

It must be an age thing



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With all of the antics of the two major public figures in our lives reaching a level of hysteria in the National media perhaps it is time to examine our attitudes toward them, and ourselves. I don't think that there is a person in this country that does not have an impression about the present Mayor of Toronto or the Prime Minister. Whatever one's politics it would be fair to say that everybody has an opinion of them. Whether it's about their politics, we'll leave that alone in this column, or about the way they has been behaving while they have been the Mayor and PM for the past many years. Making a list of his - Rob Ford's - known and reported public transgressions is not hard. He has been reported to have been seen drunk in public, insulting ethnic minorities, consorting with known criminals and gang members and generally behaving badly.

But therein lies the rub. What is behaving badly? And can one behave badly enough to get thrown out of office. The big question here and it has not been answered to the satisfaction of the general public (if it had the question would have been settled) - what kind of behaviour do we expect from our public figures; be they politicians, rock stars or hockey players? Because if we don't know what to expect then we muddle on, as we have been doing for the last few months tut-tutting to ourselves and musing aloud "just what can we do?"

Older people, throughout the ages -from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Victorians have despaired about the behaviour of the Youth in our midst. The older demographic have been the wearers of that despair since the days of rock'n roll, and before that the jazz era. So who is it for us to decry the antics of the generations below us? But the appalling behaviour of our public figures, this year, has really pushed us into a corner. Some may think it is hypocritical of us, as elders, to even question modern norms considering that we changed so many of them in our younger days.

But enough is enough!

It's time to take a stand - bad behaviour by Public Figures has to be recognised and rectified. Unfortunately the stand against bad public behaviour by public figures appears to be an age thing. Generations younger than ours see nothing wrong with the Prime Minister standing up in Parliament and not telling the "truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth". He is forgiven and given a pass on that type of bad behaviour, "because all politicians do it!" Mayor Ford gets a pass because, "what he does in his private life is nothing to do with me" Try explaining that his private life is so scurrilous that it offends many people and those people are written off as being out of touch. This inter-generational difference in the way we do things hits home almost every time we see our offspring and progeny while they raise their children. Even when we have the temerity to say to our children and grandchildren that perhaps they might do things a different way the common response to us is always - "Oh Grandma we don't do that any more." So much for the transfer of wisdom.

So the modern question of this month is simple, "How do we enforce a code of conduct on public figures when that code of conduct is not written down." It is no longer acceptable to treat our leaders as members of the Gentry who are expected to know when their behaviour is bad enough to be unacceptable by the general public. Because they don't and apparently never will. As my neighbour sighed and said, "They don't know it's not cricket." But even Cricket these days is suffering through a spasm of ungentlemanly behaviour. This issue is not academic, even in Cobourg. Just this month we have seen the Cobourg Council introduce a very wishy-washy code of conduct. The question to them would be not be; "what is this?" But "why do we need it?" In a lot of people's minds their code is totally unrealistic as it does not define bad behaviour, beyond vague statements and platitudes and has no teeth. So amoral people will still ignore codes of conduct as they are totally unaware that they have transgressed.

But to get back to the main statement in this column it would appear that inter-generational issues have once more surfaced and we as a Society are completely lost in the search for solutions.



But enough of that serious stuff, it's time for a bit of lighthearted story telling and travel, again. Last April, in our Spring trip I had the foresight, wisdom? Or just plain whimsy to place a bet in one of the Casinos that we were strolling through to place a bet on the upcoming Baseball end of season championships. Not quite believing the hype about the second (third or fourth) coming of the Toronto Blue-Jays I passed on them as the form sheet was being studied. Looking for a long shot and a sure thing, at the same time is the gamblers dream and I had it. Laying a bet on the Boston Red-Sox ticked off both boxes. Placing bottom of the League the previous year and possessing a great history seemed to be good enough for me. One ticket at nine to one, for the ACLS championship and the World Series line at fifteen to one seemed a great gamble to me. Long enough to create a buzz for the Summer BBQ party and totally unrealistic for the realistic baseball aficionado. Well, blow me down with a feather. Come September and the 'Boys of October' were leading the League. Going into the Play-offs and then the ACLS and then because of the wonderful play by the "Boys in Beards" the World Series was watched intently. To cut a long story short, Boston won the World Series in six games and I had two winning tickets. All I had to do was to cash them. Looking at the Aeroplan account, which had just been boosted by 20,000 points because I had switched credit cards, we had enough for two tickets to Vegas - hey we can go to cash the Baseball tickets. One fly in the ointment. Without our usual thorough planning, it was after all a spur of the moment trip, it has become apparent that we will be returning on the busiest day for travellers in the US - Thanksgiving Weekend. The security lineup at McCarren airport is not the swiftest at the best of times, it will be interesting to see at its busiest.

Here is the travel tip of the month: if you are coming back through Pearson Airport you now have a decision to make at Customs. Do you stand inline and wait to speak to a young and bored Customs Agent or do you take advantage of the new 'self-serve' passport clearance machines? A tough one, as the machines, like all self-serve machines, take a bit of confidence and nerve to use the first time, and if the lineup at the Agent's' lines is small you don't save much time. So if the lineup is long use the machine. It gets easier the second time around.



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Hit me in the head with a hammer!

That was I thought should happen when I realised the solution to my latest vacation problem - it was so easy. This tale will lead to the greatest travel tip that you, the readers, will ever read.

It all started on my trip to the UK. During that trip the only credit card I was using became unusable, I will not tell you how because it would demonstrate great stupidity, something we will never admit to. The result was that I was in the UK, with limited cash and no means of getting any and no way to pay my hotel bills or car rental. As soon as I realised the problem I hurried off to a coffee bar with internet access and with my netbook got on line to the cell-phone company that I was using (another great tip here - for ten pounds (\$16.50) I had purchased enough data - 1GB - for my unlocked phone so that I could use it as a GPS - beats the cost of a UK map for the GPS by five times) for more minutes so that I could phone for help. The cell-phone company wouldn't take my credit card numbers (I had written them down just in case of an emergency like this) as it was determined that the card was an international card and thus inoperative. I then drove to a store in the local Mall where they told me the same thing so no more minutes for the phone. Plan B was to sit in a Starbucks mooch their free internet and using "Skype", and my 'netbook', talk to the emergency credit card people. All I wanted was emergency cash.

The call went through immediately and I was talking to a person in the Ottawa office, she informed me that the "Fraud Office" was the place to talk to and it wouldn't be open for another thirty minute (time difference) - so much for twenty-four hour service!. Thirty minutes later after I had explained to the representative that my credit card wouldn't work and that no merchant would make a transaction without a card and telling her that I was going to be spending the next night with friends she passed me on to her manager. I spoke with this fellow for ninety minutes (thank you Skype) and during that time he told me a couple of things. Firstly he would not give any emergency money - I was not out on the street and had a way to get back home (this was Company policy, nothing personal; "I would do it if I could" he explained). He could courier me another card and it would be in the UK, at the Hotel I was going to be staying at by the next afternoon. Totally dissatisfied with this approach I then drove to meet my friend who promptly loaned me some cash. So driving to the event I was scheduled to attend at a reserved Hotel, the next day, I thought all would be well, when I got my replacement card - Wrong.

Arriving at the Hotel I couldn't book in - no credit card to complete the reservation with. The card not arrived at the Hotel at the promised time so I phoned the credit card company again, talked to the same manager as yesterday and then got passed on to his manager. This time they could pre-authorise the Hotel expenses, "What about some cash for food?" I asked.

"Charge everything to your room." was the reply.

"But I need cash",

"What for?"

"How about the money I need to pay back to my friend and the money to fuel up the rental car when I take it back!" A pause and then,

"How much do you need?"

"How much can I have?"

"As much as you need, we will wire the money to the nearest Western Union office."

Muttering to myself, "Why didn't you do this yesterday?" we concluded the deal having used up another ninety minutes of my time. Within ten minutes I had money in my hands, at a Western Union cash desk.

And now the big travel tip.

