, yet, somewhere along the trail to adulthood, we often let the world gloss over simplicity as if it were beneath us.

“Growing up,” is one cover we put on it, “adulthood” is another, and then when we're at the other end, like dormant seeds in the earth, if we let them, the magic of those moments blossom again.

Old George's story came from an old friend. It came through the old friend network, on the 'net.

It came to him from an old friend, who'd received it from an old friend, and so it's moving around the world, pleasuring most, although likely annoying the cynics.

George, 92-years-old, is a creature of habit, and a proud man. By 8 a.m., he's fully dressed looking as if he just stepped from the pages of an O.F. Fashion magazine even though he is legally blind.

His wife of 70 years had died, and he waited for hours in the lobby of his new home, a nursing home, as we like to call them.

He greeted the nurse who finally came with a big smile, and as he manoeuvred his walker to the elevator, she began describing his room.

"I love it," he said with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old with a new puppy.

"Mr. Jones, you haven't seen the room; just wait."

"That has nothing to do with it," he replied. "Happiness is something you decide ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on the furniture arrangement. It's how I arrange my mind. I've already decided to love it.

"It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do.

"Each day is a gift, and, as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away. Just for this time in my life.

"Old age is like a bank account. You withdraw from what you've put in. So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in the bank account of memories! I'm still depositing."

"I use five simple rules to be happy:

- 1) Free your heart from hatred;
- 2) Free your mind from worries;

- 3) Live simply;
- 4) Give more;
- 5) Expect less”

Some would call it hokey, eh? Well a tip of the hat to hokey.

It seems to me it's the same as the April sunshine we've been soaking in the past week or so. It sure puts everybody in a good mood.

Oh, and about simplicity, try this one on, see whom it fits: “All the truly deep people have at the core of their being the genius to be simple, or to know how to seek simplicity.

“The inner and outer aspects of their lives match; there is something transparent about them.

“They may keep the secret of this existence in a private preserve, but they are so uncluttered by any self-importance within and so unthreatened from without that they have what one philosopher called a certain ‘availability;’ they are ready to be at the disposal of others.”

And a Happy Easter 2 U 2.



MAY 3, 2006 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

“It's not our way, so it's the wrong way ...”

In the 19th century people living in industrial societies stuck up their noses at tribal peoples, and many of us still do. After all, many still live in tiny villages, don't use modern conveniences, continue ancient rituals and ignore modern science so, according to us, they're undeveloped, backward, and primitive. But, guess what, after only 100 years of 'intensive studying' many anthropologists have concluded, the only “primitive aspect of tribal societies is their technology.”

David Maybury-Lewis who headed one of the studies, believes tribal peoples adopt technological advances as readily, and as rapidly as we do. The difference, he says, is they keep their traditional life, their teachings, their principles, their morals, and their rituals unchanged.

(He's surely not implying if they had cars, they'd use cellphones sensibly and not kill themselves driving off the road while ordering a pizza?)

To illustrate he tells of a Xavante man (pronounced sha-van-tee), from a tribe in South America's Amazonian jungle. This Xavante man moved into Sao Paulo, a city of 13 million people.

A few years later he returned to his village of 300 people. His reason I've edited to fit: "People in my village know who they are, people in Sao Paulo, do not. People in the city do not respect women, we do. Women in my village walk unafraid of assault; husbands do not beat their wives. The whole village would know of such violence and would punish the offender. Children, and the elders, are not neglected nor abused here. The children know from birth they'll fill a role in the society when their time comes, and everyone in the village cares, teaches, and accepts responsibility for them. The elderly are treasured too, for their knowledge, experience and wisdom, and for bringing us to where we are today. Granny dumping doesn't happen here. "

How's that for some astute observing on the part of a "backward, primitive guy," eh?

Bottom line, according to the Maybury-Lewis and his team: Tribal wisdom teaches us to connect, and to stay connected, to our neighbours, and to our social responsibilities instead of sluffing it off on the "System."

The mounting complaints about our governing parties, our big business leaders, our justice system, even our sports and entertainment celebrities and the proliferation of chicken soup books, coupled with a growing fascination with ancient ways, tantras, and the like suggests we're in the market for something — something the Xavante people seem to have. Time is their friend. They walk from place to place, listening to the music of the Earth.

Time is our enemy; we dash from place to place in magnificent high-speed machines our ears plugged into the sounds of man, convinced they're better than the sounds of the Earth.

Yet when the machine stops we walk as they walk one step at a time, though we seldom walk slowly. A walk with the Xavante people seems to be in order.

Indeed it's encouraged — well, indirectly, in a book by Carl Honore. In the United States, its title is *In Praise of Slowness*; in the rest of the English-speaking world it's *In Praise of Slow*. Mr. Honore is a leader in something called *The Slow Movement*.

He quotes a senior manager at IBM who adds a rallying cry to his e-mails: "Read your mail just twice each day. Recapture your life's time and relearn to dream. Join the Slow E-mail Movement!"

Despite all our backward glances down the tunnels of past times, despite the fact that slow in our world is found only on school zones signs and the like, what we have this day is pretty hard to beat, even tho' May is giving us the cold shoulder.

A tip of the hat to we who are here, to those who are there, and to the rest of us everywhere. And a tip of the other hat to Today, another to all peoples of all the Yesterdays who brought us to this day, and this time. They were as wise as us, and we are as wise as they. Wisdom is like any good tool in skilled hands; the skill comes not from the hands, but from the head and the heart, and there are a lot of good heads and hearts around this place.

Tomorrow, well that's between you, me and the gate post I suppose. Have a good spring!



LAST COLUMN OF 2006

DECEMBER 20, 2006 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

A Merry Christmas to you and yours ... may the people under your roof never fall out, and may your roof never fall in

The freedom gift ...

It's Christmas, we're Canadian, and we're free!

Do gifts come any better than that?

The freedom gift came to us as a legacy from the people of our past; people we cannot thank, but can appreciate.

It is a generous legacy, one we need to hold as tenaciously as they have done. It was bequeathed to us to share with others, to cherish, to guard with our lives, as some do now. It is now our duty to pass it on to our children, if possible, better than it was given to us.

