





**Lunar New Year 2019**

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**IT'S THE YEAR OF THE PIG, SO HAVE A RASHER OF BACON**  
photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary Chinatown has such a large Lunar New Year celebration that they spread it out over two weekends before the actual date, which this year was February 5. I went down to the Chinese Cultural Centre on January 26 for the first day.



The photos on the cover and below show the Chinese equivalent of a Christmas tree, where people hang up red envelopes with wishes to the God of Wealth. The envelopes contain small donations of cash for charity.





It is indeed the Year of the Pig.

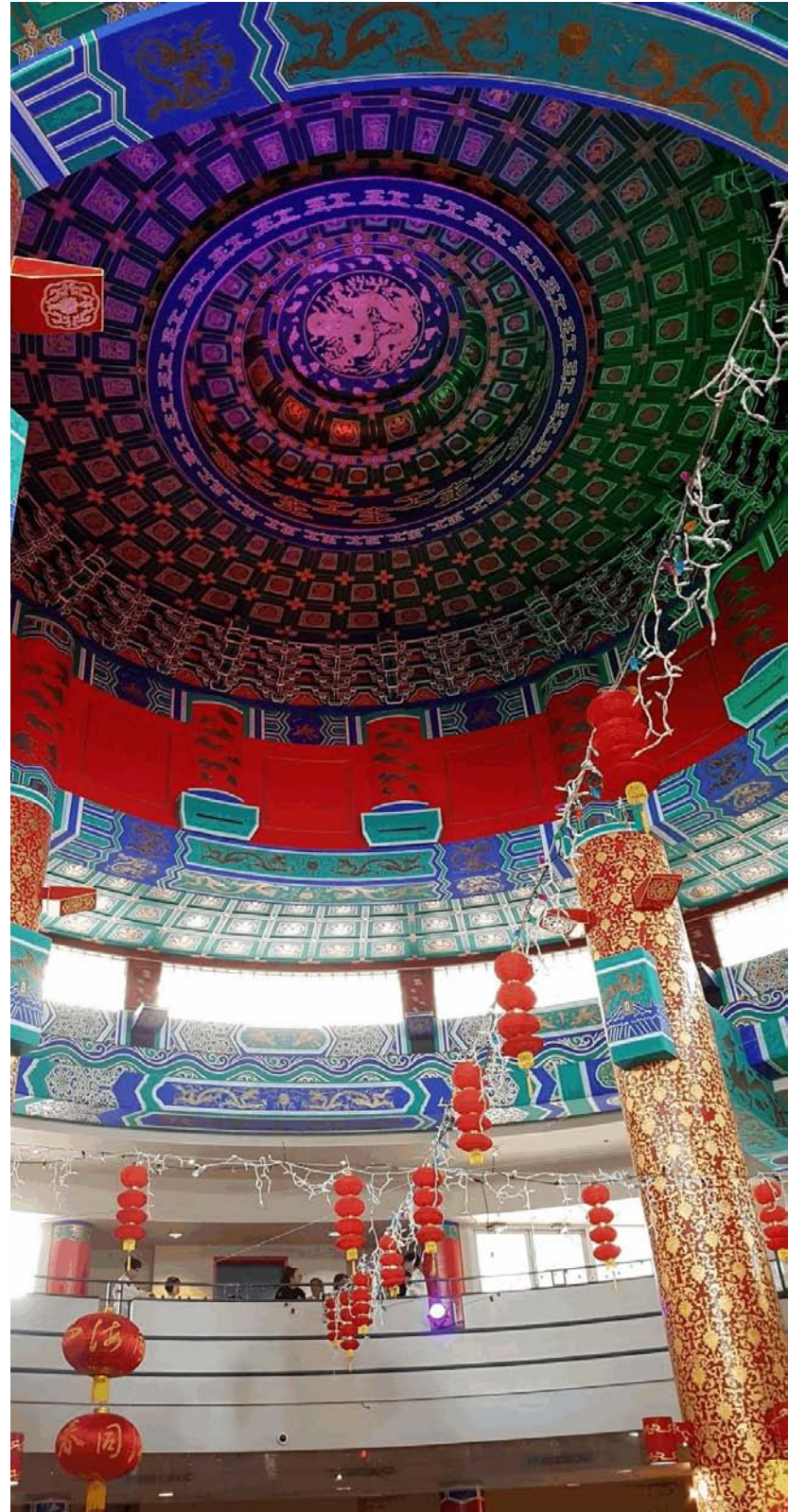
What surprised me was that for the first time in the years I've been attending Lunar New Year festivals (see OPUNTIA's #299, 333, 334, 335, 365, and 405) there was a free pancake breakfast put on by the Calgary Stampede.