Getting back to Cobourg I entered my trusty bank branch and asked if there was a person that I could use in the future as a contact person who could wire me money if I ever needed it. I was told, "Your personal banking officer, but why don't you just use online banking and wire yourself the money using Western Union!" Well slap my hand into my forehead and shout "DUH".

So the big travel tip of the day is to set up your online banking, if it doesn't exist already, to wire yourself money. I tested it and it is easy but it comes with a caveat. You have to setup computer security after you have done it. You must assume that the network you use to do this is totally insecure that means it can only be used once, but once should be enough. So before you go away you should establish a relationship with somebody in the bank that you can email in case of an emergency. After you have logged on to your internet banking and concluded the transaction the next thing you should do is to email the bank contact person and ask that person to change your password and then have them email the new one back to you. If you think this is complicated, it is, but it is definitely better than being stuck in a foreign place with no money and an unsympathetic credit card company which is unwilling to send out emergency cash when you need it the most.

Enough of the tips how about some opinion about the raging issues in West Northumberland? For starters the issue of a dog park and where to put it hasn't died down in Cobourg. Councillor Larry Sherwin, on his election to Council in 2010 made this issue his and he has doggedly pursued it, but is still nowhere to completion. Hard to believe that three years later Cobourg is bogged down with dog-owners on one side demanding a park that they can walk to and nearby residents of a potential site, one sited on Elgin St. Sandwiched between the Cobourg creek and the YMCA, vociferously putting their objections forward. It is also hard to believe that Cobourg cannot find a piece of Town controlled land that is not suitable and away from residential areas. I do know one thing - three years and a solution still months away is not acceptable.

The other issue that grips West Northumberland is the taxation issue in Port Hope. When Hope Township merged with Port Hope the ratio of taxes paid by both was 85% paid by Port Hope and 15% by the former Hope Twp. It is still 85/15 but now after a committee review, where a panel of citizens recommended that the ratio stay the same Council has wrested the process from the committee, disbanded it and imposed a different ratio. One that would see a tax increase of an additional average increase of over six hundred dollars per household in Ward 2. With the loss of two rural fire stations it could be said that even if the 85/15 ratio was maintained Ward 2 is getting a lower level of service next year than this year and are being asked to pay higher taxes, per capita, than their fellow urban citizens. As we go to press there has been no resolution to this issue but a tax revolt is brewing and the results are going to be messy.

Exciting times to be a Council watcher!



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Another mixed bag!

This month I am cheered by the response to the last column which deviated from usual cornucopia of travel tips and how to take advantage of the savings that are out there in the travel world. This column will be a bit of both.

Our recently completed trip to Ecuador was just that completed, not without incident which will be revealed as we get into this month's tips. Overall impressions of Ecuador for a tourist are: it is a very friendly place, even if you do not speak Spanish somebody will always be there to help you. A very clean place and thanks to the latest President - a man of the people - very well policed. Ecuador, as we were told by our very good guide, Charlo, has turned the corner. Much to the chagrin of 'Big Oil' this President has renegotiated oil contracts, (the Country has large oil deposits), to bring in more money to the Country. This extra money has gone to social programmes - the amount of GDP spent on housing and health and education has doubled in seven years, and the reorganisation of the Police. The people love it! The new programmes are reflected in the eyes of the tourist by the sight of many Police on all of the major streets of Quito (I cannot speak for other major Cities as we did not see them). Not just one or two but clumps of them. This has restored the confidence of the citizens as they now feel safer in their streets. However for a tourist the presence of so many Police is unnerving. The major sights of Quito were seen, we didn't enter many Churches - just how many can you see (there are over two dozen Plazas each with its own Church) but the ones we did see were magnificent. The Churches inside decorations were the best we have seen in the many places we have been to. Gold leaf appeared to be the major decorating tool of the builders, and many of these Churches were built in the 17th Century by the Spanish conquerors. So a couple of sidetrips out of the City, much sightseeing in the City and some days of just wandering is how we spent our time.



When in Quito one has to visit the Equator. The seven year old in our family told us before we went, when we told him we were going to see the Equator he said, "You know Grandpa the equator is an imaginary line!" Such young wisdom, from who knows where, was almost true. The actual site of the Equator, as depicted in "Munto El Mindo" is in many places. The Spanish Friars, in the 18th Century placed it in one place. The Government in the 1920s placed it in another and built a Monument, which has become a theme park to celebrate it. And, now private enterprise has calculated it in another place and built another theme parky museum around it. Never mind we knew it was there somewhere and we saw a line on the ground, listened to guides tell us the history of the places and watched experiments involving water going down the plughole in two different directions depending on what side of the line you were doing the experiment. Most entertaining.

A small sidetrip to the UK was taken by me ten days later. This trip had been planned for over three years and just happened to be so close to the Ecuador trip so don't get the idea that I don't like to stay home. This trip was a reunion for all the people who had enlisted with me as Army Apprentices fifty years ago. We served three years being trained as tradesmen for the British Army and then we went our separate ways. So for many of us we hadn't seen each other for forty-seven years. The idea of being with total strangers for two days was a weird one - what would you do, what would you talk about? Well as anybody who has been to a High School reunion know the years just melt away. We had been in each others pockets (twenty to a room) for three years, well forty-seven years later we were still in each others pockets - for two days. An amazing experience and I would not have believed it before I went, a wonderful way to feel seventeen again!

As with every experience in life there are lessons learned. On the Ecuadorian trip we learnt that panicking in the middle of the night will not work. Case in point - after a really gruelling day - we had set off to visit a market and jungle sights a couple of hours away. First mistake do not ever ride the roads out of Quito on a Sunday. You have not seen 'Sunday Drivers' until you visit Quito. This City, which sprawls sixteen kms along a valley has two and a quarter million inhabitants and all of them (so it appears) want to drive out of town for some reason or other - at the same time and to the same place. There are only two roads out of town on the North side and after driving for an hour to the entrance of the Pan-American Highway, the major route, we were turned around; the road was closed due to mudslides - back to the start line and a smaller road. Cut a long story short the two hour trip became a six hour trip and the trip back became a seven hour one. Hence the arrival back at the Hotel at one in the morning. This Hotel did not have a front desk and the operators arrived every day at eight to setup for breakfast. This night an inside door was locked, presumably by the restaurant operator who thought the place was devoid of guests that night. Anyway we get dropped off at one with no means of contacting the operators except a scribbled cell phone note from the guide - what to do? Don't panic! Two choices - stay outside and wait - not a chance, or look for a solution. Struggling to speak Spanish we asked the Security guards on the street, did I mention the heavy Police presence in the City, this time we appreciated it, if we could use a cell phone - No. But they did say there was another Hotel three doors down the Street. Marching off we finally got in, it was locked and there was only a small, but not obvious, intercom on the wall. Inside there was an almost luxury hotel. When at the front desk without even asking for the price we just said, "We will take two rooms" problem solved, but not really. The next morning an obviously irate Hotel operator agreed to pay the exorbitant room rate and we were served the worst breakfast of the trip by a snarly faced operator. Tip don't panic there is always a solution.

I have run out of words, in this column to fully describe the next tip - always have a hidden credit card because you will never know when you lose the one you use, leaving you absolutely penniless in a strange land. The solution to that one is still being fought as we speak as the Credit Card company refused to supply an emergency cash payment. Keep tuned.

For something completely different and perhaps this should have belonged in last month's opinion column, what good things can anybody say about the idea of the Downtown Business Association to have their customers pay for parking downtown - none. Hey folks why does WalMart have free parking? To get and keep customers. This a Dumb Dumb idea. With the whole of the Cobourg establishment screaming about getting more people downtown to help revitalise it, the powers to be want to make us pay to go there - Dumb silly and stupid!



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A few opinions

When I was asked to write this column Peter D told me to be myself - “You know write about what you do and tell of your travels.” So I have been doing that, and people have been liking that, but those who know me know that it's not the real me.

