

OPUNTIA

61.5

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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Kris Mininger

2006-02-08

Calle Obispo 4 bajo

Plasencia 10600, Caceres, Spain

[Re: farm life] Regarding your father's phone conversations like "Is her afterbirth still hanging from her?" I've seen that myself. I am glad I now live in a town where I can buy all the fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and cheeses my heart could desire without actually producing it myself. Three years of farm life, while fascinating and enjoyable, was enough. Sometimes I get the itch to do it again, but then I remember demaggotting 200 sheep, and I'm cured.

[When I think about retiring to a rural area, I remind myself of the time I got the pickup truck stuck in the middle of an open field on Christmas Day while feeding the cattle, during a howling blizzard at -20°C. I had to walk across the field facing into the wind, get the open-cab tractor to pull the truck out, finish feeding the cattle who were huddled in the bush, drive the truck back to the yard, walk back to get the tractor, and then drive it home into that wind. I always laugh when I hear people talking about giving up the urban rat race and enjoying the simple life of farming.]

FROM: Jeanette Handling
1905 Southview Court
Jacksonville, Illinois 62650-3525

2006-05-14

[Re: my cattle drive story and mention about my father, a livestock veterinarian] I remember meeting a large-animal vet in the late 1960s and expressing my admiration for his work. He sadly mentioned that his grandkids didn't seem to respect what he did. I said that as a farm girl I knew how important a vet was when he's trying to keep animals healthy that a family has a hefty financial stake in. I also appreciated the hazards in working with large animals and the courage it must take to do that.

[I don't recall anyone up my way speaking disrespectfully of veterinarians, but unfortunately when my father died at the too-young age of 68, the grandchildren were still too young to have any memory of him. They are all city born and raised; my brother, cousins, and I are the last generation of our family that have any personal experience of the farming way of life.]

[Dad died in 1996 of a coronary thrombosis (blood clot in the heart) which was the result of a bad accident he had two years previous when a cow smashed him against a board fence and made the right side of his body completely black and blue. He was on blood thinners the remaining two years of his life because there were so many blood clots from that injury. After the

accident he told me that for the first time in his life
he had gotten careless and violated a cardinal rule of
farming: When you are in a corral with livestock, never get more
than two seconds away from the fence. It takes four-legged
animals two seconds to come up to speed because they have to
sort out all their legs, during which time it is actually possible for
humans to outrun a horse or a cow.]

-2-

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road, Tottenham
London N15 4JU, England

2006-02-05

[Re: thriftiness of the older generation that lived through the Great Depression] My parents were teenagers during World War Two, and so grew up in a culture which was very much make do and mend. You lived within your means, were grateful for what you got, saved hard for occasional luxuries, never got rid of anything if another use could be found for it, and so weiter. Naturally they carried their frugality into the postwar decades, as did much of society at large. After an intervening couple of decades in which the want-it-now throwaway society born in the mid-1960s triumphed, we're now encouraged to recycle.

FROM: Lloyd Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2006-02-09

I think our lifespans are also lengthened by the fact that we have clothing that is superior in keeping one warm and dry. The only kind of headgear seen these days are baseball caps. I've never worn caps before, but now I'm getting used to it, especially to keep my bald spot from getting sunburned.

[I never wore hats until about five years ago, when I found I couldn't take the sun beaming down on me like I used to. No bald spot, but my eyes aren't what they used to be. Now I wear a cowboy hat, which I didn't back on the ranch. I prefer them because they protect from the sun and rain on all sides, whereas a baseball cap isn't much use in heavy rain.]

2006-04-11

I know a number of people who own horses. A couple are equestrians, but most are farm-types who own a horse or two to ride and to be close to animals they love. There's not a cowboy hat in sight. We're all going by stereotypes we see in old movies.

[I've seen lots of pictures of the old days on the Canadian prairies, and the cowboys all wear derbies or Yorkshire cloth caps because they were the only ones you could buy in the general stores.

Cowboy hats didn't arrive (via the USA) until after the open range had been closed off.]

FROM: Sheryl Birkhead
25509 Jonnie Court
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882

2006-05-12

[Sheryl is a practicing veterinarian.] As a veterinary student I found it difficult to articulate the difference between beef and dairy temperaments. The beef breeds are just so much calmer and predictable.