There is no gift card.

If there were, it would tell us their legends, their songs and their stories. Stories we should know, stories we should tell often together with songs of praise, for there were heroes and heroines among them. Their

tales are our tales, their fumbles and stumbles ours, and their random acts of kindness ours too. Helping they were, and hindering, hollering, howling, living, loving, booing, cheering, going to war in other lands, living and dying, the good and the bad mixed up like a dog's breakfast, just like us, bringing us to this day, sharing their inheritance of freedom. An inheritance cherished by many in our world, shared by too few.

It is a worthy gift. A gift to celebrate, and any time is a good time to remember them and their gift. How fortunate we are to have been born in this land, or to have emigrated here. Working together, we can live up to their legacy and return the gift.

Merry Christmas, Canada!

A Happy New Year. May your home be too small to hold all your friends!

May your favourite people, sights and sounds be with you this Season.

May the gifts you share individually be the equal of those we share collectively.

May the freedom we share on this continent spread everywhere.

May our troops at war be blessed with the luck of the Irish, and our continuing support, as they secure the gift of freedom.

FIRST COLUMN OF 2007

JANUARY 10, 2007 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Hands across our land ...

Meeting people from across Canada seemed like a fine way to begin a new year, even if only in print.

It's easy to do, with a selection of some of the 700-plus Canadian Community Newspapers from small towns and cities in all provinces and territories.

You can read about people who could be your neighbour, and in doing so you find, despite the vast geography of this place which helps keep us apart, you're also sharing similar community, territorial, provincial or national concerns.

It's a sense of sharing you'll not find in any other media, especially on national television, and in national newspapers.

For example, HELP FILL HANGERS was an attention-getting, front-page headline. The half-page colour photograph of a lady holding two empty coat hangers complemented it.

"The appeal is to make sure every kid in Leduc has a warm coat this winter," Linda Topping, chairperson of the local Kinette appeal, is quoted.

The article about their food bank on the Op-Ed pages of the Leduc Representative confirmed the need.

The other side of the coin came quickly enough. "Town Council Contemplates Hiking Pay" came from the next paper off the pile, the South Peace News. The subject surfaced in others too, telling us about the \$1,000 Christmas bonuses handed out by the Canadian Wheat Board "in recognition of the stress they have been under during the Winnipeg-based agency's fight with the federal government."

Although the Ontario MLAs topped the "be-kind-to-yourself" list, voting themselves a 25% raise on their second-last day of sitting, and then scampered off to celebrate Christmas.

To be fair, this is simply proof positive of the continually voiced need for us to pay big money to get big-thinking people to run big governments and big businesses for us, eh?

This money thing popped up quite regularly amidst local sports pages, the Alberta with more want ads than you could shake a stick at, and then a story in Saskatchewan's Shaunavon Standard stopped me, and my unscientific study, cold.

Buried in the back pages, an enterprising reporter introduced us to the story of a man who was “born to farm”. Here was just what the doctor ordered to kick a new year into high gear: an inspiring tale of a man and a woman.

John Iverson, the story begins, just completed his 76th harvest on his farm on the south Saskatchewan prairie.

Apparently John’s achievement came and went without fanfare, except for this half-page story in his local newspaper.

As the piece, without a byline, tells us: “He’s outlasted the Depression, world wars, 14 prime ministers and two pacemakers.

“Only recently did John begin curtailing his workload. He sold most of his cattle three or four years ago, but still maintains a small herd of five cows and five calves.

“I just got to the age where I couldn’t do as much as I used to,” he explained.

Last spring, he sold 21 quarters of his land, although he kept six quarters - half cultivated and half grassland - and harvested 104 hectares of wheat this past summer.

The secret of his longevity, he told the readers, is his wife Anna, who shared in every step of their work and journey together.

Now that’s a legacy, but it’s also a family farm that’s ... well, here’s John again: “At one time, I was hoping my son would stay on the farm, but I never said anything. It was up to him.”

“But when I look at things now, it’s just as well that he didn’t get involved. He made the right decision. It’s just too hard to make a living at farming these days. Grain prices are so low, and your costs are so high.”

While various magazines, newspapers and television networks seek men and women of the year to shower with accolades and brass statues, I nominate in their place this couple, and the thousands like them, who feed us.

I wonder where, and who, will control our food supply in coming decades when men and women like them are gone? I hope it’s still people like them, although I think they’d feel uncomfortable around a place so far removed from the land as a big boardroom table, although I’ll bet the decision would be people-oriented as well as money-oriented.

A tip of the hat to you, and to 2007. May you be lucky enough to meet people like John and Anna wherever you go, and may our leaders be inspired by, and listen to, people like them, the salt of the earth.

FIRST COLUMN OF 2008

JANUARY 9, 2008 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

A healthy, prosperous 2008 to Yukoners everywhere!

May your flight into the New Year be C A V U (ceiling and visibility unlimited)!

May you meet friends, new and old, wherever your journeys take you. May you meet more smiles than frowns, more appreciation than complaints, and may learning, laughter and love fill your time with others, and leave worry behind.

Friend Big Ray told me, "Worry is like a rockin' chair. It's something to do, but it don't get you nowhere!" He had a lot of rumblegumption, that fellow!

Rumblegumption is an old Scots word I stumbled on recently, and it's become an old friend too. Before falling out of favour, it described an essential, though endangered, characteristic ... common sense.

And farewell to 2007 ...

Memories of the old year are being tossed about by our pundits like voodoo witch doctors tossing chicken bones into the dust of the year, expecting answers to rise from that dust. All we get is more clicking of the bones, more chatter, and little or no answers to the problems, and the blessings, the year brought to our Canadian world.

The rest of us gather, feast, tell tales, raise our glasses in appreciation of the generous legacy we share together — a legacy as old as our land, and as new as yesterday's snow — memories of family, friends, neighbours and community.

Together they are our national memory! Individually, day by day, night by night, the peoples of the place past and present helped bring us to this time, and the bounty we share. A bounty we share not because of what we have done, but what those who have gone before us have done and given, and left in our care.