So who's the real me? Well a person of strong opinions for one, opinions that may not be the mainstream but relevant anyway. I write an online news column that a few people know about, I won't put the URL here but it is easily found in Google. In that publication, which gets a new post twice a week or so, we (other people write in it too) just vent, opine or write about anything we want to write about. Most of us, the contributors, are Town watchers (Cobourg and Port Hope) so many of the articles have been about local issues. We do not censor or apply rules about the comments that people can make but we do draw the line at personal attacks, otherwise anything goes. But having said that we do not degenerate to the level of the comments published in the SunMedia online. Most people want to discuss the points made in the original post rather than just slag the previous commenter for being a “leftard” or a “Tory hack” names hurled in other commenting arenas.

One of the posts in August dealt with a “Fitting Tribute” to the late great Tom Macmillan, Cobourg's Town Crier, Santa Claus, Constable Tom who ran bicycle safety classes for all the schools in the area, Rotarian and otherwise great guy. The least offensive person that anybody could have known. Anyway after, what the contributors to the blog considered to be an asinine suggestion that Historic Second Street, in Cobourg, be renamed Tom Macmillan something - way street or road a long thread of comments ensued. Fine sentiment very bad idea. Second St. Isn't just any street, it is one of the first streets to appear on the earliest Town maps. It is also part of a trilogy of streets - First, Second, and Third. To disturb that rhythm would not only disrupt our earliest heritage but would disturb our actual history. A far better idea would be a statue of him crying “Oyez” in full flight. It should be placed in the precincts of the Town Hall in a prominent position. Funding such a statue would be no problem even the worst fundraiser should be able to finance the project in a week by just asking the right people. Council has taken a good first step by establishing a committee of people who want to do just that.

Another opinion would be what to do with the Highland Games Society. This local organisation has been in existence for fifty years and run completely by volunteers. It has been suffering hard times for about the last fifteen years, losing committed volunteers and running deficits on a regular basis. Cobourg Council loaned the organisation ten thousand dollars a few years back and after making only one payment now owes more money than the original loan. This month the Highland Games Society came back to Cobourg Council and asked for another loan. It was refused and the Highland Games may now be in danger of folding.

This episode is symptomatic of the financial problems that non-profits encounter. The events/buildings that the non-profits support are heralded by the Tourism industry and Town Hall. It is time for Town Hall to put their money where their mouths are. Support community events with public money. It doesn't have to be tax money we have another source. A few years back Cobourg decided to sell the Public Utilities to themselves. By selling electricity and water to the public the new Utility Company - known as LUSI. Cobourg as the owner of LUSI receives a yearly dividend. For the first five years Council decided to fund the local Hospital's early years. This dividend revenue has always been kept off the usual set of books Cobourg keeps. It has never been entered as ‘General Revenue’ only being spent by resolution of Council, this is why I call it “Council's Play-money”. Now this play money could be set up to serve the community in a meaningful way. Many communities have set up “Community Funds” - separate from the control of Councils and administered by a community committee. Cobourg should have one of these. If the LUSI dividend was used to establish an endowment fund, this fund could be used to help community organisations that need financial help. Not only would that reduce our Town's tax bill by transferring the budget line that doles out money to community organisations to the new fund and reducing the total expenditure bill, but as the amount of money available would be larger than we spend now we could fund more organisations.

Another opinion: why can't we have foodcarts around Town? This, and the other linked question - why we don't have businesses on the beach, are perennial questions. Frankly I don't know why a Council so devoted to economic development is against more business. Perhaps they echo the parochial view of the Downtown merchants - “They don't pay business taxes so they shouldn't be there”. But the people making that argument show no inclination to setup business at the beach so what's the beef? So the Town is bereft of the items that make other beaches glow. In that vein let me tell you I am not a fan of the Cobourg waterfront. It could have been so much better. This area of town is an enclave for the wealthy - nothing wrong with that but we must recognise that as an economic engine for the downtown and waterfront this area does nothing. Why aren't there more commercial enterprises? Almost every Marina development I have seen worldwide has a commercial level on the ground floor, condos above. This one should have too, but the Town has a policy of ‘mixed use’ that allowed the developers to only supply the minimum and that was eight thousand square feet per development, but seeing as there were only two developments that occurred we only built sixteen thousand square feet of commercial space - a pittance and it shows. That means in the major part of the Marina you only get one small restaurant - we should have many more!

Why can't Council demonstrate that it has been listening to the citizens that take the time to talk to Council as a delegation. Cobourg Council, unlike Port Hope has no ‘question time’ on its agenda. That means that if a citizen wants to talk to Council or ask a question they have to ask to be placed on the agenda as a delegation and tell the Town Clerk what the subject of the address is going to be. Speaking for ten minutes each delegation is heard, heard not listened to. Usually on the agenda the Council has to dispose of the delegation in a formal way. Thus the wording is; “the material is received for information”. Few if any delegations from a citizen are questioned on their address or material. So if a delegation is listed on the agenda and then disposed of as “received for information” then Council has just formally brushed off somebody who has made the effort to speak to them. It is bad manners to be ignored and I would suggest that it be mandatory that the Councillor in charge of the problem should be ordered to respond, even if it is only to reiterate Town policy.

Well folks it's the end of the page and I have only just warmed up but it's good to be able to share my beefs with you, at least once a year. Off to Ecuador now and that means more travel and cheapo tips next column. Feedback welcomed ben@eagle.ca



What do travellers do when they don't travel?

By Ben Burd

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They read travel books and watch travel shows on TV! How many times have we heard the refrain. “Six hundred channels on the cable and I still can’t find anything decent to watch.” Well folks stuck up in the nether regions of the cable dial, sandwiched between the Food Channels and the Kid’s Cartoons there are more than a few lively channels delivering oddball travel shows.

Travel shows have been around for decades, think of David Attenborough’s many series on animals and their habitats, but with TV becoming more personality than substance we now have travel shows hosted by unfamous people. Admittedly Celebrities do host shows but they are outnumbered by people whose personalities prevail over the location and formats. But why do we watch travel shows? I don’t know why other people watch travel shows but there are plenty of them with different themes. We, the love of my life and I, watch travel shows to see what the rest of the world looks like. The advantage of having many different types of shows is that if one wants to watch people backpacking through Europe they can watch a show described as “A home video on steroids” - ‘Backpackers’. A description of the show, snipped off their website, says: *“The show follows the story of three mates from country Victoria (Australia) who decided to leave behind their everyday lives, step outside their comfort zones and venture into the unknown. Over one year Jag, Mick and Lee will run out of money 7 times, fall in love 5 times, be robbed 4 times, experience 20 countries, 5 festivals and get lost on their way to places with profane names.”* Definitely sounds like a cultivated taste. At the other end of the scale is the much loved PBS Star, Rick Steves. He gets trotted out almost every subscription period, by PBS stations. and we are subjected to a few of his smaltzy, middle class respectable travelogues sandwiched between the interminable telethons and appeals for money. But standing alone Rick Steves who has published books, given seminars and regularly endorses travel products, as well as filming his travel episodes he does show how foreign travel can be made safe and exciting. For instance one year, when in Tuscany, I hauled out his travel book and followed his advice to find the best restaurant in San Gimignano, we found it and damned if he wasn’t right; I can still taste the fresh rabbit!

We can divide the options for travel into a few categories - the Celebrity themes, the Adventure themes and the totally weird bordering on reality show peculiarity and of course the travel show that isn’t a travel show “The Amazing Race”. This show, now in its twenty-third year of TV does take us around the world but concentrates on the competitors rather than the backgrounds of foreign climes. The Celebrity theme is headed by the master of all travel - Michael Palin. Ever since he was asked to replicate Jules Verne’s ‘Around the World in Eighty Days’ in 1989, he has been the Gold Standard of travelmasters, in fact he now has a problem. Places that he visits tend to become more popular with other people - the ‘Palin Effect’. Peru noticed a jump in visitors after Michael’s show about Macchu Pichu was aired on TV. With six subsequent TV travel series behind and one more planned - a trip to Brazil - he also pens books about the experiences, a complete travel package. He has also garnered the moniker, “Britain’s nicest man”, and his TV shows reflect his attitude to travel - just a normal guy in strange places. Billy Connolly, the Scottish comedian is also a Celebrity Traveller. With at least six travelogues behind him his most memorable ones, in North America, are “Billy Connolly’s Route 66” which as self explanatory, but the way he meets strange and wonderful people is the show and In Canada “Journey to the end of the World”. Filmed in 2008 he travelled across Canada from Halifax to Vancouver Island via the NorthWest Passage - a tremendous undertaking, armed only with a camera and a banjo he charmed all he saw and met.