This is an old rodeo tradition, with flapjacks, sausages, and beverage to all comers (see OPUNTIA's #253, 346, 383, and 418). It sets a new record for me for earliest Stampede breakfast of the year.

On the next page are two views in the changing light of the giant dome over the central court of the Cultural Centre.













# OUT WHERE THE WEST COMMENCES: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #68.1D, 356, 418, and 419.]

## The Idyllic Life.



Having grown up on a cattle ranch just north of Red Deer, in rural west-central Alberta, I was quite happy to become a city slicker. I laugh when people tell me they want to move to the country and enjoy the simple life. If they seem serious, I ask them these questions:

If the furnace goes out during a blizzard, do you know how to diagnose and fix it? Because no HVAC technician is coming out to repair it.

Ditto tractors and pickups. Your machine breaks down out in the pasture. Field mechanics will come out to farms, at a minimum \$100 for travel time, plus \$100 per hour, plus parts.

If you have livestock, no sick leave is allowed. I've been out there half-dead from influenza, tossing hay bales to the cattle in the corrals. Nor are you allowed to be squeamish. Pens and corrals must be mucked out from time to time. It has to be done in summer when the manure is soft, not in winter when there is no odour but the ground is frozen.

Do you know what "compound low" means and when to use it?

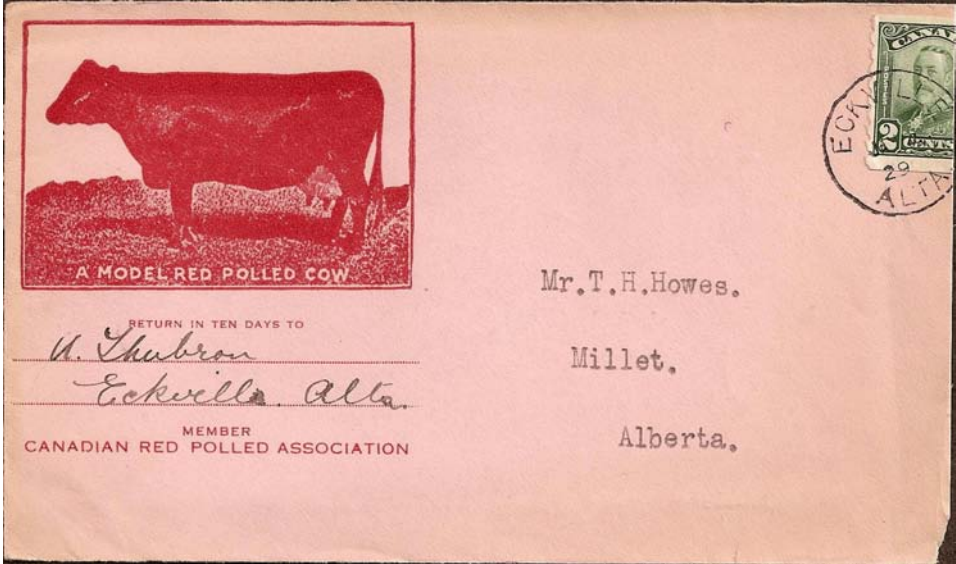
A 12-hour day, every day of the week, is the normal shift. 16 hours or more during seeding or harvesting. A cattle ranch is the least intensive form of agriculture, but it still involves long endless hours doing boring repetitive tasks like baling hay and fence riding.

