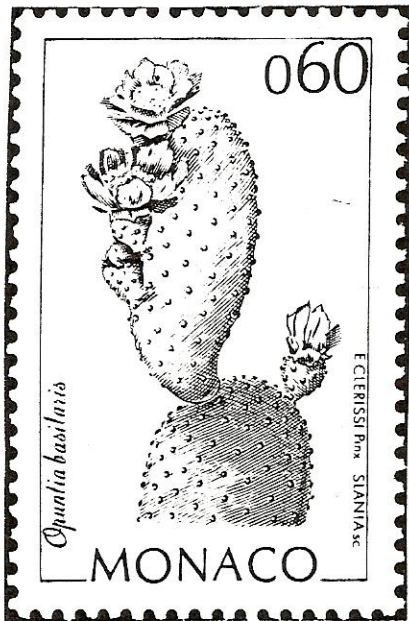


OPUNTIA

46.5D



ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

ART CREDIT: *Opuntia basilaris* is native to southwestern USA and is popular worldwide as a house plant. Common name is beavertail cactus. No spines but lots of glochids, which look cute and fuzzy until you brush against them and find out how difficult it is to remove these tiny barbs.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Scott Garinger, Picasso Gaglione, Diane Bertrand, Harry Andruschak

ME! ME! PICK ME!

by Dale Speirs

On October 22, 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chretien called a federal election for November 27. Off we went on another marathon run. The four major parties have registered a full slate of 301 candidates, and Bloc Québécois is contesting all 75 Québec ridings. The Liberals currently have a majority government, Alliance is the Official Opposition, and the Tories and NDP are the 'third parties' in the House of Commons. Two parties, Christian Heritage and Marxist-Leninist, have no candidates this time, while two new fringe parties, Canadian Action (about which I know nothing) and Marijuana (no prizes for guessing what their policy book is about) are starting up. In addition, there are the usual fringers such as the Greens and Natural Law.

Also as usual, I am in one of the most boring ridings in Canada, made more frustrating by the fact that my house is just inside the junction with two other, more interesting ridings. If I had bought three blocks east, I would be in Calgary Centre, where former Prime Minister Joe Clark (a Tory) is running. Three blocks south and I would be in Calgary Southwest, where former Alliance party chief Preston Manning is a candidate. Instead, I am in Calgary West, with a nondescript opposition backbencher.

Joe Who?

For the benefit of my non-Canadian readers, I should explain about Clark and Manning. Clark was briefly Prime Minister in 1979 but his minority government soon fell to the Liberals. He was shortly evicted from the party leadership in a coup brokered by Brian Mulroney, who went on to get the Tories back into power for 8 years. Clark then served under Mulroney, first as Foreign Minister, then as Minister of National Unity. Mulroney's legacy was that in the 1993 election the Tories went from the largest majority government in Canadian history down to two seats.

After a brief interregnum of a pair of nobodies leading the Tories, Clark was re-elected party leader, basically because no one else wanted the job. He is now trying to revive the party federally; the Tories are still strong provincially and form the Alberta and Ontario provincial governments. His election posters in the Calgary Centre riding show his middle-aged jowls and receding hairline with the slogan "Not just another pretty face". An amusing slogan by itself, but even funnier when you know that he is constantly accompanied by his beautiful 23-year-old daughter Catherine. She is a leggy, blond bombshell, and without a doubt the most popular subject for news photographers, who can't get enough pictures of her. Think of her as a Canadian version of Princess Diana, except much smarter.

The Rocky Mountain Way.

I have a personal connection with Clark, although we've never met. Back in the early 1970s, he was just starting out as a backbencher. He was so obscure that when he was first elected Tory party leader, nobody knew who he was, hence his nickname Joe Who?. My father stood as the Social Credit candidate against him in the old riding of Rocky Mountain House. Dad didn't have a chance, but he knew that and only campaigned to put Socred monetary policies in the public eye.