The Adventure themes are illustrated by the likes of “Survivor Man” and “Going Tribal”. Survivorman, Les Stroud, sets off to inhospitable places - the jungle or the Arctic ice-flows and sets up camp and lives off the land as he tries to reach a specific endpoint in seven days. The heat of the deserts or the cold of the North don’t seem to faze him as he only has a couple of cameras, an axe, a few matches and his harmonica. Unfortunately the toll of the series defeated him for a fourth series in 2010 but he did come back from a disease that felled him. He said it was a parasitic mouth infection, an affliction gained from eating Georgia swamp turtle meat, to make a special series in 2012. This time he extended the week to ten days. A new series which is planned for 2014 is being filmed later this year. In another Adventure travel show British ex-Royal Marine Bruce Parry lives with indigenous peoples of the world for a month and lives as they live. Hunting, fishing and joining in with their spiritual ceremonies are all shown in the series. In his three series he has lived with tribesmen in far flung places: Ethiopia, West Papua and Venezuela to mention a few. This series is an old one but memorable because he always seemed to enjoy the rituals which involved hallucinatory native potions.

The totally weird travel shows may not be weird but just different. The imagination needed to decide to make such shows is amazing. The series that grabbed us this year is one called “Around the Next Bend”. This shows consists of the adventures of two young men from Regina, a snip from the website of their film distributor says it all, *“The unscripted 12-part series chronicles the story of Dustin Corkery and Adrian Traquair, as they set out aboard a rubber raft intent on paddling from Delhi, India to Dhaka, Bangladesh. They leave home with few supplies; a camera and the raft they intend to carry them 2,500 kilometres down the Ganges River – their previous paddling experience coming only from a field test of the raft in Wascana Lake, a manmade urban water feature in Regina, SK.”* The show is spellbinding and we couldn’t wait for the next episode. Considering that the series was shot on domestic camcorders the story is well told. The rubber raft didn’t make it to the end, in Dhaka, but they did - well done to both of them.



Mutton Testicles at Oenotri restaurant

If one is not grossed out by seeing people eat foods not normally on any kind of a menu then tune into this one - “Bizarre Foods”. In its tenth season on the ‘Travel and Escape’ channel host and chef Andrew Zimmern travels the world eating food described as disgusting, exotic, or bizarre. Examples would be: frog’s beating heart, raw pig’s testicles and turtle hearts - all in season one’s opener. By the of season six he had had enough of the world and changed the show’s emphasis to bizarre food found in the United States and in next four series he had tasted such foods as: died octopus bile sac, sampled in Hawaii, monkey face eel from Northern California and Bloody Marys made with real blood in Austin Texas.

So with TV travel shows we can travel the world without even leaving the Laz-y-boy. Great fun but not the real thing to real travellers, but a mighty fine second choice.

Summer Fun

By Ben Burd

One of the joys of being older is that one gets to do stuff that you may have not been doing in earlier years.

Three activities come to mind very easily. One is downsizing by means of “YardSaling”. The trend to look at one’s ancestors by becoming amateur genealogists, and finally the thrills of “Family Picnics” and parties that celebrate the “Fifths”



After a couple of them I can say that being involved in a Yard Sale is not my favourite way of spending a full day. Having downsized recently the experience of Yard Sales is painful. The problem is that being a person that clings to things, as opposed to being a hoarder, one is very reluctant to let go of possessions. Even worse is being asked to put a value on those possessions. Yardsalers fall into a couple of camps - sellers and buyers and the two values shall be forever apart. Faced with two choices - keeping or divesting, sellers will either place low prices on the goods just to get rid of them or just dump them at Charity Shops or make a dump run. The problem that with keeping the goods and hoping to make a few bucks is that one is heartbroken at every transaction. That painting that was given to you by your fellow workers at the retirement party, the treasured workshop tools that you used to build the house or just mementos from well remembered vacations will tug at your heartstrings whenever you handle it for the last time.

But what strikes at the heart of the seller is that when one is asked “How much for this?” the answer given will never satisfy the buyer. So what does one think when a buyer, when told “Fifty cents each” as he hold two items worth much more, will then counter with “How about fifty cents for two”. When that happens the seller will have two choices as the buyer holds out a loonie and expects two quarters in change - one is to bite the bullet and mutter to himself, “What a cheap *****” and take the offering or say to the cheap ***** “The price is fifty cents each!” and lose a sale. Needless to say the next time anybody suggests a yard sale I will counter by putting out the stuff and giving it all away to good homes for free.

At any gathering of older adults two topics of conversation will dominate - the health of their bodies and the need to boast/complain/commiserate with the others about the amount of illness and prescription drugs ingested and the propensity for one of the family to be the family historian and genealogist. As Sharon Murphy, the onetime owner and founder of “*Timelines*” a genealogist research company, “In every family, in at least three generations there will be one person who take the job on.” It’s true and I meet people who have researched family trees and histories. I remember one of Cobourg’s local characters of the 70s was Orvil Calhoun, a former demolition contractor who had to give it up for health reasons, who was into his family history. Really into it, he ended up publishing over three volumes of lineage and going back to 700 AD - and this was before the Internet, his postage bills must have been horrendous!. He had told me at one time as I paid him the rent for an apartment of his I was renting, “This activity has extended my life by years.” And it is true. But I suspect that as we get older we all want a legacy project, what will be my mark? Unless you a local politician that may have a name inscribed on historical plaques and markers the visible sign of legacies may only be family histories. With the emergence of Governments needing money and the growth of worldwide databases it is no wonder that we have all become genealogists. But it is becoming an expensive hobby. National Archives in most Countries have sold their information contained in old census records and museums to firms such as “*Ancestry.com*” and “*FindmyPast.com*”. With few exceptions information can only be accessed by people willing to buy subscriptions and ‘pay for view’ images. To its credit the Cobourg Public Library has set aside three computer stations, in the Local History Room, with “*Ancestry.com*” access - a very good example of spending public money in a wise manner. I use them sparingly knowing that they are popular and there is nothing more annoying than coming into the Local History Room and seeing the same person online for hours when all you want to do is a quick lookup. However it is hard to explain an interest in one’s family history to people who just think that “People are dead, who cares what they did?” Well I care and finding the odd black sheep of the family is fun, after all who wouldn’t be intrigued by finding a reference to a great-uncle that reads - “..... is removed from the Army as the King is no longer desirous of his services.” Or finding that one’s great-grandfather died at the age of forty-nine from cirrhosis of the liver , or discovering that his father died in a smallpox epidemic at the age of forty-one leaving behind ten children. All this is interesting stuff but you have to have a bent for it, otherwise they are just dead people.

But back to the living as Summer approaches we will be heading into the season of the “Family Reunion”. Cobourg, with its magnificent Lions’ Club Pavilion, in Victoria Park overflows with them. Usually a couple each weekend. You can spot them a mile off, the Mom’s running around fussing with the cold salads and desserts, the men just chatting to the assembled relatives trying to figure out just when was it they last saw each other and guessing who will turn up next. The older adults just content to sit in the collapsible chairs and watch the goings on and talk about childhood memories or long forgotten, by most, family slights. The kids just running around avoiding the fate of being put on display to the long forgotten Aunt and being told, by that Aunt, “The last time I saw you, you were only this high!” This is especially painful to the preteens brought here under the threat of the loss of ipod privileges. But all in all these gatherings are fun, almost as much fun as the birthday parties which are now occurring with more frequency - the “fifths” - sixty-fifths, seventy-fifths - well you get the idea. These parties involve alcohol and cameras - a lethal mix! But you do get to meet characters; ‘the first boyfriend’, the ‘third wife’ and everybody in between. One great advantage about these family affairs is that they are a heckuva a lot more fun than the ultimate reunion of all - the funeral of a family loved one. This meetup is guaranteed to get out all of the people you haven’t seen for years, and it’s a good thing too. Just how many people do you want to bury just to get meet long lost relatives?