[My paternal uncles were dairy farmers but I had no personal experience of how fussy a Holstein might get. Our Charolais and Hereford beef cattle were very mild mannered and I was never in fear of them. On the other hand, our neighbour kept Black Angus, and I wouldn't even set foot in the same quarter-section field if one of them was around. The second most dangerous farm animal is an Angus cow when you are standing between her and her calf. The most dangerous farm animals are swine, especially sows, because they not only trample, they bite.]

I showed Brown Swiss; my original cow was Fogel's Meadow Barbie ("Shadow"), and all her offspring I named "Shadow's _____". Not as fancy as your herd name!

When I was working in a mixed practice, we did lots of chute work. It never ceased to amaze me that the farmer rarely had things set up, and frequently did not even have the right stuff. Headgates made things a lot easier.

[Before coming out, my father always told the farmer to pen the animal in a stall with a headgate or a corral with a squeeze chute. Those who didn't were billed "waiting time" while they went out and got the animal. Dad never had to bill anyone twice for waiting time.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Henry Welch, KRin Pender-Gunn, Martha Shivvers, Chester Cuthbert, Ficus, Phlox Icona, Karen Gory, John Held Jr, Ned Brooks, Murray Moore

GIMME THAT OLDE TYME RELIGION.

by Dale Speirs

But First, A Digression.

My mother's religion was Presbyterian. During the first part of my childhood, in the rural village of Eckville, Alberta, we attended that church, but I was too young to have any memories

of it. My father's family was Baptist, and that is the church we attended in later childhood. There was no Baptist church in Eckville at that time. When I was eight, my father moved his veterinary practice to a rural area just north of Red Deer. The reverse situation then transpired, as there was no Presbyterian church but there was a Baptist church. By then I was old enough to have some memories, and the Baptist churches are what I remember.

There is a joke among Baptists that if you have four Baptists in a village, there will be three Baptist churches, one of which will be in the middle of a schism. My father was like that. He grew up in a very political family in southern Saskatchewan, where loud debates around the dinner table started as soon as grace was said. My brother and I picked it up from childhood and took it as a normal part of daily life. Dad was one of six sons. His brothers lived in various places throughout western Canada, and at family reunions they would pick up their political discussions from where they last left off a year ago. It was a shock to various in-laws the first time they had a dinner with any of the Speirs clan. "Pass the salt, please" was about the safest thing you could say at the table without starting up an argument about monetary reform.

When we moved to the Red Deer area, we first attended a regular Baptist church in an outer suburb of Red Deer. After a couple of years, some of the members, including Dad, fell out over doctrinal

differences. What they were, I have no memory, because small boys are not interested in such adult topics. The dissenters found an abandoned one-room schoolhouse not far from our farm, and set up a new church. It never had an official name; we just called it the North Hill Baptist Church from its location. I don't believe it was ever officially incorporated. The congregation met in the single large room. Sunday school was in the cloakroom. I well recall sitting amidst the parkas and boots, while a member of the congregation took us through the lesson. Pews were too expensive, so the congregation used folding chairs. When Sunday school began, us kids would pick up our chairs and lug them into the cloakroom, our teacher following us with his chair in one hand and balancing a pile of books in the other.

There was no regular minister because the congregation was too small to afford one. Instead, various members took turns acting as a lay pastor. They found out quickly that the job wasn't as simple as it appeared. It was easy enough to come up with a sermon for holy days such as Easter and Christmas, but for the rest of the year, the list of topics was soon exhausted. At first, the lay preachers used the newspapers as a source for topics. They soon ran dry at this well because most news is repetitive. Politics, scandals, disasters, and crimes differ in the details but not the themes. Sports, in those days, were not considered part of the police beat as they are now.

In the summer, sermons were less trouble because the church could bring in sessionals, who were divinity students from various Baptist seminaries across Canada and western USA. The sessionals worked cheap because they wanted the experience for their resumes and because they weren't yet fully qualified as ministers. The pay was low, but it was the practice to give them free room and board with a local family and the loan of a car. A sessional could thus save almost all of his pay since he had little in the way of expenses. Most of our sessionals were from the Canadian prairies, but one summer we had a Noo Yawker from an Iowa seminary. I remember him because it was the first time I ever heard an American accent. I grew up surrounded by people speaking with Slavic or Scandinavian accents, but I couldn't place which country he was from. I asked my father, who told me about New York. I was quite surprised to learn that an accent could be localized to a single city, not just a country.