The riding was murder on all the candidates. It ran up the west side of Alberta about half the length of the province, but it was only about 50 kilometres wide at most. Worse yet, even though the riding was a strip of land running north-south about 400 kilometres, all the roads through it went east-west. To go from top to bottom of the riding, one had to go outside it into either the national parks of Jasper and Banff on the west, or through the rural ridings of central Alberta on its east side. Joe Clark then lived in High River, at the very south end, and my father lived in Red Deer, in the central part. The NDP candidate lived in Hinton, at the very north end. We're all used to driving great distances in western Canada, but this was excessive even by prairie standards. Rocky Mountain House riding was finally partitioned among the rural ridings in the 1980s, much to everyone's relief.

Meanwhile, Back At The Election ...

Preston Manning, meanwhile, had been evicted as party leader of Alliance earlier this year, having been displaced by Stockwell Day. Like Clark, Manning swallowed his pride and stayed on as a lieutenant to the new leader. Day was previously a cabinet minister in the Alberta Tory government. Both he and that government tend to have their flaky moments.

So who will I vote for in my riding? Not the Liberals, the same old gang of tax-and-spenders. Not the Tories, whose candidate is a disgruntled Alliance deserter. Not Alliance, whose candidate considers Maggie Thatcher a weakling. Not the NDP, a labour-socialist party slowly disintegrating as the unions and university intellectuals feud amongst themselves (and whose leader is married to a Tory cabinet minister, giving concrete meaning to the phrase about strange bedfellows). By process of elimination, that leaves the Greens, whose nominee is a spotty-faced university student running as a sacrifice candidate.

sigh

Did Not! Did Too!

I only glanced at newspaper headlines during the campaign. It was the usual name-calling and gotcha games playing. The

Liberals declared Alliance would eliminate medicare and the old-age pension, and force everyone to worship in a fundamentalist church. Alliance denounced the Grits for driving Canada into ruin by high taxation and uncontrolled government spending. Joe Clark (there really isn't a federal Tory party to speak of) only got his picture in the papers if Catherine was beside him. I assume the NDP and Greens were campaigning, but if they made the newspapers it was buried in the classified ads.

And So To Vote.

2000-11-27

I never got my voter registration card by November 8 as promised by the Elections Canada advertising. I wasn't particularly surprised. The cards are mailed to street addresses only. I get all my mail at Box 6830. My house is the only one in the neighbourhood facing the avenue, whereas all the other houses face the cross-streets. This has an advantage in that I get very little junk mail, since the flyer delivery boys go up and down the streets and not the avenue. They either don't notice my house or else can't be bothered to walk half a block out of their way and back again. However, because the lettercarriers never deliver mail to me, since I get all mine at the downtown post office, they don't believe my house exists. I have very good reason to suspect that my voter registration card was therefore returned to sender, address unknown.

There is a voter hotline run by Elections Canada to apply for a card if not received. They have about ten operators for the entire country. "Please stay on the line. All our operators are busy at the moment, but the next available operator will take your call as soon as possible."

I checked the Elections Canada website at www.elections.ca, thinking they might have a list of polling stations. Nothing but brochureware. The closest I could find were maps of the ridings, but I already knew that anyway. The home page had an e-mail address to contact, so I clicked on that. I was greeted by an unapologetic notice that no e-mails would be accepted by Elections Canada until Tuesday, November 28. Since that is the day after the election, no one would have any need to contact them then for information. That's one way to avoid having to spend money on customer service.

Well, no problem. If you don't have a voter registration card, you can register at the polling station as long as you have two pieces of identification. So off I drove to the Altadore Elementary School, where I have voted about 99% of the time in federal, provincial, and municipal elections. They did have a polling station, but unfortunately it was for Calgary Centre, not Calgary West. The Returning Officer didn't have any lists of polls for adjacent Calgary ridings. Since the boundary line between the two ridings is the centre line of the street on which the school sits,

one would have thought that someone might have anticipated a few misdirected voters.

Still no problem. Anytime I didn't vote at Altadore Elementary School, I did so at the CFB Calgary Community Centre, in what was a military base until they closed it in 1997. The base is now re-developed as residential housing, but I figured the community centre would not have been torn down since it was a relatively new building. So off I drove, only to spend the next quarter-hour driving about in circles. They didn't tear the centre down, but they re-arranged all the streets. I could see it off in the distance but couldn't find the route. Eventually, after a couple of illegal U-turns and bumping across a vacant lot, I got there. Only to find that the centre was now a business office.