Another one off the ‘bucket list’

by Ben Burd

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” - that’s French for the more things change the more they stay the same. Well it ain’t so! We have just returned, with another line crossed off the ‘bucket-list’, from visiting the “*American Country Music Awards*” and let me tell you this; Country Music has changed and it ain’t the same as it was.

Any comparison between the oldsters, Merle (Haggard), Conway (Twitty), Charlie (Pride), Hank (Williams) and the rest of the Ryman Theatre population of the fifties and sixties and the newcomers of the eighties, Garth (Brooks), Toby (Keith), Allan (Jackson) and

George (Strait) to the Country singers of today is like comparing the inhabitants of the Planet Earth and the Aliens living in Roswell.

Somebody has described “New Country” as rock and roll with a twang! I’d say it is anything that appeals to the Millenium demographic - those born between the eighties and nineties. This generation raised on new rock and roll and rap music are being manipulated by the movers and shakers to tune into “New Country”. Consequently the music has to change to fit their tastes, and it shows.

The Academy of Country Music has been in existence for nearly fifty years and its showpiece is an award show. This show is televised and this year had the best TV ratings of any similar offering. When you have a Country Music Show that features Stevie Wonder as a headliner the whole thing is an exercise in misleading advertising. But demographics are paramount. To get the eyeballs on TV, and the show, Country Music has had to change.

So where does that leave this stick-in-the-mud?

Back to the ACM awards and the show. We had booked up, online for a three-day ‘jam-fest’ at the Casino that was part of the awards - the Orleans in Las Vegas. This Casino was offering a three day room and festival package for a very reasonable price and coupled with a competitive seat sale from Air Canada enticed us to attend. Stating three days in an ‘offstrip’ hotel was going to be a challenge we thought, as we always stay on the ‘strip’ to be central to the action and reduce the amount of walking to get anywhere. So being way off the strip looked boring. Turned out to be anything but. The food and beverage prices were lower, the cost of table games were lower and the ‘jamfest’ ate up a lot of time, some of it in line for tickets for the two shows in the ‘fest. The “jamfest” was a collection of booths featuring anything from a Dodge truck display to tents full of western gear and kitsch. The large parking lot had been converted into an outdoor arena complete with stages and sound. The lineup of bands was the “C” list of up and coming bands with a minor headliner thrown in at the end of the day. To this older person attending a stadium show was different. Never having been a person to attend many live shows, rock or country the specifics intrigued, the first show I saw was the Rolling Stones in a theatre in 1965 and the last was George Jones at the Memorial Arena in P’borough a few years back. The setup was typical of modern stage shows. Three or four storeys of scaffolding comprised the portable stage and the sides were filled with the speakers designed to emulate the noise of a Saturn Rocket during blast-off - de rigueur for a show. It was the lineup that kept the audience in place. There were five or six bands in the days’fest and the diehards stayed all day. We chose to watch the last of the lineup, the stars, and when we arrived the parking lot had been taken over by people with lawn chairs and blankets, obviously some had been in for the long haul!



The ten most popular Country Songs of all time

1. Your Cheatin' Heart - Hank Williams
2. He Stopped Loving Her Today - George Jones
3. Blue Moon of Kentucky - Bill Monroe
4. Can The Circle Be Unbroken - The Carter Family
5. Stand By Your Man - Tammy Wynette
6. I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry - Hank Williams
7. Crazy - Patsy Cline
8. Forever & Ever, Amen - Randy Travis
9. Make The World Go Away - Eddy Arnold
10. I Walk The Line - Johnny Cash

So what is it about Country Music that doesn’t sit well, it isn’t the C&W that we grew up with. Can you imagine any of the songs on the right hitting the charts today? In fact the late George Jones, when asked what he thought about Carrie Underwood, Taylor Swift and other young stars, said, “they were good but they weren’t making traditional country music.” That’s why we now have “New Country” as opposed to the “Old Country” With singers barely fresh from their successes on “American Idol” now topping the Country charts the musical styles and genres are interchangeable. When looking at Hunter Hayes, a rising star one wonders if we are looking at Justin Bieber. The stage mannerisms are so similar. Image makers have dominated the scene so powerfully that songs don’t rest on the lyrics anymore - it’s glitz and glamour, and I don’t like it.

The third day of the festival was the culmination of Country celebration, an afternoon concert in the open-air theatre and then the evening televised concert. Being in the Orleans Casino and not the MGM Grand we were at the ancillary venue. Although we were part of the event, by virtue of being in a second arena and the TV shots alternated between venues, it was not the same as being on the A-list at the MGM. However we did get a Country Show after the TV from Brad Paisley a real modern-day Country Star. By the time he was finished we had been in the same arena seats for five hours. A darn good job they were padded and very comfortable.

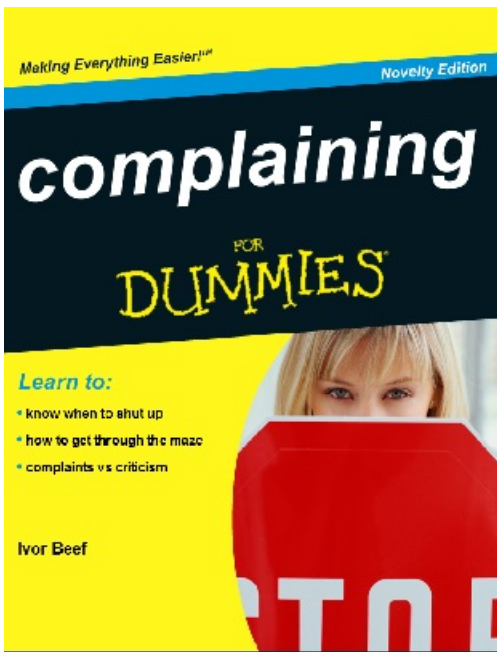
Just as the world has changed so has the staging of concerts. The first one I attended in 1965 consisted of four guys on a small stage surrounded by one hundred amp speakers and thousands of screaming girls. By the time Kenny Rogers came to Peterborough in the 80s for a show his stage, alone, cost a million dollars and consisted of lights and speakers and hundreds of screaming women. When George Jones came to Peterborough in the 2000s all he had was a mix of old-time staging and a screen for his video clips to crank up a few older women. Today all that has been forgotten in shows that consist of one hundred feet TV screens and 3D holographic projections framed by lasers coordinated to the songs - very impressive.

However all of this staging stuff is only a backdrop to the music and as mentioned before I don’t know who is really comfortable with the music crossing over in every direction. I guess what confused it for me was watching one of the hottest modern stars - Brad Paisley, a consistent Country Music Award winner for the past ten years, in almost every category, this year kicking off his new tour - at the Orleans - with arrangements that wouldn’t be out of place on a rock tour. A gifted guitar player his skill and riffs could earn him a fortune in a traditional rock band. Putting those skills together in songs called “country’ didn’t fit for me. But obviously being in the minority opinion in my group of fellow travellers didn’t stop the enjoyment. But the kicker for me this year was on the Award show - the only segment to feature “Old Country” was a duet of George Strait and Garth Brooks - two dinosaurs of the industry and it blew the Show away.

Just made us old farts feel good!

Now we have time; we do it!

By Ben Burd



Complaining that is. Now that us older folk have time on our hands how do we spend it? Constructively I hope, I think I do, however there is always a time that banging one's head on a wall is necessary.