Eventually the North Hill Baptist Church faded away. It was too small to be viable, and the congregation buckled under the workload. It happened that about this time the Red Deer First Baptist Church got a new minister from Calgary. My father's parents and three of his brothers lived in Calgary and had Rev. Benson Jones for their church minister. Jones took the calling in Red Deer, and if he was good enough for Dad's parents and brothers, he was good enough for Dad. So we moved to the First Baptist Church.

Jones is the only minister I remember. After I left Red Deer in 1973 to attend university there were other ministers at the First Baptist but I never met any of them.

Strangely enough, when my father died in 1996, his funeral preacher was a Presbyterian. In his final years Dad had fallen out with the Red Deer First Baptist Church minister (not Jones, who had by then retired to Calgary), and quit attending church. The Presbyterian minister and Dad were good friends. Both had begun their careers at the same time in Eckville in 1951, my father healing animals and the reverend healing souls. Since both were frequent travelers on the rural roads, they passed each other quite often. Sometimes they arrived at a farm at the same time, and while Dad was treating a sick cow, the minister would sit on a nearby straw bale and discuss politics with Dad and the farmer. The three of them would solve the world's problems together. After the cow was dealt with, everyone would adjourn to the farmer's kitchen, coffee and cake were set out, and the rest of the family would join in for the minister's visitation.

I Told You That So I Could Tell You This. 2005-12-18

Several decades later, I took in a movie at a local Calgary theatre, part of the Famous Players chain. Like other theatres, they had stacks of a giveaway house magazine, and like most patrons I took a copy to read while waiting for the movie to start. Normally I

leave my copy behind because the magazine is just puff pieces for forthcoming movies and gossip about brainless starlets. It happened that the issue I picked up was the December 2005 issue of FAMOUS. On page 62 was a selection of quotes by celebrities on their personal faith. Some, such as Bill Gates and John Malkovich, were honest enough to say they had no religion. Others were obviously written by publicity agents. Courtney Love lost credibility with me with her first four words: "*When I attend church ...* ". -6-

The one that really stopped me dead, and the reason why I am writing all this, is the quote by Britney Spears, who fortunately is no relation to the Speirs clan. She said: "*I believe in the power of prayer. I'm a practicing Baptist. I had a Bible book that I prayed in, night after night. I would pray, 'I hope my song plays on a certain radio station that's really big', and it happened. Then I was like, 'I pray they play it on MTV.' I am totally blessed.*"

I guess those Southern Baptists have different doctrines than up here in western Canada. It's too bad Britney never met Janis Joplin; the two could sing a duet of "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz".

ON THE JOB IN COWTOWN

Lights! Camera! Action! Cue The Goalie! 2006-02-11

Calgary, like most places, does its best to encourage film-makers to shoot their epics here in Alberta. It creates jobs, not that this is a problem in this oil-boom province. It is also believed to publicize Alberta as a tourist attraction, although I rather doubt the effect of this since most Hollywood movies filmed here purport to be in some other place. BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN, for example, was filmed in the Alberta foothills but is supposedly set in Wyoming. Consequently, the American tourists are booking for that state, not our province. To add insult to injury, Alberta ranch hands are upset not at the idea of fag cowboys, but that they were herding sheep. Sheep! In the heart of cattle country! Them liberals are outta control.

And so to work today. I cover the whole city as a Parks Weekend Trouble Calls Supervisor, but this afternoon I spent about an hour and a half at management request helping out a film crew at the Olympic Plaza skating rink. The crew was filming a tourist publicity commercial to publicize Alberta down under in Australia and New Zealand. They were going to do this by showing a pickup hockey game on the rink. This didn't make much sense to me, as I doubt very many Anzacs are going to book a long-range

flight to see a hockey game. It would be like Australia trying to attract Canadian tourists by showing adverts of cricket and rugby games, neither of which attract any interest other than from recent immigrants.