## A Cow's Life.

And so I come to a 1919 book I found on [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) titled THE RED COW AND HER FRIENDS, by Peter McArthur. I loved the dedication of the book: *This book is dedicated to all city men who feel sure that they could farm at a profit. If each one buys a copy, I can afford to keep on farming.*

A century ago, purebred livestock were scarce in the Americas. The standard breed, if you could call it that, was the red cow, an all-purpose bovine that produced milk and beef as needed. Red cattle were descended from domesticated cattle brought into northern Europe by the Romans. They have long since been displaced by specialized breeds such as Holstein and Guernsey (milk) and Hereford, Angus, and Charolais (beef). Red cattle are mentioned in the Bible, and thus are the oldest domesticated breed known.

My father was a livestock veterinarian who kept rangeland Charolais on the side. Charolais are a pure white or cream coloured beef breed originating in France. His father before him had a dairy farm with Holsteins. My mother's family kept red cattle. She and I were both born in Eckville, a half hour's drive west of Red Deer. The envelope shown below was from long before her time. Polled cattle are genetically hornless and found in all breeds.



Peter McArthur started off with the story of his prize red cow Fenceviewer going off her feed. Back then, veterinary science didn't really exist. He had to rely on a farrier who knew livestock. Fenceviewer was the brood mother of his herd, so he was quite worried. Eventually the problem was solved with some homemade purgatives. Cows have four stomachs and if they have medical troubles, the cause is usually digestive.

When I was a boy in the 1960s, I often rode out with my father on farm calls and watched him treat the animals. A common failing among cows was, and still is, bloat.

Bloat occurs when a cow is switched to fresh green pastures with legumes in it, such as alfalfa or clover. If she ate too fast and too much, bloat was very likely. The legumes were digested so fast that they foamed, preventing the rumen (one of the four stomachs) from releasing digestive gases. Pressure built up and the rumen eventually swelled up and squeezed the lungs shut, killing the cow.

It is also a problem in feedlots. Grain has to be fed coarse to feeder cattle. If there is too much fine grain dust in the feed, that will cause bloat because the fines are digested too fast and cause foaming.

The treatment was to restrain the cow in a squeeze chute so she couldn't move. A large metal tube was placed into her mouth. A rubber hose several metres long would then be threaded through the tube and down into the rumen to allow the pressure to vent. The metal tube was to prevent the cow from biting down on the hose.

This procedure resulted in a lot of bellowing and shoving, and the cow did it as well. We stood a safe distance to one side of the cow, because when the pressure blew out, so did her rumen contents. So you see, not much has changed since Fenceviewer had her problems.

Getting back to the book, McArthur wrote about another problem which I was very familiar with in my boyhood days, cattle getting out of the pasture. If there was the slightest sag in a fence wire, or a rotten post tipped over, the cattle would find it and a-roving go.

Once we got them back inside through a gate, we then had to walk the fence to find out how they managed to escape, following their footprints back to the weak spot and then fixing it.

The following extract by McArthur was exactly what we had to deal with on our farm. As I read it, I kept nodding in agreement and remembering our little chases. Too true.

*These are the days when the cattle become discontented with their pasture and begin to go on a rampage. Fenceviewer I. and her brood are running true to form and living up to their best traditions, but I have lived with them too long to be taken entirely unawares. As soon as the pasture withered with the long drought they began to take an undue interest in the cornfield. Although it is a comparative failure, it still looks green and succulent compared with everything else on the farm, and the cattle have been stretching their necks over the fence and bawling.*

*The first to get through and enjoy a feed were Fenceviewer's twins. Although they are small they are thrifty and seem to inherit much of their mother's resourcefulness. Already they are taking a lively interest in the fences. Although I felt quite safe on that point, it happened that during the haying a board was broken in a gate. The twins found it and worked their way through and had their first feed of stolen corn. After they had been driven out and the gate had been mended I felt secure again, but it was a false security.*