Just the other day, as I was starting to go through a year of financial records so that the ritual of tax-filing could get underway it was discovered that there were no Tslips for the pensions. Not to worry a quick phone call should sort that out. Hah bloody hah. Entering the dreaded phone maze of Service Canada when all I wanted was an agent to speak to inform them of my missing T slips was not fun. The voice on the other end of the Service Canada phone had one message - go to the website. I had been there but because I did not have a code number, you had to contact Service Canada to get one, to enter into the form necessary to change my address I was not allowed to do it - so onto the phone. Listening to the options of seven directions I selected the one that sounded nearest to my dilemma and was directed to the website. In desperation and getting upset by the lack of simplicity the next step was to contact the

local MP's office to try to get a phone number of an agent instead of just the generic 1-800 one. Managed to find the phone number from the local MP's website and dialled. But I had dialled on a Tuesday, the day that the Cobourg office was closed and the staff were working in Port Hope, again no number to call. Next try was to contact the MP's Trenton office - nobody to answer the phone so a message was left. Now feeling really frustrated I tried the motherlode - the MP's Ottawa office - bingo, a person answered on the second ring. Explaining the problem the person on the other end explained that if the MP's office interceded and changed the address for me I would need to sign a release form allowing them (the MP) to handle my information - All I wanted was a bloody phone number! Finally the young lady, after she had given me the 1-800 number that was the cause of the frustration, said, "You know if you press zero at any time during the message you will get an agent." "Oh" I replied, I had tried that but instead of the message that informed me that I was being transferred to an agent all I got was another conversation instructing me about the virtues of Service Canada, so I assumed nothing had changed. Hanging up and trying the phone maze again and pressing zero and waiting a long time I did get to an Agent, but the process ~~wasted~~ occupied three hours - good job I had it.

But that was nothing compared to the many hours spread over two weeks that it took to get a defective part replaced on a vacuum cleaner. In that case the "issue was escalated", by me because after many days of dealing with a recalcitrant call centre I felt that the president of the Company had to be informed. Two principles of complaining are: one be positive in your complaint, in other words one has to offer solutions to the problem, not just vent and criticise, and secondly the complaint has to be heard within the organisation that caused the problem. In the case of the vacuum cleaner part the call centre had failed to follow through on a promise, "I guarantee you will be spoken to tomorrow" - it never happened, and the President of the Company had to be told.

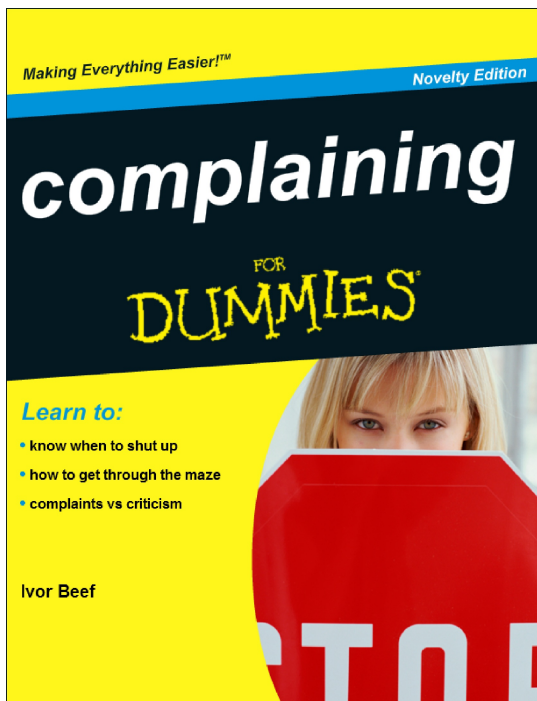
This is where us older folks have an advantage; time. Most websites and company literature only reveal the information about the products and location of the Company. Even sites that have a click button called "About us" very rarely reveal email addresses and phone numbers of the executives, making personal contact very hard. But if one has time it can be done. Executives like to boast about two things - themselves and their position. So 'googling' the name of the Company and "President" will often give you a name. Having obtained the name then you 'google' the full name and look for the activities they are involved in and very often by cross-referencing executive sites or social media sites a phone number will pop up. So armed with the name and phone number of the President of the vacuum cleaner company it was easy to leave a message on voicemail informing him he had a problem at his call centre. I can tell you that the call centre certainly sorted out the problem within hours and that included an follow-up call to explain how to fit the replacement part so victory can be claimed.

So realising that complaining will become part of me in the next few years, it was necessary to find out how to do it properly. Almost every consumer group in the world has advise, every professional organisation has a complaints process and governments have 'Ombudsmen'. But they are also part of the problem, bureaucracy doesn't understand complainers. So how to do it, and this advise has been gleaned from hours of research, and I can't wait to practice. But doing it right is an art. The prevailing attitude appears to be summed up by -- Lou Holtz -- *"Never tell your problems to anyone...20% don't care and the other 80% are glad you have them."* An internet search ("the art of complaining") produced 7,110,000 hits, so obviously a great number of people indulge in the topic.

Reading a few produced an earth shattering revelation - there is a difference between 'criticism' and 'complaint' Now how many of us start the complaint with, "You people have screwed me up!" Well that's not for me any more. The first move for me is to ask myself, "What do I want out of this conversation?", secondly who will be giving it to me. I am starting by avidly reading whatever Jason Greigson, a professional complainer in the UK writes. On his website he explains himself - *"During the late 1980s I realised that it pays to do the un-British thing and complain. I used to be a twitching rabbit like everyone else until it became clear to me that by being assertive and complaining effectively, it is possible to get a positive response to complaints about bad goods or services."*



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Look him up at <http://www.complainer.co.uk/> it is an interesting and thoughtful perspective.



Need to fix your body parts - go to Mexico

After a month of staying in Mexico one thing becomes absolutely clear, it is easy to save money on two items - healthcare and rental cars.

In an previous article it was mentioned that booking online prior to picking up the car saves a pile of money. So when it is suggested by those in the party that they need to get off the resort, or that last year's friends - who decided to go somewhere else this year - need to be visited and it's easy to hire a car from the hotel, or the office in the mall, stop and think about it. It isn't cheap but it may be convenient, but inconvenience saves money, and for those of us on fixed incomes don't we want to be cheap frugal at all times? So the way to do it is to go to the website of a major rental agency, we always use Thrifty, and look for a location. This will only work in major tourist locations so don't expect it to work if you are in a far away place. But try anyway. For example, we had friends that needed to be chauffeured (one had a walker) coming in for a day visit and we decided to rent a car instead of using the excellent bus system. Booking online and walking across the street to the office cost the equivalent of thirty-four dollars, just walking in would have doubled that.

But the biggest savings to anybody staying for more than a couple of weeks is to have some medical work done. With health-care costs soaring governments of all stripes now have fewer "free" services available and the wait lists for most of the procedures have lengthened considerably. There is an answer - "Medical Tourism"



"Medical Tourism" (wikipedia definition - *is defined as patient movement from highly developed nations to less developed areas of the world for medical care by bypassing services offered in their own communities*) is a fast growing trend. This fancy bunch of words just means that when on vacation you can find a dentist to clean your teeth, fill a cavity and perform advanced treatments for half the price you would pay back home. For example, here in Cobourg, cleaning by a hygienist costs seventy-five dollars, cleaning in a fancy office costs one hundred dollars. In Puerto Vallarta, Cancun or Acapulco will cost at the most forty-five dollars. For those wanting more extensive treatments one has to get out and ask but on a quick survey of the local dental clinics, and there were three in the same mall below our condo, the average savings for most procedures ranged from sixty to eighty percent. A crown for three hundred and fifty on average,

a filling from a high of sixty-five dollars and a low of thirty-seven fifty! Anybody who needs a set of dentures, a bridge and a couple of crowns could easily finance a hotel room and airfare from the savings coming from the lower prices available elsewhere in the world. I use Mexico as an example because we have seen it in action, the sign in the pic was seen in a small Town in Central Mexico. Internet websites abound in cyberspace where one can compare locations, prices and quality for all kinds of "Medical Tourism". But the real advantage to this kind of vacation is using it as a way to get around long wait times. Hip replacements and knee jobs can be done in India and Thailand in hospitals and clinics that are amongst the most modern and staffed with extremely competent specialists.