May our generosity in sharing equal theirs, and may we remain as steadfast as they in ensuring the foundations, traditions and stability they toiled, fought and died for to make Canada what it is, are passed on in total to generations intact.

It is their due, and our duty, eh?

Do not corner something you know is meaner than you! (a cowboy tip for '08).

What's next, eh?

A search, perhaps? A search for leaders with rumblegumption and a few more desirable characteristics: honesty, truth, just plain goodness; like old Santa's image, for starters.

Considering today's crop, writer David Brin, in the Bangladesh Daily Star, is likely closer to the mark when he gave us a new take on some old advice. "It is said that power corrupts," he wrote, "but actually it's more true that power attracts the corruptible."

Reminding us how small our global village is, and how intertwined we all are, he also left us another way to measure our choices if our federal leaders ever get with it and call an election. Let's get it done and get on with the rest of our lives.

Having said that, Cowboy Ray pulled my reins pretty hard with his proclamation: "The biggest troublemaker you'll probably ever have to deal with watches you from the mirror every mornin'!"

My friends bettered him with a birthday card announcing to me that, "On the day you were born, a thunderous, glorious voice sounded from Heaven above and proclaimed to the entire Earth below Oops!"

A tip of the hat to 2008, and Happy New Year everyone, especially those who sent the birthday card. It's a keeper, and so are you!

I hope everyone's 2008 year-end proclamation will not echo my "Oops!" But be an enthusiastic, "What a wonderful year!"



LAST COLUMN OF 2008

DECEMBER 17, 2008 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Dear Santa:

Christmas catalogues come in handy these days. They help us to describe clearly what we'd like you to bring us.

A fine plaque caught my eye in today's arrival. "Children are such a great way to start people," it read. I imagined it on my wall, but decided it's better in my head — it's priceless there, as priceless as children in a warm, loving home.

Our town is on the banks of a mighty fine river, a river that's a beautiful green colour in summer, though it's white now of course. One story tells us the town was only a tea stop for cheechakos heading downriver for gold. There were rapids upstream of town and it took some scary boat work to survive without losing yourself and your gear, so everyone stopped for tea to settle down once clear. Coffee breaks weren't even in the cards then; tea was the gold-trail drink, but only when you stopped.

We, all of us — business, financial, political and social leaders along with the ubiquitous taxpayer — have just come through heavy rapids ourselves, only they're economic, financial and political waters. Some were uncharted. Our leaders, too.

We're at a tea stop, or a Christmas tree stop, right now with a lot more rough economic, financial and political rapids ahead — so we could use some guidance.

We were wondering if you have some kind of Economic/Financial/Word GPS system to help guide us, and our leaders, too, since they're giving a great imitation of being as mixed up as a dog's breakfast!

This GPS system I'm on about would need a 'What we can do without' lesson since the pundits keep reminding us a taste of the Dirty Thirties is in the offing.

A heavy dose of common sense might be advised, including a clawback from overpaid CEOs even as our government claws back old age pensions from Canadians who planned ahead.

Living wisdom would be needed too, something like this: “To live content with small means, to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable and wealthy, not rich; to study hard, to think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to the stars and birds, to babes and sages, with open heart; to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasion, hurry never; in a word to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common. This is to be my symphony.”

This is old hat to you, it’s from the 18th century. William Channing, clergyman, penned it to outline a program of happiness. It’s still being passed around so has, like you, stood the test of time.

Say, have you noticed when times get tough we tend to lean on hokey, perhaps because it’s practical and down-to-earth? Spending lavishly like drunken sailors is gone with the wind, we’re told, so maybe the Anonymous folk have got it right with this little ditty. It might fit in the GPS too.

Share a little, strive a little
Care a little, thrive a little
Spend a little, save a little
Brave a little, bend a little,
Don’t belittle, don’t be brittle,
Take a little, give a little.

Thanks, Santa! Enjoy all those Christmas trees and lights! Your carbon footprint will be the envy of all!

A tip of the hat to you and yours, far and wide though they may be. When you open the curtains on the new year may life’s candles burn brightly and fully all year long, and may the words of long-ago Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, go with you along the trail of 2009: “Where you do not find love, put love — and then you will find love.”

FIRST COLUMN OF 2009

JANUARY 7, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Happy New Year to the 6,722,318,700 of us on the planet at 13:50, 5-1-09, and to the 122,231 who join us daily according to the World Clock by poodwaddle.com.

“The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early hour. Now is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will. Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still.” (Robert H. Smith, 1932)

Happy Belt-Tightening 2009 ...

Shirley sent a card with some hope in it. It read:

A gentle word

Like summer rain

May soothe the heart

And banish the pain.

A mom added another dimension of hope to that thought when her wee lass asked, “Mom, what’s a good life, and how do you get it?”

“When you’re young,” Mom replied, “life is like a garden with nothing in it, but with every kind deed, every loving thought you plant another flower in your garden, and the more you plant the brighter and lovelier your garden becomes.”

Some pretty fine thoughts to kick the New Year into gear, wrapped up by 18th-century economist Adam Smith when he asked, “What can be added to the happiness of a person who is in health, out of debt and has a clear conscience?”

Reality predictions for 2009 say thousands of Canadians would reply firmly to Adam, “A job!”

And therein lies the rub; our financial, business and political elite are telling us our red carpet lifestyle may soon fade to grey — well for us, not for them. Our political party leaders did “protest too much” in their pre-Christmas holiday parliamentary charades. They surely dashed out hopes

of parliamentary maturity, which we expected upon learning parliamentary practices are 700 years old.

Grasping for their share of the voter-dole, they dashed our hopes they would earn their own way, as we must. Could this not cause more taxpayer belt-tightening, which could tip the scales putting us into Grandma's Bread Pudding Times. (Just her way of saying the "D" word!) The period of history where Fats Domino was heard to say, "A lot of fellows nowadays have a B.A., an M.D. or a Ph.D.; unfortunately they don't have a J.O.B."

The D word is definitely partnered with the A word in the seldom mentioned category. Depression, and accountability are words you'll not be hearing from the lips of those who'd have no truck at all, at all, with the thought that success is to do more for the world than the world does for you.