*A few days later I happened to notice a commotion among the cows and saw at once that Fenceviewer II. was beyond the fence and making straight for the corn. The Government drain was dry and she had managed to push through where the ice had loosened the wires that were used for a home-made flood-gate.*

*But would she go out where she got in? Not if she knew it. She seemed to have an idea that if she fooled us about that hole she could get through some other time. She was evidently working alone when she found it for even her piratical mother had not noticed it, and had failed to follow, though she bawled with surprise to see her daughter so near the cornfield. After three or four attempts to make her go out through the ditch we finally had to give up and drive her out through the gate. Then we fixed the hole and now we are waiting for the next outbreak.*

McArthur's herd, like everyone else's, had farrowed cows that were not calving for a year. These cows often act as babysitters for other cows' calves, and sometimes try to adopt them because the maternal instinct is so strong. That is why you should never get between a cow and her calf. All the cows in a herd

are related (sister, daughter, granddaughter, niece, cousin), so it is not unusual for a farrowed cow to think she could do a better job than her daughter in raising a calf.

*The calf belonged to the purposeful and strong-minded red cow. Of course, she was very proud of her calf, and mooed solicitously when we approached to examine it. But strange to say she was not nearly so excited about it as her oldest daughter, a quiet and hitherto well-behaved cow that has been milking all winter and is farrow this season. Judging from her actions she had adopted the new calf, and had taken out adoption papers before we arrived on the scene.*

*As I think over the occurrence the lesson that sticks in my mind is that the farrow cow was wonderfully like a professional reformer. Though her interests were not involved in any way she made a bigger disturbance and got more thoroughly worked up than the cow that was really bereaved. And nobody thanked her or gave her a word of praise. I admit that this lesson came home to me with great force.*

McArthur mentions another incident that had me going “Aha! Same thing here!” He had to get a stray cow to come over his way, and did it by waving a pail at her that he used for spot-feeding grain to individual cows in pens. Cattle recognize pails and have learned to associate them with grain. The cartoon at right is from his book.

*After the chores were done I took a pail that was as empty as a political platform and she followed me right back into the pen just like an intelligent voter. I could do a little moralising right here, but it is not considered good form to talk politics just now.*

That immediately caused a memory flashback for me. For some reason I have since forgotten, we wanted to get some cattle out of the bush in our back pasture. Herding cattle in the middle of a flat pasture is easy, but tedious in the bush. Horses can't be used because the cowboys would constantly be whacked by tree branches. My father took my brother and I out into the bush. Each of us carried a pail with a few centimetres of grain in it, just enough to provide the scent of grain.

We stayed upwind so the scent would carry to the cows, who immediately came out of hiding from the bush to investigate. They had learned from experience to be leery of bipeds, so we held the pails low and facing at an angle to the cows,

swishing the grain around for them to see. They overcame their natural distrust and moved toward us. We backed up a few steps at a time, and before the cows realized it, they were out in the open.

The hired hand had his own cutting horse, so he stayed off to the side until he could come in behind the cows and drive them back to the main herd. They never did get our grain. It is easier to herd hungry cattle than fed ones.





McArthur's book covers a wide variety of livestock, with many anecdotes taken from actual incidents. Other than to recommend them, I won't go into the details because we never had sheep, pigs, turkeys, chickens, or rabbits. Well worth reading though, even if you are a city slicker.



The photo shows your humble editor in 1960 in Eckville, the village where I was born. I was four years old and am on board our Shetland pony Sugar, with my baby brother hanging on to me while our father held the reins. Mom took the photo.

You know it was a rural village when people kept ponies in their back yards and no one complained. In 1963 my parents bought a cattle ranch just north of Red Deer. By that time, us kids were too big for Sugar, who stayed behind and went to live on another farm with younger children.