Just across the road from our condo, in PV, we can see the latest and most modern hospital in the City - Amerimed. Amerimed's statement on its website sums it up; *AMERIMED is the hospital network located at the main tourist destinations of Mexico, and the first organization specializing in medical tourism in the country based on US standards for quality services.*" This hospital doesn't just do all the procedure that patients demand - quoting a *Banderas News* article "*The new Amerimed Hospital boasts over 12,000 square feet of consulting rooms for cardiologists, traumatologists, pediatricians, gynecologists, oncologists, physical rehabilitation, plastic surgery, and an obesity clinic among others.*", but has paired with a local boutique hotel - the Casa Velas. This boutique hotel, featured in *Conde Naste*, is one of the most luxurious in PV, has paired with the Amerimed hospital to offer recuperation facilities. A mini-bus will transfer the patient to and from the hotel and at the hotel one will receive twenty-four hours of personal attention to ensure a rapid recovery, all for only (quote from the Casa Velas website) "*The Week of Wellness Package, which requires a minimum stay of four nights, starts at \$285 per person per night based on double occupancy. Pre- or post-surgery accommodations start at \$210 per person per night (double)*"



So what can I say other than if you have money to spare, little time to wait and the urge to keep well, a trip to foreign lands may be necessary to fix up the aching older body. Choose the right place, with the right specialists and you will be definitely save enough money on the medical cost to transport you to places you may have never thought of visiting, like India, Thailand or Costa Rica. Over fifty countries have declared that "Medical Tourism" as National Industries so there is plenty of choice. But be careful in choosing, always use a "Medical Tourism Advisor"; but the payback is enormous - you get fixed up and enjoy a vacation at the same time.



Good memories and new experiences?

Memory is the first to go in older age - so they say, the ability to connect memory with the facts is sometimes very hard.

This was brought home recently when watching the “Relief for Sandy” concert. The organizers hauled out the relics of rock and roll, packaged them as today’s goods and charged exorbitant prices for the privilege of watching. Almost all of the “legends of rock and roll” that are left on the planet appeared at this concert. The Rolling Stones, The Who, Bruce Springsteen, and the greatest rocker wrinkly of all time - Paul McCartney all strutted their geriatric stuff. Not to be too negative the rocker that impressed me was Eric Clapton, never missed a note or failed to hit a chord.

For a few years now the fact that these aging rockers, of all stripes - even older C&W stars have lost it - are still running around the stadium and casino circuits performing the songs that made them famous with vocal chords that have been stretched way beyond the listeners’ patience, has been driving me nuts. I guess the performance that drove me to the point past nausea was Sir Paul McCartney attempting to hit the high notes on “Hey Jude” at the Olympic Games wrap-up concert. Unfortunately for those of us who saw the originals and even purchased the records of the day these same songs sung today by these people bear little resemblance to the original. For example listen to the original version of “Jumping Jack Flash” sung by the Stones in 1965 and then see the same song performed by Jagger and his buddies in 2012 and there is no comparison.



This problem of aging singers is not new. How many of the previous generation cringed when Frank Sinatra sang his early songs in the latter stage of his life. At least some singers have learned how to cope with the loss of range and memory of early arrangements. When country legend George Jones came to Peterborough a couple of years ago he had the sense to pick his songs and pace himself with a show that included video and other singers helping him out. No such luck with Bob Dylan’s concerts these days. He perfected the art of mumbling performances years ago and has since got to the point where now all of his act is one big mumble. But the problem of legends appearing later in life is not new, one of my earliest memories is when television was first introduced and I was watching, with my grandmother - a stately lady raised in the Raj by military parents (you get the idea) and Gracie Fields (an Edwardian singing legend) was performing one of her standards on TV. All my grandmother could say was, “She should have worn a better bra” - a remark that took me another ten years to understand!

So what can be done about these bad acts? Apparently not much as tickets still sell and the songs go on for ever. Look forward to the Rolling Stones tour of 2013 rumoured to be coming to a City near you. And here’s a bit of trivia - what is the most played song on the radio? The answer was a surprise to me as it belongs to none of the rock legends. “*You’ve lost that lovin’ feeling*” by the Righteous Brothers. An amazing feat considering that one of the brothers killed himself in 2003. Can’t help but wonder just how many royalty payments came out of that one. BMI, the measurement agency says it has been played over eight million times to date!

Ever heard of “Glamping”? Neither had I until one of the internet newspapers published an article about travel trends for 2013. The word combines Camping and Glamorous - hence Glamping. This zippy copy from “*Pitch-up.com*” sums up the game: *Too posh to pitch? We bring you glamping, a heady mixture of glamour and camping that's even found favour with the more sensible slebs among the glitterati in recent years. (We've also got dramping - drinking and camping; gramping - camping with grandkids and wamping - wet weather camping.*

With older and affluent travellers demanding both the outdoor experience and the luxury of a hotel it is no wonder that locations have sprung up in the world that give the discerning traveller both. Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and doing a Safari while the tents are set up by porters every night. Or if you want stay the nights in luxurious treehouses. But the most surprising piece of travel kit that fits this bill is in Europe, especially the UK where it is considered to be in the lap of luxury if you stay in an “Airstream” travel trailer. These caravans that used to fill the highways of the US have been superceded by million dollar buses, not so on the other side of the pond. Roughing it one of these babies is considered the lap of luxury. Facilities for “Glamping” are not confined to treehouses and caravans but luxury tents fill out the bill. Tents modelled on Mongolian Yurts are popular, I guess Mongolian adds to the image of adventure. Checking out the internet reveals that even in Ontario we have “Glamping Yurts”. From the *Misabi Adventure*, in Minaki, at thirty-one dollars a night to the “*Glamping Tents by Kawawaymong Lake*” in South River at one hundred and ninety seven dollars a night, there is a Yurt in everybody’s wallet.



One big advantage of “Glamping is that there are Companies in the UK that cater to rock festival patrons. One website claims that Glamping started at the Rock Festival of Galstonbury, where it always rains and celebs did not want to get down in the mud. One Company - “*The Popup Hotel*” (what else would they call it?) advertises luxury in every tent with a restaurant and a bar, in their own luxury tents and with supply limited room service!

So if you do it right you can have the best of both of the worlds in this article - old and wrinkly rock stars at festivals and a luxury tent to watch from - what a heavenly thought.



A couple of timely items

Came to me this month: one was the letter from the Ministry of Transport of Ontario that informed me that unless I submit a completed medical report to them by February 21st my Driver's Licence will be downgraded. The other was that we had completed the arrangements for our month's sojourn in Mexico.

As I made arrangements for the medical examination that will cost me seventy-five dollars, I recalled that my Doctor had told me on a previous medical, "We were once allowed to call this an annual checkup and that's free." So chalk one up for either the Ministry of Health or the Ontario Medical Association as costcutters, but either way I'm out seventy-five dollars for something that OHIP covers for free.

Anyway as I contemplate the thought of not being allowed to drive a semi-truck without a medical that certifies me free from any debilitating diseases or ailments I cannot help but think that something is wrong here when I pull into the parking lot of the local drugstore and watch, not one but many, people stagger out of the store with a death grip on their walkers struggle with their car doors, exhale with amazement that they finally managed to get comfortable behind the wheel and then drive away as slowly as possible, evading the other cars in the lot. Where's the need for a medical for these physically damaged folks?

Not wanting to discuss ad nauseum the merits of older adults and driving, but I will - put plainly there is a helluva lot of people behind the wheel that should never be there! You know them, you may even be one of them. You know the refrains and justifications - "I am a good driver.", "I only drive to the store.", "I never drive after dark." and the best one of all - "I am not the worst driver on the road."

The point I make here is that if the only way I can drive an eighteen wheeler when I am over the age of sixty-five is to have a Doctor sign me off as healthy and fit why can't we apply the same standards to all drivers? Perhaps it's the fact that most accidents involving big rigs are caused by inattentive, careless or reckless drivers of "four-wheelers", and a great number of them are driven by older adults that irritates me. Now insurance statistics will bear out the fact that most claims are paid out in accidents involving new or young drivers, how many of the accidents involving older drivers never get put through insurance? My mother, God rest her soul, whenever she dented her car, and that was more than a few times, would refuse to put it through her insurance and made Murray Thompson a richer person at the end of his weeks. Her sister used to pay the other participant in her many "incidents" off in cash as they occurred. I am sure that none of this is news to the readers and everybody will smugly read this and mutter, "Yep that is somebody else and I know a couple of them!" So why do we allow infirm drivers to stay on the road? Who do we blame for this? And how can we, as a society correct this situation?