But it wasn't my money, so I briefed the rink staff. The film crew was hampered by what has been one of the warmest winters in Alberta history. January normally averages about -15°C, but this year it was +10°C and no snow. The Olympic Plaza rink is chilled by underground refrigeration so that didn't affect the ice. The rink is open to the general public free of charge; in the summer the rink becomes a wading pool. If public assemblies are held, it is boarded over. The Plaza is where the medals were presented during the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games, and is the centre of the downtown core. City Hall is directly across the street, the main public library kitty-corner to it, and the main police station a half block down. Along the south side of the Plaza is Calgary's major cultural centre, with multiple theatres and orchestra venues. Whenever something major happens in this city, such as the New Year's Eve party, this is where Calgarians instinctively gravitate to celebrate. Today's forecast was a high of 13°C, so there was a good crowd of pleasure skaters. It is the place where parents like to take their toddlers to teach them skating. The older generation circles the rink, and the girls practice their figure skating in the centre of the rink.

Instinctively, everyone always skates widdershins, even though there is no regulation against circling in the opposite direction. The film crew thought there wouldn't be many people here, and if the temperature had been a more seasonal -25°C it might have been so.

By permission, the crew was allowed to block off part of the rink to film what was supposedly a pickup hockey game. The director made one serious mistake in picking this location. The Plaza is surrounded by skyscrapers except for one gap where the cultural centre dips down to two stories high. Since the sun is low on the horizon in the winter, this means that there are only about two hours of direct sunlight per day onto the rink. The crew worked fast though, and they managed to get it all done before the sun vanished behind the skyscrapers. The public were confined to one half of the rink during the shooting but there were no complaints once people saw the camera. As Jimmy Durante remarked, everybody has to get into da act. The girls suddenly moved their figure skating behind the hockey players to line up with the camera. Most of the pleasure skaters stopped to watch as the hockey players staged their game. The goalie was the only one wearing a helmet. The players apparently went to the same gent's hairdresser, as all had bleached-blond Brad Pitt hair and a three-day stubble. If it weren't for the numbers on their jerseys, they would have been indistinguishable.

The acting life is not an easy one. Most of the scenes were shot in one take, but the final scene took multiple takes. This was a shot of a forward being dumped in a body check by a defenseman. It was done over and over again, and the forward repeatedly crashed into the ice as he took the hit. If it had been me, I couldn't have gotten to my feet after the third impact. He managed each time to spring up again cheerfully, albeit about one second slower each time. I hope he got union scale.

I don't have any New Zealand subscribers on the OPUNTIA mailing list, but do have a number of Australian readers. I ask them to keep an eye out for a television commercial extolling the wonders of Calgary and which shows amateur hockey players crashing about an outdoor rink. If you see it, I was standing to the right of the camera. If you see, in the background, a white 1-ton crewcab truck, that one is mine.

This Traffic Jam Brought To You By ...

2006-04-28

It is basically impossible to drive anywhere in Calgary without being delayed by construction, as both the City and the private sector race to keep up with the oil boom. The downtown core is a maze of lane closures for skyscraper construction. You might be driving down a street and have to switch back and forth from one side of the road to the other several times within a few blocks, depending on which side that a new skyscraper is being built on.

The major freeways are having new interchanges installed or old ones upgraded, and the LRT tracks are perpetually being extended.

The rule of thumb I now use is to calculate how much time I need to drive somewhere and then add fifteen minutes. At work, my nightmares are about getting a trouble call for the opposite side of the city during the afternoon rush hour. Traffic is so bad that the City of Calgary recently started up its own FM radio station that does nothing but broadcast details of construction work on the roads. 97.5 FM, call letters CIRI, is a non-commercial station covering the entire city. A weird computer-generated female voice transcribes the Roads Dept. notices. The two commercial all-news radio stations used to give traffic reports only during the morning and afternoon rush hours, but now broadcast them all day long.

You Can't Get There From Anywhere.

2006-05-12

Calgary commuters had their worst fears come true this morning with multiple crashes stopping traffic everywhere. Early in the morning, a semi-trailer hauling frozen beef flipped over on Deerfoot Trail, the main north-south route essential for all commuter traffic out of the deep southeast. The freeway was closed until late afternoon, as the trailer had to be unloaded by

hand before being righted by tow trucks. This turned all the alternative north-south routes into parking lots, as commuters tried to bypass the accident.