They're easily recognized — they're the people stepping from chauffeur-driven limos onto red carpets, with their hands out, only the tin cup is missing, while their lips are muttering, "bail-out billions if-you-please, Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer!"

But not to worry, the experts are assembling; the bureaucrats are bureaucratizing and bread pudding recipes are being dug out of the trunk. Hope springs eternal. We hope that Obama fellow south of the 49th hasn't cornered all hope; he sure brought it front and centre, and, without question, it's in big demand.

A tip of the hat to all the men and women, who are behind the scenes all the time at fire halls, police stations, airports, on road crews and in tow trucks, and all those I've missed, keeping us safe, warm and cozy in our homes and cars. A second *tip of the hat* to those who bring them, and us, all the supplies, tools, and goodies we need ... those indispensable Santa's helpers, the long-haul truckers. Where would we be without them all in this frigorific weather?

p.s. Linda sent me a bread pudding recipe from - where else - an Irish cookbook, which begins, "to make pudding, combine raisins (1/2c) and whiskey (1/2c) and let soak an hour." If we're about to have bread pudding days, how's that for a start?

Keep well, especially Canadian Armed Forces men and women at war the world over. Our hope is that all may come home safe to a grateful nation.



SEPTEMBER 23, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Chaos and the Butterfly Effect

It was a neat idea: the choir entered from the back of the church, singing as they walked up the aisle single file. At the front of the church, they passed over a wooden checkerboard-style floor vent.

A few members of the choir had passed over it without mishap, when one of the ladies' high heels caught in the vent. The quick-thinking lady slipped the shoe off her foot and walked on without missing a note.

The quick-thinking man behind her reached down, grabbed the shoe and walked on without missing a note, but missed the fact that the shoe and the wooden grate were still together, and in his hand.

Head held high, concentrating on his high notes, without missing a note, the next man disappeared into the hole left by the missing grate.

This inconsequential event, except for the poor chap who disappeared before the congregation's very eyes, is an example of the Chaos Theory, a true scientific theory out of which, if I've got it right, came the thought that the flapping of a butterfly's wings somewhere in the world can cause a tornado somewhere else.

The Chaos Theory relates to "some nonlinear, dynamic systems that exhibit apparently erratic or random behaviour even though the system has limits and contains no random variables."

A recession example of this butterfly effect, an expert tells us, is the housewife cleaning the fridge, when her child trips over a toy and hurts herself. She goes to help and leaves the fridge door open. It's a very hot day, the child's injuries need more attention, the fridge is open for hours, breaks down and the family needs a new one. To get funds for a new fridge, they decide to add some home repairs, so they sell off a large chunk of IBM stock from her parents' wedding present.

By chance, at the moment she sells the stock, a market specialist sees her sale and gets it into his head that the sale of a large chunk of stock means something; so he follows suit, selling off his stock in the tech sector. A financial reporter sees both sales, interprets it and reports that it

must reflect a shortage of silicon and suggests investors unload their tech stocks immediately. Many stockholders follow his advice, and a massive sell-off takes place... The butterfly effect at work in the recession.

Tracing the origin of a popular quotation into the realm of science was a new experience for us, and we found that a scientist named Edward Lorenz is credited with its origin. The story told is that he was using a numerical computer model in 1961 to rerun a weather prediction when, as a shortcut on a number in the sequence, he entered the decimal .506 instead of entering the full .506127 the computer would hold. The result was a completely different weather scenario.

He published his findings in a 1963 paper for the New York Academy of Sciences, noting that "One meteorologist remarked that if the theory were correct, one flap of a seagull's wings could change the course of weather forever." As is the way of our world, it was dressed up to the more poetic butterfly, becoming "A butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil sets off a tornado in Texas." — or a version thereof.

"Hey, that's a bit of alright!" Stan commented. "That chaos/butterfly-effect thing is the first scientific principle I've wrapped my head around, I got it right away: I see it every day in Question Period!"

If butterfly wings can cause a tornado somewhere else in the world, I wonder what our official birds can do?



SEPTEMBER 30, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

ANONYMOUS ...

Anonymous said, "Words slip easily from the tongue. Think well before you let them go." Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff let some go earlier this week saying they were tired of game playing. So are we! Next he moved a vote of non-confidence, while Jack (Jack-in-the-box) Layton jumped on the support bandwagon, balancing the scales, I guess.

Oh well, what can we expect, even Anonymous is game playing, but his, her, or their words are from an internetter claiming to be he, she, or it. His, her, or their Google site, one of 146,000,000, says that, "Anonymous, in addition to being responsible for 85 per cent of all quotes ever made, is the source of 91 per cent of all internet truth and justice, and 33.33, repeating of course, daily dosages of Vitamin B."

That was enough; we turned to books, where it's still easier to find stuff.

The first story took us to Sunday School where the lesson was about Jonah and the whale. "So what does the story teach us?" the teacher asked.

Little Johnny, as quick as a wink, answered, "You can't keep a good man down."

The whale perspective, much like ours on elections, is poles apart, so we went forward, learning from Anonymous, that random acts of kindness are still on.

An elderly lady paused in front of a flower shop admiring a tiny bouquet of violets in the window. She looked in her purse, closed it and walked on. A young man standing nearby noticed, dashed into the store, bought the bouquet and gave them to the lady, hearing the startled thank you as he dashed away. "It was wonderful," she told a friend, "for a few moments it made me feel quite young again."

A random kindness for Canadian voters could be stability in governing, eh?

Back to Sunday School, or is that where we are? Anyway, teacher was on about the weekly offering, asking the class for verses of scripture about giving. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," said one girl, followed by a boy with "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and Little Johnny, still there, wrapped it up with, "A fool and his money are soon parted."

For the disillusioned teacher, Anonymous wrote: "I see children as kites. You spend years trying to get them off the ground. You run with them until you are both breathless ... they crash ... they hit a rooftop ... you patch, comfort and assure them that one day they will fly.

"Finally they're airborne. They need more string, and you keep letting it out, but with each twist of the ball of twine sadness comes with the joy.