Cooling down after that rant, I can tell you the other item worth noting in this column is that we have concluded all the arrangements for our month 'down South'. This year, for the second in a row, we are going to live in Mexico for a month. Yep this burd is going to be a snowy one. This is not a holiday as we have no need to get away from drudgery or employment, we will just be living in a different place. A place that will be warmer and free of snow and ice. And when one factors in the other loss - that of seeing the immediate family, that is about the only difference in the way of life.

The condo has been rented, tip one - good deals can be found on the internet in the many rental sites. Followup to the selection can be done via email and finally if one still needs to engage the real estate person or the owner it is too easy to use Skype to talk to them and avoid long distance charges. The condo we will stay in is in Puerto Vallarta and we will join the approximately 50,000 'norteamericanos' who live there, a great number of them fulltime residents. Last year the arrangements were taken up with a freelance rental guy who called himself 'the Pvkid' turned out he was a part-time airline attendant who spends some of his spare time in Vallarta arranging rentals through his website. He was waiting for us when we arrived and showed us to the condo, located in the Northern part of Town, a fifteen minute bus ride from Downtown and thoroughly accessible to anywhere, who counting time anyway - hey this is Mexico. Despite a few renting problems, which were very efficiently handled by the owner's representative, a charming lady named Gaby, the condo was rebooked for this year and by bypassing the Pvkid we managed to rent it for two hundred dollars less than last year. Tip two - never get worked up by emergencies, for instance when we discovered that the condo had not been cleaned since the last letting before us, we just calmly told the agent that we were going to spend the night at the Comfort Inn next door and move in when it was cleaned. The owner told us - "Just do that and I'll pay for the stay." We were very pleasantly surprised when the money came through.

Knowing how much a flight to Vallarta usually costs means that we can gauge when a reasonable flight is offered by the airlines. Booking the flight usually takes place about six months before the event, any price near the previous year's cost will work but for real cheapos the lowest price as calculated by seat-watchers is at the forty-two day point, before the flight. We don't wait that long but do watch the price closely. Where the bargain-hunting comes in is when one looks for parking in Toronto. For short trips always stay the night before at a hotel that provides long-term parking with the room. Most hotels don't charge for seven days, some will give fourteen and a few will allow twenty-one but only one hotel would allow four weeks and that went out of business last month for renovations. So a hunt around the off-airport parking sites is needed to find the cheapest. Searching the internet for coupons is the only way to go.

So the plan is this year we will be having relatives stay for a week, the condo is a three bedroom, visiting Krystal and Doug (these folks live in Brighton and summer at Wicklow Beach) in Manzanillo - two hundred kms to the South. And just layaround the pool. Which leads to another tip; always book the rental car online. Last year the car was booked, on a

moments notice, and the booking was so hot off the presses that I had the confirmation number before the agency had the order. And the cost was half the 'walk-in' cost. Tips over; off to Mexico - talk to you next month!!



Forever Young!

Well I never thought I'd make it - retirement age that is. Starting off as a young boy soldier one would see the age of sixty-five expressed in four digits on one's personal documents from time to time. In 1966, 2011 seemed lifetimes away. But we made it, and so far it is a helluva lot of fun.

After suffering the slingshots that society throws at you - unemployment, bad bosses, good bosses, good jobs, bad wives, good wives, friendly places to live, good neighbours and friends; we have arrived with plenty of baggage and a few more years of healthy living before we check out of here. And as one never knows just how long that will be all we can do is to remain "Forever Young". I know my inspiration today is a older fellow of ninety-seven who still lives in his own apartment, chuckles a lot and gets frustrated by his fading memory and his ancient computer. Yep Jack Allin is definitely "Forever Young".

But gloating about surviving to this age is not the point of this column, nor is this the place to find tips about stretching your pension, complaining about your health, or lack of it and definitely not the place to print those interminably boring and maudlin quotes that start off - "Do you remember when". Nope I have been asked to write about the excursions away from Cobourg that the love of my life and I take from time to time, the impressions of the places we visit and how we get there (cheaply). The methods we use are not unique and we did not invent them but we learn something new each day and if we can will pass them on.

We have travelled a lot this year and never used a travel agent because we felt confident in what we were doing. That's the secret of this deal - confidence. If you feel queasy about any of the steps we use don't do it, go and see your favourite travel agent and then you get peace of mind. As well you have the satisfaction of knowing that if any of the arrangements get fouled up help is only a phone call away. We prefer the challenge of solving it ourselves, after all it is something else to do in an otherwise possibly bland day. And there are unintended consequences to the good. One session of trying to fix a hotel booking made online which had gone wrong at their end, and took three and a half hours of phoning resulted in two compensation vouchers worth \$150. Oh that is the other thing in all of this self-help always ask for something. As Fundraiser Extraordinaire - Bill Patchett says, many times - "Always ask".

Just come back from a trip to South America. Now for the details: noticing, in the Toronto star travel section (which is a must read every Saturday morning), a travel agency advertising a special fare for a flight to Lima Peru and seven days in a hotel for a very cheap price I phoned. Tip number one, only phone for details not commitment. After discovering the details of the offer - airline, hotel and prices then we went to work. The airline was COPA Air, a Panamanian airline which had just started to fly out of Toronto and the website was mined for details. They were offering promotional seats on all of their flights out of Pearson for a limited time. At a cost of \$501 per person one could not afford to go. Surfing Expedia.ca for a three star hotel for seven days to match, and the final cost per person was \$696 - fantastic.

But as we explained the deal to our friends the overwhelming response was, "What you are not going to Machu Picchu?" This question was still unanswered even as we landed in Lima. We had arranged to be picked up at the airport. After several emails to taxi companies had been ignored the hotel was phoned via Skype on the main computer. Amazing stuff this technology; just dial a number and one can be connected halfway across the world in an instant and at little cost.



As we explored Lima a travel agent was spotted. Moving in we started to ask about Machu Picchu tours from Lima. Another tip - you can pick up tours that the internet says are booked solid by talking to local tour operators when you get to your destination. They have the contacts and access to block bookings that never hit the internet. The tour operator booked us in for the following day on a three day fly-in personalised booking - hotel, flight, taxi transfers and site tickets for just over six hundred dollars a piece. Now the South American holiday was just over twelve hundred dollars each. A bargain compared to the packages being retailed from the travel brochures.

So what did we do in our time in Lima? The first thing we do, wherever we go is take the "City Tour" preferably a "hopon hopoff". These tours allow one to get the feel of the place, as we listen to the multilingual guides through free headphones, and from the open top bus one can see places to return to. These tours are usually booked online before we go for the best prices and convenience. The only chore on arrival is to get to the start point. That finished we were on our own for a few days. Walking around the area and visiting the usual sites - the Cathedral, the main museum and the local pride of the Town. In Lima as we walked we could not fail to see the large numbers of locals engaged in public works. Peru has abandoned the laissez-faire methods of tackling unemployment and a huge effort has gone into public works. This contrary method of economic revitalisation was a surprise to us as almost every other person on the street was wearing a municipal uniform of some sort or other. I guess that in order to combat the underground economy all the street vendors, for instance and that even included the money-changers, had to be licensed and uniformed for public identification. Add to the mix the large number of police and regulators a huge part of the population appeared to be public servants - at least the official unemployment figures were low! And the streets were very clean.



But the highlight of the trip was seeing two Wonders of the Modern World - Machhu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage sight and during a seven hour layover in Panama, the Canal. Not enough can be said about seeing both of these sights except - "WooooW" But those can be the subject of another column.

But the life's lessons learned after many years of practice is that we all have choices, we choose to spend our limited disposable income on travel. Others may drink, smoke or buy toys; we measure our success in travel dollars well spent. Hopefully by publishing our experiences and methods some of it may rub off on you - the readers and we will always remain, "Forever Young".