Meanwhile, police were also investigating a drunk driver who soared off the end of 130 Avenue SE into a riverbank park before rolling his SUV down the slope to the Bow River and putting three of his friends in hospital. I heard the news on the radio and waited for the trouble call to clean up the mess in the park after the police had done their investigation. It came through as expected, but fortunately I was able to hand it off to an assistant working in the south end of town, saving me a one-hour crawl to reach the site. That assistant had been late getting to work that morning because she had been caught in the Deerfoot Trail jam.

Just as police mopped their brows in relief at cleaning up those two accidents, an afternoon eastbound commuter swerved his SUV across the centre line into a westbound tandem-axle truck on Calgary's main east-west freeway, Glenmore Trail. That shut down the eastern section of the road, but fortunately it was a different group of commuters who had to suffer through that one. They had it worse than the Deerfoot Trail motorists, because Glenmore Trail has no alternative routes. Calgary developed over the last century on a north-south axis, and even at the best of times any east- or west-bound traffic is slow.

Prelude.

The Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo, is underway, and as usual I took it in. This year's event was held in a very optimistic mood throughout the city. With oil staying in the \$65 to \$75 range, Calgarians are in a festive mood with or without the Stampede, as Alberta gaily pumps oil and rakes in the money from addicted Easterners and Americans. Every morning, Calgarians of all religious faiths kneel down beside their breakfast table, face towards the Athabasca Tar Sands, and pray for the oil boom to continue a few more years, at least until the mortgage is paid down and they can pay cash for a new SUV.

But first, I stopped by the downtown post office to mail a packet. As it was going to a stamp magazine editor, I wanted the stamps to be cancelled with the post office commemorative cancel as shown below. This cancel is kept behind the counter and has to be asked for because it requires an ink pad. The posties prefer to use the regular postmark because it is a self-inking canceler, but it is not a commemorative.

I get my mail at a box number there, and frequently request the Heart of the New West canceler, so it is no problem. I've had the box number since I moved to Calgary in 1978, thusly I and the

posties have grown old together. The postie told me she was just sorting out my mail if I cared to wait a couple of minutes. I told her I would pick it up in the late afternoon as I was on my way to the Stampede and didn't want to carry my mail around with me. She was surprised I was going so early because the show wouldn't really get going until 11h00, but I told her I wanted to enjoy the livestock exhibits. I like browsing the livestock displays, secure in the knowledge that I do not have to muck out their stalls or haul feed to them. The postie, like me, is also from a farm, so we reminisced about the old days and why we both now prefer the simple life of the big city.



From the post office I walked down the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall towards the Stampede grounds. It is the custom during the Calgary Stampede for businesses and social groups to offer free pancake breakfasts to passersby, and the mall was crowded with them. The catch is that you usually have to wait about a half hour in the lineup to get one pancake, one scrambled egg, one slice of bacon or sausage, and a TetraPak of warm orange juice. I wasn't going to waste the time for that. And so down the main drag of Macleod Trail to the Stampede grounds.

Through The Gates Of ...

Admission to the Stampede is \$12 for adults, which includes all performances and events other than the main rodeo itself. A ticket to the rodeo includes admission to the grounds. I proffered my credit card to the ticket wicket operator just for the general admission. I try to pay by credit card as much as possible to reduce the necessity of carrying cash, and since I pay off the monthly statement in full, it costs me nothing for interest charges or fees.

But today it cost me a bad moment. The cashier swiped my card, and a second later a look of horror crossed her face and she clapped her hand over her sagging mouth. She had mis-entered the transaction and the slip printed out a \$712 charge. She was near tears as she repeatedly apologized to me. She could not

reverse the charge herself, and had to call a supervisor from the far reaches of the Stampede grounds. I had to wait about ten minutes, but finally the supervisor showed up and swiped my card again for a refund of \$712. By way of apology, they let me in for free, so no harm done.

Today, a Monday, had scattered showers throughout the day (July is the thunderstorm season in Alberta) but it was not a problem, as everyone simply ducked inside to the exhibits and waited out the brief rains. The showers kept the inner city cool; the Stampede grounds are on the southeast corner of the downtown core and subject to the heat island effect of the massed skyscrapers.

Superdogs And Star Trek Communicators.