No need to panic, not just yet anyway. It's still early in the morning. Lots of time to search. Think logically. Think, think. Aha! Polling stations are always located in schools, community centres, or church halls. There can't be that many of them in my neighbourhood, so it was just a matter of systematically working outward in a spiral from my house. After driving by two more schools, I finally found my polling station in a private school three blocks from my house. I could have walked, had I but known.

And so to vote. Not having a voter card, I had to swear an oath to the Returning Officer, and Her Majesty the Queen of Canada, Elizabeth II Regina, By Grace Of God, that I was who I said I was. Technically incorrect, though. She is actually Elizabeth I of Canada, since the earlier Elizabeth was never Queen of Canada. She is Queen by the Act of Settlement, not by grace of God. The natural heir (that is, by grace of God) to the Canadian throne would be the Duke of Bavaria, the heir to the Stewart throne. A polling station, however, is not the place to start a pedantic argument, especially since the clerks had no authority to change the oath.

This was all redundant, as the polling clerk first insisted on seeing my driver's licence, the Ministry of Highways being considered more trustworthy than my loyalty to God, Queen, and Country. After five minutes of paperwork, I walked over to the proper table to get my ballot. My name was pre-printed on the voters list and the scrutineer there questioned why I had bothered to register, but by now I just wanted to be done with it. Let somebody else worry about the paperwork. I made my X on the ballot, dropped it into the box under the watchful eye of the clerk, and left.

Even though the polling station was only three blocks from my house, the labyrinth of new streets constructed by the developer meant that I had to drive a kilometre on winding roads in the opposite direction, then double back past Altadore Elementary

School to get home.

I hope the Greens appreciate all I've done for them.

Once More With Feeling.

2000-11-28

The morning after the night before. The Liberals had been predicted to be reduced, possibly down to a minority government. Instead, Alliance's collection of right-wing lunatics panicked eastern Canada into giving the Grits an increased majority, with 173 seats in the House of Commons. They are the only party to win seats in every province, and took two of the three Arctic territories. This also gives Prime Minister Jean Chretien three consecutive majorities, something not done since the 1940s.

Alliance increased to 66 seats and will remain Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. They didn't get the breakthrough they were hoping for in Ontario, winning only two ridings out of 103 in that province. They split too much of the right-wing vote with the Tories. Alliance politicians lost the aboriginal vote because they proposed to abolish tribal homelands like Nunavut and the hundreds of Reserves scattered across the country. They lost the vote in the Maritime provinces because they referred to them as a bunch of unemployed layabouts living off the pogeys. They never had the Québec vote to begin with, of course, and thus were out 25% of the ridings in Canada from the beginning. One of their candidates referred to Asian immigrants as invaders.

Several Alliance candidates gave the impression that separation of church and state was a bad idea that would be done away with by an Alliance government, and further sweetened the pot by gay-bashing. The anti-gun control rednecks tried to make a big splash, but even on the prairies were frustrated by the fact that the majority of Canadians support gun control. That issue never made much of an impact, as everyone was too busy name-calling about hidden agendas.

The most embarrassing faux pas for Alliance was their proposal to allow referendums on any topic as long as 400,000 people signed a petition for it. Jokesters immediately collected that many signatures for a law requiring Stockwell Day to change his first name to Doris, and another group got enough to change his name to Sunny. I am not making that up.

Alliance swept the prairies and British Columbia, but since 70% of Canada's population is in central Canada, that didn't mean much. In Calgary, Preston Manning specifically blamed the Tories for ruining the chances of Alliance by splitting the right-wing vote and allowing the Liberals to take 100 seats in Ontario.

Joe Clark defeated the incumbent Alliance M.P. in Calgary Centre, by a comfortable margin of 3,000 votes. He was helped by cross-over voting from the Liberals and NDP, who knew their candidates didn't have a ghost of a chance and decided to make

their vote count against Alliance. In my riding of Calgary West, the Alliance candidate cruised to an easy win over the Tory by 54% to 22% of the vote. The Green candidate finished last with 2.4%.