"The kite becomes more distant and you know it won't be long before that beautiful creature will snap the lifeline that binds you together and will soar, as they are meant to soar – free and alone. Only then do you know your job is done."

Until, of course, that wondrous day they come home with grandchildren.

Grandparents, still hung up on manners, would want to take Sarah under their wing on hearing the tale of her first Sunday school.

The question for the class was, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Sarah's answer brought smiles: "An angel." Pleased, teacher asked why.

"So I can fly around and drop water bombs on people I don't like," she said emphatically.

Thanks to Sarah from Canadian voters; water bombers unite!

Ah, but seriously, tomorrow is another day, and here, a wish from Anonymous:

"The joy of the morning to you. Ahead of you is a magical 24 hours of new life to be filled by YOU. It is yours, and yours alone. A precious possession. No one can take it from you – it is unstealable. What's more, no one receives more, nor less, than you. How's that for equality?"

Unstealable? This Anonymous lost the spelling bee, but the anonymous Scotsman may win your heart with his toast, his way, in his lingo: May the best ye've ever seen, be the warst ye'll ever see!

A tip of the hat to friendly Anonymouses! And to you too!
Enjoy our white season!



OCTOBER 7, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Tether, tethered, tethering ...
How wrong can you be?

Tethering, which my limited knowledge thought was very old, and in dictionary terms: "a cord that anchors something, such as an animal or child, to something else, such as a pole."

That was in once-upon-a-time land; B.E., Before Electronics, when our society has achieved phenomenal new heights in tethering, especially Lawn Chair Larry, who was happily tethered while he took the first steps toward his boyhood desire to fly.

Dreaming after retirement, in his favourite lawn chair he'd named Inspiration, it's told by the Darwin Awards folks, he hatched his scheme to achieve his goal. He bought 45 four-foot-diameter weather balloons, filled them with helium, tied them to Inspiration, which was securely tethered to his Jeep. He strapped himself in, with his Miller Lite, a passel of sandwiches, a descent control, his pellet gun, and had friends cut the tether.

His calculation that he'd drift lazily into the sky, nibbling on his sandwiches, sipping his Miller Lite, enjoying the scenery, was more than a bit off. Apparently, he went skyward as if shot from a cannon. He'd calculated he'd level off at 100 feet; he didn't. He was still rocketing skyward at 5,000 feet, finally levelling off at 16,000 feet.

Afraid to use his descent control, lest he plummet to earth like a rock, he apparently drifted around for 14 hours before deciding he had no choice but to shoot some balloons.

He did. It worked!

He landed on some power lines, then into the arms of waiting policemen,. The US Federal Aviation Agency plodded through their books for flying lawn chairs to find how many flight laws he'd broken, including crossing Los Angeles International's primary approach. They came up with a \$1,500 fine, and grounded lawn chair Inspiration. As he was led away, a reporter asked him why. "A man can't just sit around," he nonchalantly replied. I suppose we can take a lesson about cutting tethers from Larry, although the one that comes immediately is he and his beer were cool for a toast to his survival.

We, tether masters for centuries, have willingly become the tethered. Unlike the creatures we've tethered, most seeking freedom, we seek electronic tethering with the same zeal as our youth. A 17-year-old electronically tethered fan is quoted in last November's Globe and Mail, "I'd rather be stabbed than give up my iPod."

Reflection suggested that, in our rule-ridden world there'd be tethering rules, so from my electronic tether I sought and chose the first, a tetherers' code from the State of Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, Australia.

It was the basics of domestic creature tethering, perhaps as old as the hills, but still in use. It said, "This Code has been developed to assist

people to tether animals correctly when circumstances make it a necessary method of confining and protecting animals, and the rules are: “Tethering exposes creatures to increased risk of stress, injury or death,” the Aussies wrote. “They may be unable to avoid predators; they may be unable to obtain sufficient exercise; they may be isolated from their companions,” and “they should be inspected and exercised twice daily. The amount of exercise should be appropriate to the species and to the age, health, working status of the individual.”

Ah well, tethering may be as old as Methuselah, but its rules appear far from outdated. A tip of the hat to tethers, old, new, and the most fascinating of all, invisible tethers. Gravity tethers us to the earth, survival tethers us to the land, and love tethers us to our family, our homes, our communities and our country.

Oh, Lawn Chair Larry’s ‘flight’ got him an honourable mention in the 1982 Darwin Awards, but a tip of the hat to him too, for reminding us that everyone has a purpose, and perhaps his was to set an example to the rest of us what not to do in a lawn chair, and take care which tether you cut.

You have to wonder if, perhaps, Larry was an aficionado of Horace, poet and satirist, 65-8 BCE, and lived by one of his mottos: “He who postpones the hour of living is like the rustic who waits for the river to run out before he crosses.”

Keep well!



OCTOBER 14, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Once upon a time, a man said to me, “I could write a column like yours, you often use other people’s words.” I agreed. I have not been everywhere, man, I have not read it all, heard it all nor seen it all.

And, we must not forget, everyone is unique. There is no other human being like you. Millions have two eyes, a nose, a mouth, but not like you. None have your traits, none think like you and none speak like you. Your individuality is your one unique possession, and your only real claim to importance.

Think for yourself is a motto to help achieve, and maintain, our uniqueness.

Will and Ariel Durant's *Story of Civilization* was a good start, well, actually ending, for in their brief summary of what they discovered after studying and writing about the world's people, came this thought-provoking observation:

“What we are up against is the simple fact that man is still an animal. That is the deepest thing in his nature – the survival instinct and the hunting instinct. Those were necessary at one time. When self-preservation was the rule, rather than the pressures of society. So morality has an uphill battle against these two inheritances. You have to recognize the enormous difficulty in making an animal and hunter into a citizen, a civilized man.” All of which may play into our search for the good life, which Marya Marmes has observed, “The good life exists only when you stop wanting a better one. It is the condition of savouring what is, rather than longing for what might be. The itch for things so brilliantly injected by those who make and sell them is, in effect, a virus draining the soul of contentment.