I wandered about the livestock area until the events started up, and went in to see the Superdog show in the Corral hockey arena. The Stampede grounds have two arenas, the Corral, for the junior league hockey team, and the much bigger Saddledome for the NHL team. Hockey season being over, the arenas are used for the Stampede and later in the summer for rock concerts.

Calgary has one of the highest birth rates in North America because of its large proportion of affluent couples in their 30s and 40s, the prime years for forming families.

This statistic didn't mean much to me until I walked inside the Corral arena and saw child strollers parked four deep all the way around the concourse. I have never seen so many strollers in one place in my life. It looked like Macleod Trail during rush hour.

I climbed up about halfway in the stands and sat down for the dog show. A group of high-spirited teenagers sat in the rows below me. They began shouting "Hi!" and waving to the folks in the stands across the way, who at first thought the teens were directing their shouts to friends. Then they realized the kids were trying to start a dialogue, and they responded in kind. Pretty soon, everyone in the arena was waving across the ways to each other, and a good time was had by all as we waited for the show to start.

Superdogs is a traveling show that appears annually at the Stampede. The dogs run races, do tricks, and often fail to follow the script, creating some enjoyable canine ad libs. The Master of Ceremonies was tastefully dressed in a sky-blue jacket, red shirt with ruffled lapels, yellow pants, and blue suede shoes. He looked like a bad accident in the garment district. Buzzing around him was a cameraman from Global TV (a Canadian network) who were official sponsors of the Superdogs. In consequence, they were determined to get their money's worth by filming lots of cute dog tricks for the funny animal story section of their newscasts. In the dog races, as Fluffy charged through the gates and ramps, the cameraman raced alongside with his camera, sometimes

beating the dog to the finish line. But not the Scottish shepherd dogs, one of the fastest breeds on Earth. -12-

On one occasion, the cameraman and the dog got confused as they raced along. The curious dog swerved over to see what the cameraman was doing. To avoid colliding with the dog, the cameraman swerved further over onto the adjacent track, where he ended up jumping hurdles to keep from crashing at speed, while the dog raced him along the sidelines. The cameraman was declared the winner and the dog was disqualified for stepping out of bounds.

In past years at Superdogs, camera flashes would constantly be going off in the stands, sometimes making quite a strobelight show. What really struck me this year was how few flashes I saw. Instead, the glow of cellphone screens was everywhere, as people held them up to take photos and instantly e-mail them to Aunt Emma back east in Ontario. Once I noticed this, I began looking around as I traversed the Stampede grounds, and saw that cellphone cameras far outnumbered digital cameras.

It was something that reminded me of the Star Trek communicators. Captain Kirk would be amazed, or more correctly, will be amazed, since he won't be born in Riverside, Iowa, for another century.

Food.

On the midway, the food booths are one of the big attractions. Calgary is now a cosmopolitan city, not the Cowtown it used to be, so the food booths have changed over the years. There still is the traditional pioneer cowboy food such as flapjacks, sausages, and Chinese. Yes, Chinese. I learned a few years ago from a western historian that cowboys on the range often ate Chinese food because so many chuckwagon cooks were Chinese. The cooks were former railroad workers who had been let go after the Canadian Pacific Railway finished building the first transcontinental railroad, which reached Calgary in 1883.

But there were also other types of food, such as mini-doughnuts, hamburgers, chickenburgers, and pizza. I had the turkey and cheese panini, from an Italian booth staffed by Chinese. The real Italians were probably still out celebrating Italy winning the World Cup of soccer yesterday. East Africans were running the Ukrainian pyrogy booth, and the Jamaican samosas were sold by local white boys.

Ride Em, Cowgirl.

Thence to the Saddledome arena, for the horse acts. First up were the Canadian Cowgirls, just back from performances in Louisville, Kentucky, for a horse festival that was associated with the Derby.

They rode in formations, doing crossovers and geometric figures to such traditional cowboy tunes as Glenn Miller, Scottish reels, Abba, and Beethoven. They were followed by the Wild Angels, trick riders who did gymnastics on top of or beside their galloping horses. Some of the trick riders were as young as five years old, although the kids only did simple things like standing on the saddle as the horse slowly walked along. Apparently trick riding is like the ballet; you have to start them young if they are ever to become professionals.

Agricultural Exhibits.