Bloc Québécois dropped down to 37 seats, partly because of declining separatism but mainly because of voter dissatisfaction with the provincial government's newly introduced municipality amalgamation laws. The governing Parti Québécois are forcing the numerous Montreal suburbs into a single unified metropolitan government, and likewise for other towns and cities across the province. This measure is hotly opposed by many, especially anglophone communities who don't want to be swamped inside a francophone-majority city. Since there won't be a provincial election for a few years yet, the voters had to take their anger out on the Bloc, which is the federal wing of the Parti Québécois.

The Tories and NDP were essentially unchanged at 12 and 13 seats respectively. Only 63% of voters eligible to cast a ballot did so, despite what was a vigorously contested election of Right versus Left. To put that into perspective, that is the lowest turnout since 1896.

Alberta Premier Ralph Klein has stated that he will call an election next spring. Our province has the lowest taxes in Canada, no sales tax, no net debt, and will have paid off the gross debt in a couple of years, all because of petroleum royalties. (Alberta produces 40% of Canada's oil and Calgary is the petroleum capital of the country.) Soaring prices for oil and natural gas have flooded the provincial treasury with cash. Klein announced income tax rebates to help Albertans survive the higher cost of heating. The first rebate of \$150 arrived in today's mail. The next rebate will be sent out just before the spring election. Don't forget to vote!

ONCE MORE UNTO THE WEEKEND.

2000-08-04

I had been a Parks Dept. District Foreman, supervising about 30 people and contractors, and was burning out from stress. When I successfully bid for the weekend shift in April 1999, my quality of work life improved immensely. I now work 12 hour shift Friday to Sunday plus statutory holidays. No labourer crews to look after anymore, no staff meetings (well, at least very rare; only three in the last 18 months), nobody hollering. Just do trouble calls (broken branches, irrigation leaks, vandalism cleanup) and fill in with building and vehicle security checks. I have only seen my boss once since then, and that by accident; I

was walking downtown when I met

up with him as he was going into a meeting at City Hall. (Actually, he's a nice guy; I don't have any boss-from-Hell stories.) Four days off per week, during the week when I can go out into the mountains without having to fight the weekend crowds.

Walter Who?

The maintenance depot I currently work out of is 16A Street, located in a residential area. We share the facilities with a golf course, whose staff start earlier than I do. Each morning as I drive into the compound at 06h30, I see a shadowy figure scurrying along the building wall. When I get out of my car and start walking to the office, the figure waits patiently for me to open up. The cat, for it is indeed a feline, is a smokey grey shorthair named Walter, who lives a block away. We know this because the tag on his collar gives his name and address.

I unlock the building door and hold it open briefly while Walter scoots inside to the lunchroom ahead of me. He scouts the floor for goodies dropped by careless eaters on the early morning shift taking their coffee break, while I unlock the office I share with the weekday District Foreman. I always come in a bit earlier on Friday mornings, the start of my workweek, to catch up on the accumulated e-mail.

We have recently upgraded to Windows NT, so it now takes about 5 minutes for the computer to boot up, as opposed to 30 seconds for the obsolete command-line system we used to have. Therefore, as soon as I walk in, I ctrl-alt-del on the keyboard, backspace out the weekday foreman's name and put mine in, and log on. While the login screen churns away, I then take off my coat, turn on my cellphone, go outside and do the daily maintenance check on my truck, load it with tools, come back inside, re-fill Walter's water dish in the lunchroom, and then sit and wait for WinNT to finish loading.

As I scroll through the important (requests from weekday foremen for jobs to be done on the weekend), and the internal spam from the desk jockeys downtown in City Hall (retirements, Homeless Awareness Week, the latest news about our departmental re-organization), Walter comes in from the lunchroom and hops up on my lap. Together the two of us delete (most of the time) or print (some of the time) the missives that cluttered the in-box.

Play Ball.

This is the August long weekend, so I actually have to work four days this week, Monday being the Civic Holiday. It is a long-standing provincial holiday in Alberta, since before I was born. Nobody knows what its purpose is, other than to provide a nice

break between Canada Day and Labour Day, but nobody proposes to abolish it, not even the Tories.