## PROFESSOR CHALLENGER MARCHES OUT AGAIN: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #326.]

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's second most popular character was the blowhard explorer Professor Edward George Challenger, only about one test tube removed from being a mad scientist. Pastiches are now beginning to appear in numbers frequent enough to justify a review column for such stories.

CHALLENGER UNBOUND is a 2015 anthology edited by Michael R. Brush and S.G. Mulholland.

"The Last Expedition" by Simon Kurt Unsworth began with Challenger on his deathbed. A scientist named Quarmby had invented the Dead Soul Battery, a device that captured a soul at the moment of death, stored it in a battery, and then allowed it to dictate to a recording device, cutting grooves in disks to record the soul's existence beyond death. It worked only too well with Challenger. A strong-minded man, his soul not only was recorded but refused to move on to the next world.

"River Of Bones" by Paul Lewis did the opposite to Challenger's personality. A summons to an isolated Scottish isle, whose population of crofters had been destroyed by some sort of monster or unknown physical effect. Challenger, the newspaperman Malone, and Prof. Summerlee investigate, but finish by running away with their tails tucked between their legs. What caused the deaths was never elucidated, and Challenger comes off a weakling. I doubt it. He would have done more, and a coward he was not. Pastiches should not alter the basic characters.

"Challenger And The Isle Out Of Time" by Michael R. Brush took an interminable time to get going, with a lengthy prologue on how Malone, Challenger, et al organized an expedition to the Atlantic Ocean to examine a mysterious island. Then suddenly they are there, exploring it and determining it was an ancient rocket launch pad. Some of the lizards 65 megayears ago had a civilization that spotted the oncoming asteroid, and rushed to clear the planet before the impact. A nice concept but the story needed better pacing.

"The Damnation Gate" by Harding McFadden brought Challenger to a backwoods farm where a mound had suddenly grown up in a field. He arrived



at dusk but didn't want to wait until daylight, so an excavation began immediately. The body of a demon was uncovered, but it wasn't dead. Just as it began looking back at the humans, and obviously thinking of them as prey, the sun came up. The demon dissolved into ash, howling in agony at the light. A standard plot that would not have been out of place in a 1930s issue of a pulp magazine.

“Professor Challenger And The Spider’s Kiss” by Bob Lock is narrated by Challenger. The MacGuffin was a bunch of diamonds found on a previous expedition. Some funny digs at Sherlock Holmes in one scene where Challenger was riding down Baker Street. The geologist Casement was poisoned because he would not divulge to the villain where the diamonds from the expedition were. The Black Widow who did it was unprincipled but met her match in Challenger, who saw no reason to waste time with the courts. Many alarums and excursions. An action-adventure story.

“The Vendetta Virus” by Rhys Hughes was narrated by Edward Malone and had two rather bizarre plot lines. Malone’s newspaper sent him to Corsica to find out if there was a biological cause for so many vendettas there. In a word, yes, and Malone was infected. At the same time, an evil sculptor in London was creating sculptures that were secretly animated robots, for his own evil purposes. He made one of Challenger. The two plots merged neatly together in the climax, with the real Challenger appearing and solving both problems.

“The Lady And The Professor” by Ian Milsted was an account of Miss Arabella Crowe’s encounter with Challenger in the Rocky Mountains when both were in their younger days. They met up with a wendigo who used the Professor to gain revenge on a serial killer. A nice variant of the Cree legend.

“Challenger Of The Two Worlds” by Tom English looked at the Professor’s excursions into spiritualism, paralleling those of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The difference was that Challenger had access to the Disintegration Machine of Theodore Nemor from the canon story. Challenger rebuilt the device into a teleportation machine, which overloaded after he passed through it and began sucking so much energy from Earth that the temperature began dropping in degrees per hour.

Challenger’s daughter Enid, now a scientist in her own right, was brought in to help. The other side of the teleporter was the spirit world. Challenger did not want to leave because his beloved dead wife was there. After various excursions

and alarums, Enid and her friends bring him back to Earth and restore the energy balance of the two worlds.