“A man never earns enough; a woman is never beautiful enough; clothes are never new enough; the house is never finished enough; the food is never fancy enough.

“There is a point at which salvation lies in stepping off the escalator – of saying, Enough! What I have will do. What I make of it is up to me!”

And, about the children in our lives, Dr. William J. Riley suggests, “If we were to begin, even in grade school, to teach everyone the simple lessons of human relations – just as we teach reading, writing and arithmetic, it would have a profound effect on the world we live in. This task represents perhaps the greatest challenge which education faces today and in centuries to come.”

And, about adults, consider, “A man may hide himself from you, or misrepresent himself to you in every other way, but he cannot do so in his work. His imagination, his perseverance, his impatience, his clumsiness, his cleverness, everything is there to be seen in a man's work. For example, if stonework is well put together it means a thoughtful man planned it, a careful man cut it, and an honest man cemented it.”

I cite, in closing, from an old tale.

“All my life,” he said, “I have searched for the treasure. I have sought it in the high places and in the narrow. I have sought it in the deep jungles, and at the ends of rivers, and in dark caverns and yet have not found it.

“Instead, at the end of every trail, I have found you awaiting me. And now you have become familiar to me, though I cannot say I know you well. Who are you?”

And the stranger answered, “Thyself.”

Finally, something to think about from one of my favourites, Chief Dan George:

Keep a few embers

From the fire

That used to burn in your village.

Someday

So all can gather again

And rekindle a new flame

For a new life in a changed world.

A tip of the hat to everyone involved in our municipal elections, from the scrutineers to the candidates and all in between.

See you at the polls!



OCTOBER 21, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Therapy here, therapy there, therapy, therapy everywhere ...

The following e-mail came last week, part of an ongoing flow of such stuff if you're 'net-bound. The amount we receive suggests there's a crying need for laughter, since the world is no laughing matter.

“Life is short! Break the rules! Forgive quickly! Kiss slowly! Love truly! Laugh uncontrollably, and never regret anything that made you smile!”

Limericks used to make us smile, but they're gone, it seems. Here's one:

As a beauty I'm not a great star;

Others are handsomer by far;

But my face – I don't mind it,

Because I'm behind it;

It's the folks out in front that I jar!

Bumper stickers are on the way out too, along with bumpers, and even laughter seems to be in trouble. On the all-knowing internet we stumbled onto laughter therapy. Back in the old days, Dino's wisdom was all the

therapy we got: an aptly thrown cup and saucer is cheaper than any other form of therapy.

Introspective Laughology is where laughter therapy is found. Laughercizing is the exercise portion of the therapy. It apparently follows this line of thought: Eye contact, combined with smiling, naturally produces laughter in a relaxed environment. With exercise, your laughter comes easier, gets stronger and lasts longer. The advice continues, telling us that human contact produces hilarity. And get this: One laugh leads to many using the natural principle of contagious laughter.

Not surprising in this era when we study studies to find out if we need a study, the laughologists had one too, a scientific study, which concluded that laughing for 20 minutes has the same benefit as 20 minutes of intense aerobic exercise. That sure beats my dust-covered exercise machine. But we didn't need laughercizing, we had Jack.

Jack was our bush camp humorist who claimed he got a job with a lumber outfit felling trees back in the '50s.

"Where'd you learn to chop down trees?" asked the boss.

"In the Sahara."

"There's no trees in the Sahara."

"Nope," said Jack, "not now there ain't."

He got the job because the guy liked someone with a spontaneous sense of humour.

All this expertise about everything, which is now available on the all-knowing 'net, is all well and good, although Jack was better. He absorbed, remembered and spouted stories better than a tape recorder, and he had the pizzazz machines never do. Most bush camps had need of fellows like that; why, he even remembered graveyard visits, bringing back humour from there too.

"Here lies the body of Bob Dent.

He kicked up his heels and to Hell he went."

Jack claimed that's where he, too, was headed, but none of us would buy that either. An evening with Jack, or his counterpart, had all the elements in the laughology advice, plus an element no one can duplicate – friendship. He'd beat today's TV comedians hands down; he had no need of bedroom sports events to keep us in stitches. And, in all those years,

we never thanked him for his therapy sessions. It was his gift to us. And neither of us knew.

Dare I call it friendship therapy? Anyway, it's been around a lot longer than the internet, or many of these apparently new forms of therapy, which are popping out of our electronic communications gizmos faster than popcorn coming from a popcorn popper.

Amy Wilson reminded me of another form of therapy in her book *No Man Stands Alone*. She wrote: "In the vastness and solitude that only the Far North knows, one feels the kinship with all men and living things. Here I learned much about the true brotherhood of man."

A day in the bush smoothing it, not roughing it, and an evening with a storyteller with that special, indefinable gift of pizzazz, is still the ultimate therapy and it, too, seems to be becoming rare, and more's the pity, as Grandma always said.

A tip of the hat to Amy Wilson, laughologists, and the various forms of therapy, but a special nod to the best therapy of all: family, friends and that most therapeutic place of all, home!



OCTOBER 28, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Meet Amy Wilson ...

"We filled our government car, a 1949 Chevrolet, with supplies until the doors would barely close. Everything had to be in its exact place or we couldn't have closed them at all. We checked over everything: shovel, axe, towing rope, extra gas and oil, spare fan belt, car tools, two sleeping bags, Coleman lamp and stove, two medical bags, one small suitcase each, and most important of all, toxoid."

The car, later dubbed by highway people, "the mercy car," was driven by registered nurses Amy Wilson and Aileen Bond, Alaska Highway Nurses, Department of National Health and Welfare, reporting to the Regional Superintendent of Indian Health Services, Edmonton, as they began Operation Toxoid in February 1949.

Their heroic road journey was initiated several weeks earlier with a call for help to her Whitehorse office from Hudson Hope, 1,450 kilometres south. She caught the midnight flight, a five- or six-hour journey, to Fort St. John. She drove to Dawson Creek for additional medicine, drove 240 kilometres farther north to the Sikanni Chief area, then a 40-kilometre sleigh ride to a First Nation village where their worst fears were confirmed – it was diphtheria.