The Friday morning e-mail includes messages from weekday maintenance staff about the Canadian Little League national championships this weekend, being hosted by the Calgary baseball clubs. The tournament is scattered all over the city. I am advised by the Nose Hill District Foreman that the leagues are using the ball diamonds at the extreme northwest of the city, and the South Area Supervisor asks me to keep an eye on the diamonds in use at the extreme southeast of the city.

Calgary is Canada's answer to Los Angeles when it comes to urban sprawl; the diamonds are about 25 kilometres apart. No big deal; we're used to it. I did a time and motion study on myself last winter, and about 80% of my time is spent driving from point A to point B. The city is about 40 kilometres by 30 kilometres in size, and I drive an average of 150 kilometres in a 12-hour work day.

Rain, Rain, Go Away

Which it eventually did about noon Friday. In the meantime, the mower operators went on weed eaters to trim fencelines while waiting for the weather to dry off. I sent the spray trucks home;

the dandelions will have a temporary reprieve until tomorrow. After checking with the fuel truck drivers that all the operators were in at the other depots, I drove out of 16A Street.

I didn't get far before the cellphone rang. The Trouble Call Dispatcher advised that Fire Dept. and ambulance had cut off a gate lock at the west side of Nose Hill Park while on a hot response (sirens and flashers; a cold response is no siren or lights) last night. Someone had a heart attack while in the middle of the park, which is about 2,000 hectares of native prairie. I drove over and put a new lock on the chain gate. No further action required.

As I cleared that one, the cellphone rang again. The Parks North Area Office advised a citizen concern about sprinklers running continuously in a park since yesterday at Travis Crescent NE. This is about a third of the way across the city from Nose Hill Park. I seldom get two calls in a row in the same community, hence the high daily mileage on my truck.

Arriving on site, I shut off the DCV (double check valve), which is the main control for the entire park. I marked the recalcitrant irrigation zone with red spray paint so the repair crew can find it. Probably a stuck valve or solenoid in the automatic controls. I never fix irrigation problems because they are too time-consuming. One has to dig, or individually inspect dozens of valves, or trace lines back and forth. At the end of my shift, I will

e-mail a report of my weekend activities to all the district and specialty foremen, at which time I will advise the Irrigation Foreman of the problem. Irrigation failures are not hazards or immediate concerns since the grass can get by a few days until the repair crew comes out. For attention of Irrigation repair crew next week.

The weather has dried off enough that I can call the fuel truck drivers and tell them to switch the mower operators back onto their machines.

North Area Office calls me on my cellphone and advises of citizen concern about deadwood in park shrub beds at Exshaw Road NW. I inspect site, lots of half-dead honeysuckle. For attention of District 130 maintenance crew, not urgent.

Bowness Park attendant advises that the public washrooms at Baker Park (on the opposite shore of the Bow River from Bowness) have been severely graffitied. He will clean off with graffiti remover but is running low on remover. I include a note in my weekend report for the Bowness District Foreman to get some more. Baker Park is fairly remote, at the west end of the city just below Bears paw Dam. We have graffiti or partying damage about two or three times a year now in that park. Big city life, unfortunately.

The fuel truck driver calls me on the two-way radio. One of our mower operators got poked in the eye by a branch as he was trimming around a tree with low branches. I drive over to check Abdul, who says it doesn't hurt that much. Just a minor injury, but all injuries must be reported. Trivial injuries could develop into something worse. I fill in the WCB (Workers Compensation Board) forms and tell Abdul to visit a 24-hour clinic this evening just in case. For attention of Equipment Trainer on Tuesday.

North Area Office advises citizen concern about vegetation blocking view of intersections on 26 Avenue NE at 4 Street and at Edmonton Trail. I inspect sites; both trees are on private property. Not our responsibility. I phoned By-Laws Office, who will send a constable out to issue notices to the landowners. No further action on our part required.

And so the day goes. And ends.

Saturday.