I wandered into the big tent with agricultural exhibits. Cute little piglets in the petting zoo, day-old chicks, milk cows, and so forth. The Ministry of Agriculture had the usual displays of grain, how to control weeds, and how eggs are produced. New this year in their display was one of farmyard scents, where you could stick your nose in various vents and get a whiff of wheat dust, animals, silage, and, yes, manure. Having smelled enough manure in my time back on the farm, I passed by this exhibit.

In the past few years, the agricultural exhibits have changed over to explaining how a farm operates, what part of the cow the milk comes from, and the difference between a bull and a steer. This is because the majority of Canadians today were born and raised urban,

and have no idea of what is done to put the food on their table. Few people realize the chain of events needed to take milk or vegetables from the farm to the supermarket.

In another big tent, the sheep judging and miniature donkey trials were underway. I sat down to watch, more to rest my feet than out of any genuine interest. Half the arena was given over to sheep judging, which is not and never will be televised on the networks, even Global TV. Watching the judges walk around the ewes, poking and prodding, and thoughtfully considering their score sheets, is not nearly as exciting as watching grass grow on your front lawn. Consequently, the audience spent most of its time watching the other half of the arena, as elderly farmers in miniature carts were towed around by miniature donkeys through an obstacle course. Every so often, the donkey trials were interrupted by results from the sheep judging, whose winners seemed to be the same three farms from Ontario and Idaho.

You All Come Back Next Year, Eh?

And so back to the post office to pick up my mail and take the bus home. In past years, walking back to the downtown core was a ten-minute walk because I could short-cut across parking lots. Now all those empty lots are skyscrapers and townhouses under construction, so I had to stick to the sidewalks. There is a critical labour shortage in Calgary because of the boom. Convenience

store clerks make \$11 an hour plus benefits and retention bonuses. A journeyman trade certificate is a licence to print money. Petroleum accountants, especially those good at creative accounting, can name their own salary.

Thus endeth another exciting day in Cowtown, where seldom is heard a discouraging word except when the price of oil drops below \$50.



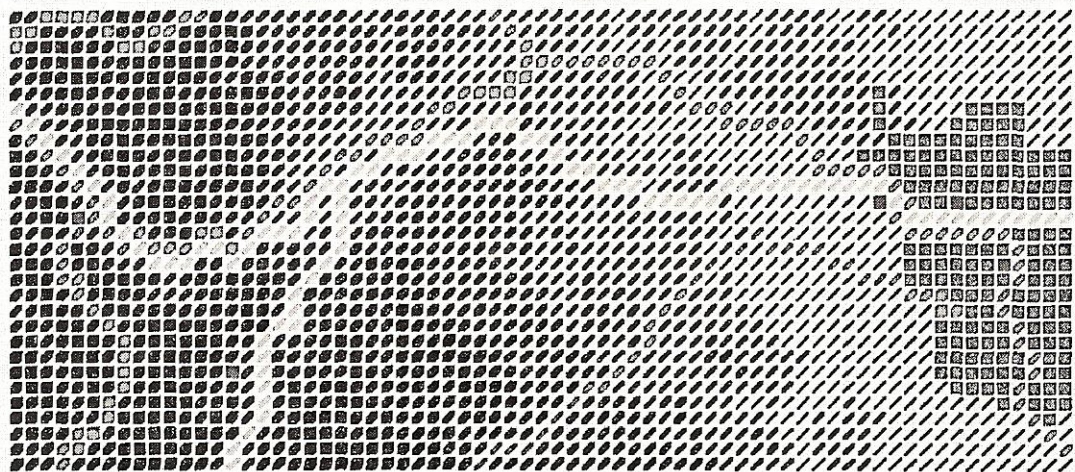
Stamp issued 1975 for Calgary's centennial.

CALGARY
1988

OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES SITE
SITE DES JEUX OLYMPIQUES D'HIVER

34

CANADA



Map stamp issued for 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics. The blob at the right edge of the stamp is Calgary. The jagged horizontal lines are rivers and highways.

Strip of three personalized postage stamps from Canada Post, showing Dale Speirs at Bow Lake, Banff National Park. Behind me is Crowfoot Glacier. Included to demonstrate what I look like in a cowboy hat and denim shirt, neither of which I ever wore back on the farm, but which are my standard casual wear as a city slicker. I look like a petroleum accountant during Stampede week.

Picture Postage



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