Back to Whitehorse, preparation, planning and Operation Toxoid began. Their assignment: the immediate immunization of everyone along the Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek to at least as far as Whitehorse. Getting there was a major part of the operation, as was the medicine itself. “The toxoid,” she tells us, “was the bane of our existence during the next few weeks. It mustn’t get too hot or it would lose its potency. It mustn’t get too cold or the fragile glass containers would break. We cared for that box as though it contained a premature baby.”

But she qualified those concerns: “Oh, that life-giving toxin!” she noted, “It seems so wonderful to us who have been trained in its use, but how much more wonderful must it seem to someone who has never heard of it.”

The mettle of these women is illustrated in her comments about their car, which they loved. Shovelling and pushing were common, and when the gas line froze, “we unhooked it at the engine head, then with a catheter attached to a syringe, squirted ether into it. That dissolved the ice and we were on our way.”

“By the middle of March,” she wrote in her book *No Man Stands Alone*, everyone along the highway between Dawson Creek and Whitehorse had been protected against diphtheria.”

Donald R. McLaren, bush pilot, Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, wrote in the flyleaf of her book: “*No Man Stands Alone* is a fascinating story. It has a true title, for no man can stand alone in the north for long. In the Cree language, ‘Muskeekie Iskwao mitone sakehikoowisew’ (“the district nurse is greatly beloved”). She deserves the praise and gratitude of the whole nation.”

The whole nation didn’t recognize her, but her peers did, and quickly. “Early in April 1950,” she wrote, “Miss Bond and I were called to Victoria to attend a convention of Public Health Workers. There we were each

presented with a specially struck medal and a Citation. The writing on both read “For Distinguished Service.”

“We felt proud but very humble, for we knew that equally deserving of those honours were the men who, with no thought of self, had provided us with transportation and shelter – who had fully lived up to the interpretation of ‘Men of the North.’ We never stood alone.”

There’s a lot of fuss made constantly, to the point of tiresome, of “celebrities” in our society. They’re touted as if they are the be-all, and end-all, the very foundation of our society. In my reality they’re more like the chrome on our car, a bit of flash, but it doesn’t help it perform any better.

It’s people with work ethics and dedication matching Amy Wilson and Aileen Bond who are our true foundations and keep our society performing and running smoothly. Her thoughts this week, and in last week’s column, are indicative that she and Aileen Bond were two true celebrities of our time.

A tip of the hat to all caregivers in all disciplines in our world. Conditions are obviously better than the good old days, but the dedication of our regular heroes keep our standards high.



NOVEMBER 4, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

That winsome little face!

"Who are you?" I looked up from my tea cup to see a young girl standing in front of me, beside the table I was sitting at in the Big River gas station coffee shop.

"I'm Tom," I told her, and whoooosh ...

I was suddenly transported back to another time, to a place far away.

April 14, 1944, Bombay Harbour, India, in Alexandra Dock, a tidal harbour. We were having early lunch, prior to moving ship at noon; our ship was to

lock out into the harbour proper by 1 p.m. to catch sufficient water depth on the lock sill.

We were just finishing lunch when the dock fire alarm started, in the days of hand-loading of ships a fairly common occurrence, but quickly and efficiently handled.

The fire engine drew up alongside the Fort Stikine directly across the dock from us – she had a light plume of smoke rising from her No. 2 hold, but everyone aboard seemed to be handling the situation. She didn't even fly the "Red Square," a fire warning flag for ships carrying dangerous cargo. The lock area was surrounded by large, shady trees, and amongst the trees stood a terrace of houses, probably occupied by dock officials. Taking their breeze from the large Bombay harbour, they must have been in tremendous contrast to their hot, dusty, and noisy surroundings.

One house, closest to our ship, had a small white picket fence; inside the fence stood a very, very young sari-clad little girl, attended by an Indian nurse. This child possessed the often achingly beautiful features of the Parsee, or Anglo-Indian. Little more than perhaps 1.5 years old, she'd obviously grown used to the procession of ships and was able to "work" them for every smile going.

It was a poignant moment, greatly affecting, particularly to those who may not have seen their own families for two or three years. Anyway, she worked each ship from bow to stern as it slowly locked through.

Clearing the lock, we moved down-harbour about a quarter-mile, and anchored to wait our turn to go alongside Ballard Pier to embark Indian troops for the Burma front.

I was taking a walk around the foredeck with our Trooping Adjutant, Captain Soames, when we noticed that the fire in the dock was still there and appearing much worse.

While watching it, Capt. Soames, who knew his explosives, said "Get down, quick!" and we huddled under an adjacent gun mounting. He'd seen the flames turn a yellow-brown colour and, almost immediately, there was a large gush of very hot air and the whole area was rained on by small debris mixed with specks of blood and flesh. This was followed by a cloud

of acrid black smoke, which literally turned day into night and persisted for many hours.

About an hour later, there was another gigantic explosion and, shortly afterwards, the smoke temporarily thinned to allow a glimpse of fires throughout much of the dock system.

Manning the radio room, we found that all anchored ships were to stay put and embarkation at Ballard Pier cancelled until further notice ... this before the widespread availability of radar.

Being an Indian trooper, I remember the officers' steward, Sebastian, doggedly bringing the tray to my cabin and also to the adjoining radio room for the operators on duty; Sebastian was wearing his gas mask instead of gasping in short breaths like the rest of us. I wondered, "Why the hell didn't I think of that?" After tea we tried it, but found it very uncomfortable and over the next few hours used our masks sporadically. There were occasional small explosions throughout the night, which we later found were deliberate and controlled by many engineers, the water system being almost obliterated and fires in this hot, dry climate out of control. They averted further catastrophe by stopgaps at critical points to contain the fires.

I remember going on watch at 4 a.m. the next morning ... a bright, sparkling morning with smoke abated. I then looked toward the dock area, still smoking with the utter destruction.

It was then that I thought of the little girl and looked towards that area.

The trees were gone, houses gone, lock gates gone and the remains of ships in haphazard positions sitting on the dock bottom, drained of water.

I could only pray that it was swift for her ... but I still see, and always will, that winsome little face.