And so another day begins. It is a cold crisp morning, and Walter stays in the office for a few hours until it warms up, napping in my chair while I am out and about. When the weather is reasonable, he will disappear, off to the adjacent Streets Dept. depot for more freeloading. I don't know what the rest of his daily routine is after that, but the Parks evening shift man tells me

Walter comes back to 16A Street Depot every night about 22h00 for a nightcap with the workers going off duty. Judging from his weight problem, Walter must have a good route.

Mowers and spray trucks running today, with no weather problems. Abdul reports he saw a doctor last night and his eye is fine. It will not be a lost-time accident.

Our interstater (triple-deck flail) mower calls in with a flat tire on Berkshire Boulevard. The fuel truck driver doesn't have that type of spare tire, so I telephone the tire shop that has the contract with the City. They will send out a repair truck. In the meantime I tell the operator to pick litter up and down the road while waiting for the repairman.

Mower operator on a Toro 580 (triple-deck rotary blade) reports he hit a Yield sign while cutting along freeway boulevard in north central Calgary. I inspect site. No damage to machine, minor dent to sign from raised mow deck that clipped it as Brad was driving past. Sign still standing and in good order. No further action required.

While in the vicinity, I note an adjacent park at Greenview Lane has a chain gate left open. Attempting to re-lock it, I see that a piece has been cut out of it for reasons unknown. I leave it be; for attention of Fences crew next week.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises of citizen concern about sprinklers running continuously in park at 200 Mount Douglas Close SE. This is in the extreme south end of the city, so I call Fred, a fuel truck driver down at that end, and have him go over and shut off the DCV. For attention of Irrigation repair crew next week.

Police Dispatcher requests that a lilac be pruned back from a stop sign at Edmonton Trail, as a traffic accident had occurred there earlier today. Since this constitutes a known and immediate hazard, I therefore spend the next hour clearing back the 2-metre high shrub, instead of passing it on to the weekday crew. The lilac hasn't been pruned in about ten years, so it takes a while to lop out the offending trunks. But finally it is done, and I can type in my e-mail report that no further action is needed.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises of citizen concern about sprinklers bubbling behind his house in the park at Hawktree Circle NW. I drive out to the site, in the far northwest of the city, and shut off the DCV. Leaky sprinkler marked with red spray paint. For attention of Irrigation crew next week.

Sunday.

No rain but still a bit damp. I tell the mowers to stay off slopes and berms and just cut flat areas on their routes such as playfields.

Walter decides to stay inside for a while. But I have a citizen concern at Goddard Avenue and Garry Crescent NE about a slow leak in the park. On inspecting the site, I can see the standing water but can't locate any leak. Perhaps it is undrained rainwater. To be on the safe side, I shut off the DCV. For attention of Irrigation crew next week.

From there I head into the far south of the city to check the baseball diamonds where the tournaments are being held. Fred is busy with the mowers, so I empty the garbage cans. They are overflowing with pizza boxes, candy wrappers, potato chip bags, and pop cans, which collectively illustrate the four basic food groups for Little League players and coaches (fat, sugar, salt, and caffeine). I dump the bags of garbage in the bin at Southland Drive Depot. No further action required.

Citizen concern about park spraying warning signs being left too long. She collected them and stacked them by her house. Under Alberta law, spray trucks are required to post warning signs in parks that herbicide has been applied. The signs stay up for 48 hours and are then supposed to be collected for re-use. It doesn't always happen. Sometimes kids or the wind scatter them, but often the spray crew doesn't get back for quite a while. I pick up the signs and take them out to the Pest Control compound at Bears paw Depot. No further action required.

And The Wind Never Stops, But It Always Complains.

By Sunday afternoon, it was looking like I would have a nice quiet weekend. But it was not to be. As I was waiting at a traffic light at Shaganappi Trail and Crowchild Trail, a gust of wind suddenly rocked my truck. I looked to the north and my heart sank. Bearing down on the city was a cold-front storm.

This type of storm is essentially a giant vertical wall of black rain clouds plowing along the ground, pushed from behind by a fast-moving polar front. It slams through with winds up to 50 kilometres an hour. These storms are short-lived, seldom more than an hour or two. Once the edge of the polar front passes, the cold air mass behind it is relatively calm, like the eye of a hurricane.