“An Unnatural Selection” by Ian Faulkner had Challenger testing another professor’s superscience machine that could recover emotions from ancient human bone fragments recovered at archaeological sites. Someone attached to the machine could experience the last emotions experienced before death. The problem, as Challenger discovered, was that the machine could also raise the spirit of a predator that killed the human and bring it forward in time.

“Challengers In Space” by Michael R. Brush was the sequel to the Isle Out Of Time story. Challenger used Nemor’s machine to replicate himself and others as the crew for a spaceship to be launched from the lizard’s island. The story plot line is repeated in different twists as all the ramifications of multiple copies of humans were worked out. A clever story.

“Two Challengers” by J.R. Campbell is the final story in this anthology. The aliens have landed, or rather, they dispatched a mind-controlled cyborg as a scout. Challenger was called in to investigate and establishes communication. The aliens ask whether or not they should reveal their starship in orbit around Earth or, in the alternate, replicate Challenger and take his duplicate with them to the stars, to report back later. An easy choice to make.

Overall, the anthology was a good read, although it could have been more tightly edited. Like many anthologies, the stories should have been better arranged so that they formed a collective narrative instead of jumping about at random. As an example, the first story was about the death of Challenger. The individual stories stand or fall on their own merits, but the editors should have paid more attention to layout instead of shoving in the stories at random.

**WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2019**

Calgary’s annual readercon When Words Collide will be held on the weekend of August 9 to 11, 2019. A writing-centred convention, with an excellent dealer bourse where only books are sold. The membership is capped at 750 plus volunteers and guests, and always sells out by June, as do room reservations and banquet tickets. More details from: [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)



## TAKEN AT THE FLOOD: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA #70.1G and 367.]

### Biblical Floods.

40 DAYS AND NIGHTS (2012), screenplay by H. Perry Horton, is a typical Asylum copycat movie, in this case of the original disaster flick “2012” (reviewed in OPUNTIA #259). The premise was that climate change of some sort was causing a giant world-spanning rainstorm that would raise sea levels to flood the mountains of the world. There were two races underway, one to build giant arks and the other to gather the DNA of as many species as possible.

The movie got off to a brisk start with a tsunami, apparently rendered in 8-bit CGI, rising over the Atlas Mountains and swamping the Sahara Desert. How a hurricane could generate a wave that can climb over a mountain range wasn’t discussed. It was just an action shot meant as a harbinger. Today Morocco, tomorrow Colorado.

From there, a jump shot to a research facility in the Colorado Rockies where a giant ark was being built. The under-construction ark is frequently shown as a matte shot but with no scale. It was supposed to be gigantic but looked the size of the Goodyear blimp.

The first subplot was established, a romance between the hero and the heroine. They attended a briefing where an admiral advised them that a giant rain storm over the Sahara was expanding exponentially and would soon cover Earth completely. Meteorologically impossible of course, but that never bothered Hollywood movie studios before.

The storm was a doozy. It was dumping two inches per hour of rain over the world, so stated by one of the characters. It opened up fissures in the ground ahead of it as it advanced remorselessly. The world would be flooded in five weeks. This raised the question of where the water came from. Even if all the polar caps and glaciers melted, they wouldn’t turn Earth into a water world.

A train carrying the DNA specimens to the Colorado facility was stranded by rock slides, so the heroine flew out by helicopter to get them. This made one wonder why the samples weren’t being flown into the base in the first instance.

They were contained in two cylinders about the size of map cases, so there couldn’t be many species represented.

Various other subplots were introduced as padding. Word got out among the populace that there was going to be a Biblical flood. Some folks panicked, some were in denial, and many would die in the SFX, washed away in a flood of 8-bit renders. The water is rising. Then the tornados began descending.

Lots of riding about in military helicopters. The passengers sat on the wet slippery floor with no seatbelts and the cargo door wide open. The choppers swayed about in the storm and made right-angle turns, yet no one fell out.