By Thomas W. Robinson, September 1995, Big River, Saskatchewan.

War at work.

Lest we forget.



DECEMBER 9, 2009 - RAMBLING BY DOUG BELL

Dear Santa:

You're coming soon, boy what a mess I'm in, shopping's not done and we're all out of vin; cookie jar's empty; the turkey truck's stuck in the snow and we've nowhere else to go.

Sorry to ramble on Santa, but that's what I do. Do you suppose a 1930s Depression tactic might help us recover from the recession? Remember it, asking everyone what they can do without?

I can do without electric razors to shave underwater, pens that write in space and distant European relatives burning tons of good oil to gather in the thousands like migrating birds, screeching and hollering at us about our "bad" oil, before the "democratic" debate begins.

I suppose we've entered the realm where every story has three sides, yours, mine, and the facts. Sorry for the digression Santa, and I do have a request: I wonder, could you give them some brooms to sweep their own doorsteps first? Oh, and on the broom handles maybe print the Christian tenet, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Ah, but I'm off track, it is the time of goodwill, and the holders of lots of good will are usually children, children with a message they often don't know they're carrying. This year it's Danielle. Mom and Dad promised her a Christmas puppy, and so Mom took her to the animal shelter to choose one in need of a home.

"We've been back a half dozen times," Mom told the volunteer, "and she keeps saying she's looking for puppy size. I'm so frustrated."

Danielle had been in the back where the puppies lived, still looking. She returned, saying no size. Mom and Dad were ready to give up but agreed to a final try. Cradling pup after pup in her arms she came to the last one, cradled him in her arms and shouted with joy, "Mom, I found the right puppy, it's the puppy sigh."

"But it's the same size as all those you've looked at," puzzled Mom replied.

“No, Mom, not the size, the sighs, when I held him in my arms, he sighed. Don’t you remember? When I asked you one day what love is, you told me love depends on the sighs in your heart, the more you love the bigger the sigh. When I held him in my arms, he sighed. You see, Mom, he loves me. I heard the sighs in his heart.”

The two women looked at one other knowing their thoughts were the same: “And a little child shall teach them.”

And one did!

A long, long time ago.

Is it time to remember, and to join Danielle and her puppy and sigh, collectively?

We also should remember the other Santas we can’t do without, all year long. They’re on the road again, and again and again, day and night, hot, cold, wet, windy, blizzards, weekends, holidays, whenever, wherever, whatever and however they’re on the road. If they weren’t, we’d be cold, hungry and walking.

A tip of the Christmas hat to all the truckers on the road, any time of the year, and another tip of the holiday hat to all their support staff who keep them rolling.

Where would we be without them?



LAST RAMBLING COLUMN EVER

DECEMBER 23, 2009 - BY DOUG BELL

Some of our favourite things ...

Swans in the spring, robins in summer,
Geese in the fall and ravens in winter –
These are some of our favourite Yukon things.

Grayling a'leap in the river, spiralling upward through waters as clear as the air, taking your Royal Coachman to become an evening feast. Accompanied by a chorus of crackling wood, snow-white grayling sizzling in bacon fat, wood smoke drifting lazily into the silence of the midnight sun – where only a loon's call, or a wolf's howl is allowed for Yukon friends sharing the night know talk would break the spell. How could sharing the spell and such a summer night not become a favourite thing?

Come the time brother Ross called the “white time;” memory gives them back when we tell the stories, embellished, just like our weather, raven, moose, berry and bear memories, as we linger in our winter solitude.

Friends who share the spell are those who do “little things,” you know, a call to ask what luck you had in finding the thingamajig you were searching for while lost in the big-box store, or the faraway friend calling to wish you a merry one, checking how-ya-doin', reminding you talking's better than a card or an e-mail these days, eh?

Shucks, even those who tell you where to go says you're part of their thoughts, and that's surely a favourite place to be ... well, at least it is to me. Like George, I don't think he was talking about us when he observed, “Do you remember, it was once a northern thing, the people who were going were the people you wish were coming, and the people coming were the people you wished were going.”

Now we say that about stores!

Friends and their ideas are favourites all year, but become treasures, hopefully not forgotten treasures, this time of year.

And is there any among us who wouldn't include the explanations of the imaginative minds of children as treasures among our favourite things?

They often explain exotic matters, such as six-year-old, straight to the point, Jack, telling us, "Angels don't eat, but they drink milk from Holy Cows."

Or philosophical nine-year-old Ashley, describing them thus: "My angel is my grandmother who died last year. She got a big head start on helping me when she was still down here on Earth."

Whereas five-year-old Gregory says, a tad sadly, "I only know the names of two angels, Hark and Herald."

Children know angels and they occasionally are, suggests John Bowring, who tends to agree with Ashley, telling us, "A happy family is but an earlier heaven."

We would also agree with Anonymous too: "Families are like fudge, mostly sweet with a few nuts."

Between those two views lies more versions and variety than stars in the sky.

'Tis interesting, is it not, that many civilizations have disappeared beneath the sands, but the foundation of these civilization, families, remain as vibrant, as plentiful and as exciting as ever, and is why family is our very favourite thing. The reason may be, as Marquise de Sevigne succinctly puts it, "We cannot destroy kindred; our chains stretch a little sometimes, but they never break."

Family, at least in Canada's geography, seems to be always saying goodbye, but there's consolation in the thought that we never leave someone behind, we take part of them with us and maybe leave a bit of you with them.

Oh, and should you wonder why the little angels don't stay angels, nine-year-old Matthew's analysis might help. "It's not easy to become an angel. First you die, then you go to Heaven, and then there's still the flight training to go through and then you got to agree to wear those angel clothes." His friend Antonio wrapped that up, telling us, "All angels are girls because they gotta wear dresses and boys didn't go for it."

A tip of the hat to children, to angels, to families and friends the world over and, despite our current bad press, all our children and all our families can rest easy, and be assured Canada is still the best place in the world to live, bar none!

* * *

Douglas Leslie Dewey Bell

1926-2021

Greatly Loved and Deeply Missed by All Who Knew Him