In the summer, when the leaves are on the trees, cold-front storms cause massive amounts of broken branches. We usually get them in batches, with two or three in one summer, then none for a couple of years.

I abandoned my current mission and turned towards the Ranchlands and Silver Springs area on the southern slope of Nose Hill. From past experience, I knew this would be where the storm would cause a lot of damage, due to mature trees and an exposed position on the hill. The other suburbs on the hill are only about

a decade old, so they won't have much serious damage since the trees are still young ones.

Before I could get there, my cellphone rang with the first of what would be 27 trouble calls in the next two hours. That night I would be working overtime until 22h30 instead of booking off at the regular 19h15.

The Trouble Call Dispatcher reverses my course. Off-ramp from southbound University Drive NW onto westbound Trans-Canada Highway blocked by fallen branch. I inspect site and determine that a 40-cm poplar (we always measure trees by chest-height diameter, not height) has dropped a large branch. I clear it back and stack the branches on the boulevard for a crew to pick up on Tuesday.

The trouble calls are now coming in flurries. Vancouver Crescent NW, 40-cm willow across road. When I arrive, it is a private yard tree; the homeowners are already out with handsaws cutting it up. I drive on without stopping to the next call, which is on 18 Street NW, only a couple of blocks from 16A Street Depot. A high hanger in a 40-cm elm, that is to say, a large broken branch dangling high up the tree. The tree tops are whipping back and forth in the wind gusts, and the trunks are running wet with the drizzle. No way can I reach it by climbing, so I will have to call out an aerial bucket truck.

I phone Fred down in the south end of town, as I know he has a contractor working there. (Parks Dept. does not own any aerial bucket trucks; we use contractors.) We make arrangements that as soon as Fred's emergencies are taken care of, the aerial truck will come up north. As soon as I disconnect, the cellphone rings. Ginny is calling from East Area; she needs an aerial truck over there. Is one available? It appears that her tree is more dangerous than mine, so I phone Fred back and tell him to send the aerial her way before it comes to me.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises large poplar across road at Silverbrook Way NW. I inspect site, private tree has fallen and is blocking street completely. We do not do private trees, excepting that if a road or sidewalk is blocked in a hazardous manner, then we will clear it back to the property line. I get out the bow saw and clear a lane for the traffic. As I am doing so, the homeowner across the street comes out and advises me their car was hit by the tree. They had moved it just before I arrived. I told them to contact their insurance agent. On clearing the road, I advise homeowner whose tree it was that she is responsible for cleanup. She will have to hire a contractor. No further action required by us.

Trouble Call advises of a broken branch at 17A Street NW, a block away from the one on 18 Street. Another high hanger for the aerial truck. I knock on the door and tell the homeowner we'll

get to it in about an hour or so.

2026 - 24 Avenue NW: 40-cm elm, fallen branch, I remove, no further action required.

322 - 5 Avenue NE: 40-cm green ash, fallen branches removed. No further action required.

1315 - 7 Street NW: 25-cm birch, top half snapped off, branches removed. For attention of Trees Gardener for corrective pruning. Not urgent, no further hazard.

Whenever we are swamped by calls during a storm, I prioritize. I know which neighbourhoods have the big trees. Newer suburbs where smaller trees are blown over will have to wait, as those trees are not immediate hazards. The older suburbs with the towering elms and poplars are the ones that have broken branches hanging high up that might come crashing down in the next gust. They therefore get priority. I drive by every address regardless of where it is. If it is not an immediate hazard, I don't stop. I keep driving to the next call-out.

The cellphone rings. The aerial truck has cleared East Area and is on the way. I tell him I will meet him at the 18 Street NW address with a list.

Trouble Call advises 1311 - 6A Street NW has high hanger. I inspect site, 40-cm green ash needs aerial truck.

2016 - 26 Avenue NW: west side of corner lot, broken branch cleared by me from 40-cm elm. No further action required.

655 Ranch Estates Place NW: 40-cm elm with cracked co-dominant leader (main trunk), leaning towards house. Priority for aerial truck.