The subplots and the rising waters kept characters busy on quests and helped thin out the extras and supporting characters. Many of them deserved to be removed from the gene pool for their idiotic behaviour. Denver was flooded by a tsunami, not a hazard they would normally worry about.

The ark was launched with moments to spare. It bobbed about in one place, picking up a few dents. The turbines canna hold, shouted Scotty, pardon me, shouted the perky little female ensign who was in charge of the engine room. But they did hold. The next few days were spent bounding over the ocean main where the Rockies used to be, albeit occasionally scraping an underwater peak. Since that was boring, and the 8-bit CGI canna hold, a few more excursions were thrown in. No further deaths though.

On the 40<sup>th</sup> day, the waves calmed and the sun came out. The clouds dispersed and the survivors gathered on deck to listen to the orchestral music as the end credits rolled. Nobody sang “There’s Got To Be A Morning After”.

THE CISCO KID was an old-time radio series, a western juvenile that ran from 1942 to 1956. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).) It was unusual in that the hero and his sidekick were both Mexicans. Their accents were atrocious, and the episodes were sanitized for the kiddies. The Old West it depicted was clichéd as it comes.

“Uncle Noah’s Ark” was a 1955 episode, no writer credit given. It took place in the town of Woodland, California, on the banks of the Sacramento River. The town was controlled by Brother Silas, a gangster who ran it as a refuge for outlaws, on the condition they pay him protection money.



The Cisco Kid and his sidekick Pancho arrived but on the outskirts met Uncle Noah and his niece Rita. Noah was building an ark for a flood he was certain was coming due to a combination of heavy rain and spring snow melt. Even the bad guys were leery of him. Noah clashed with Brother Silas, which then dragged the Cisco Kid and Pancho into the plot. Assorted adventures followed, not to mention romancing Rita.

Noah was a good prophet, for the flood did come and wiped out the town. The water was rising and the outlaws ran for the only hill in the area, while Noah and company waited it out on the ark. They rescued the bad guys on condition that they first discarded their weapons and submit to the law.

An unbelievable ending but I suspect that a network censor didn't want to traumatize even a single child listener with a mass kill. It makes one wonder if the censor ever read Genesis.

### **Tsunamis.**

EVERYTHING IS BROKEN (2012) by John Shirley is a novel set in the town of Freedom, California, a libertarian haven where the mayor was crazy and yet the sanest man compared to other citizens. In the second chapter, a tsunami arrived, a 100-foot wall of water that swamped the coast of California.

The description of its impact against Freedom was stretched out over a chapter, told and retold from several character viewpoints. The secondary wave was not quite as tall but tall enough. Following on was the suction as the withdrawing waves pulled debris and victims out into the ocean. Those in the water who weren't cut to pieces by the churning debris then drowned.

The real disaster came after the waves had gone. The anarchy of desperate people. No utilities and little shelter. The instant warlords intent on plunder and rapine, secure in the knowledge there was no law about. No medical help and no costumed superheroes to save them.

Most of this novel made for ugly reading. In the actual event, it probably wouldn't be so bad as depicted, but it might not be much better. When natural disaster strikes, it is the aftermath that causes the most pain and suffering.

## **THRILLING TYPEWRITER TALES: PART 4**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA's #287, 345, and 378.]

### **Tragedy Tomorrow, Comedy Tonight.**

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY was an old-time radio comedy that ran from 1935 to 1953 as a half-hour show before a live audience. The episodes were mostly written by Don Quinn. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).)

"The Story Of The Typewriter" was a 1949 episode. It started with McGee busily typing a screenplay for what he thought would be a surefire motion picture hit, about the history of typewriters. He told his wife Molly that he was writing it with two specific Hollywood actors in mind.

Before they were named, a constant parade of supporting and recurring characters began ringing the doorbell. This was the standard format of the show, with oddballs entering the house, doing a few minutes' routine, and then leaving without having said why they came by in the first place.