Memorial Drive westbound just before Crowchild Trail: 30-cm poplar fell across freeway. Cleared back from road. Snag (standing broken trunk) and branches for Trees crew to clean up Tuesday. No further immediate hazard.

I meet the aerial truck and give him a list of high hangers. We exchange cellphone numbers and go our separate ways. In the last twenty years in the landscape industry, I have to say the greatest improvement and boon has been the cellphone. No more driving aimlessly around from job site to job site trying to find a worker. No more stopping at payphones or detouring to depots to make a call. The cellphone is the single greatest productivity improvement the industry has seen.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises broken branch at corner of Upton Place and 24 Avenue NW. I inspect site; large branch has torn off 40-cm poplar and fallen toward house. The branch tore out about half the core of the tree at chest height. Tree is unsafe and leaning toward house, since its support on that side has been ripped out. I call the aerial truck driver and tell him to make it the next stop after he finishes the tree he's currently doing.

I drive back to 16A Street Depot to dump the pile of branches on the back of my truck. Going down a side street just before the depot, I see Walter trotting along the boulevard, thoroughly soaked by the rain. He pays no mind to my truck as I pass him; he is thinking more of home and a warm spot indoors to dry off.

29 Street NW at 13 Avenue: As I drive past Foothills Hospital, I see a large poplar branch fallen onto the road from one of their poplars. I pick it up; no further action required.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises broken branch at 331 - 3 Avenue NE. 30-cm green ash; I clear away. No further action required.

By now it is getting dark, and I've been on overtime for several hours. I meet with the aerial truck driver; we'll carry on tomorrow morning.

Monday.

Because of the long weekend, a lot of Calgarians went out camping in the mountains. They are starting to return, and many are just now discovering windstorm damage. The cellphone keeps ringing. The aerial truck is moving today between North Area and East Area. Ginny and I are constantly on the phone.

Trouble Call Dispatcher advises tree down at 1431 - 7A Street NW. I inspect site; top half snapped off 25-cm birch. I clear away branches. The snag will have to come out later, so I knock on the door and tell the homeowner. For attention of Trees crew next week, no immediate hazard, to be done after priorities.

4 Street NE, west boulevard, second tree south of 18 Avenue: I cleared broken branch from 30-cm green ash.

Ranchlands Boulevard, north side, first tree west of Ranchero Drive: 30-cm poplar snapped halfway up. I cleared fallen top and stack branches on roadside boulevard. The 3-metre snag is no hazard; for attention of Trees crew next week.

And so it goes. The steady flow of calls lets up by dark but we will have lots of calls tomorrow. People will get home from the mountains late at night to find a fallen tree or high hanger, and will phone Trouble Call Dispatch. But tomorrow is Tuesday, which means that it will be on the weekday shift. I tell the aerial truck to report to the Trees Foreman tomorrow; we'll guarantee the truck lots of work. I compose my weekend report on the computer, about five pages instead of the usual two or three, and spam it out to all the Parks foremen city-wide. I once had a weekday foreman tell me he dreaded coming in on Monday morning for fear of what he would read in my report about the shenanigans that went on during the weekend. He'll be chewing on Aspirin all day tomorrow.

End Of The Day.

My shift is finally over, and so to home. As I drive out of the compound, I see Walter has climbed up into a small Mayday tree by the entrance gate. There are three or four magpies roosting in the same tree, and at first glance I thought they were mobbing the poor cat to drive him away. But Walter does not appear distressed. Indeed, he is actively attempting to stalk the magpies just as they are attempting to mob him. It is a draw. The branches are too light and sparse for Walter to move quickly in the tree. He must carefully test each branch before he puts his weight on it, which rather removes the element of surprise against any magpie sitting on the branch tip. By the time Walter gets within striking range, the bird has fluttered to another branch.

Conversely, the magpies can't mob Walter because there are too many branches in the way for rapid flight. They can only hop from twig to twig, always choosing the lightest ones that won't bear the weight of a cat. Walter moves slowly and hesitantly from branch to branch, like a WinNT system booting up. I get out of my car and lock the gate behind me, but the combatants pay no attention to me. The Mexican standoff continues as I drive away.

End of the day, end of the weekend. See you next weekend, Walter.