There were always two musical numbers, an instrumental by the Billy Mills Orchestra, and a vaudeville song by the King's Men. The songs were sometimes original creations, as indeed was the case in this episode. "The Typewriter Serenade" was sung to the beat of someone rapidly typing, and the chorus or tempo changes marked by a typewriter end-of-line bell ringing.

There was no carbon paper in the house, so McGee typed each line twice. He told Molly that after he was done, he would then cut the pages apart and glue the lines on other sheets of paper to make two copies. Can't argue with that.

McGee figured he should grab the audience's interest at the start with a murder. The scene then shifted to England in the Middle Ages, never again to mention the murder or what it had to do with the invention of the typewriter. His logic was that the audience would hang on trying to deduce who the murderer was, and thus stay to the end of the movie.

There was some romantic melodrama and assorted tomfoolery, none of which had anything to do with typewriters. At the end of the episode, McGee received



telegrams from the two actors he had wanted for the movie. Gregory Peck and Marsha Hunt both sent their regrets. McGee angrily tore up his screenplay, telling Molly that it was Hunt and Peck for the typewriter story or no one.

**Cozy Typewriters.**



Clare Henry is the protagonist of a new Miss Marple-type series called the Dangerous Type Mysteries, written by Paige Shelton. I reviewed the first novel *TO HELVETICA AND BACK* in this zine, issue #378.

Like many cozy mysteries, the story's

economics are implausible. Clare and her grandfather Chester run a typewriter repair and book binding shop in the small ski resort of Star City, Utah. In our modern times, that is, not back in the 1960s when every office used typewriters. Their next-door neighbour was a Latin school. Vero.

*BOOKMAN DEAD STYLE* (the pun doesn't work) is the 2017 sequel. A film festival was in town, and the townsfolk were agog at all the movie stars. One was a handsome young buck named Matt Bane, who was arrested for the murder of his sister, also an actress.

Clare thought he was innocent because he bought some greeting cards from her shop and smiled at her in a winning way. The Deppity Dawgs who were the town's police force were ill equipped to investigate anything more than a fender-bender. Clare naturally decided to take on that task.

Bane was cast as the lead in a movie about polygamists. The producer was annoying enough to Gentiles, and worse to both regular Mormons and the local polygamists. That resulted in suspicion being spread everywhere and helped pad out the novel as Clare went about interrogating everyone. Bane's sister was

to have been cast as one of his wives, a decision that raised eyebrows everywhere.

Additionally, Clare was trying to find a buyer for a large consignment of IBM Selectric typewriters, which of course no one had any use for. She tried to sell them as toys to the polygamists on the grounds it would keep their kids busy playing with them.

The plot was resolved in a confused ending. Worse yet, the guilty party, an actress who had been passed over for a part in the polygamist movie in favour of Bane's sister, immediately blabbed all when confronted by Clare. Had she kept her mouth shut, it would have been difficult if not impossible to convict her because of lack of evidence. Clare had contaminated the evidence left, right, and centre, and little else remained to get a guilty verdict.

Next in the cozy series was *COMIC SANS MURDER* (2017), which began with Clare Henry's niece finding a ski boot on a local hill, with someone's foot still in it. When a footless corpse was subsequently discovered, police made the victim as Lloyd Gavin. He had gone off to make his fortune in the computer business and did. Gavin had returned to Star City because he and three others had received invitations to a private reunion, all of them having gone to the same high school.

Clare and Chester were distracted by the unrelated arrival of horror author Nathan Grimes, who wanted them to set up a book of his poems as a special limited edition. Matters were complicated when Gavin left the Henrys three Hooven automatic typewriters.

These devices, now worth a fortune to any collector who can find the space for them, were early versions of mechanical word processors. Type a form letter onto a paper tape, then run the tape in a loop to type as many copies of the letter as wanted. These were not fuzzy copies such as mimeographs and hectographs produced, but original typed copies that looked genuine.

Hollywood stars back in the days of old-time radio used them. Chester managed to get one Hooven working. When he ran a paper tape through it, the machine typed out a reply from Bob Hope for fans who had written in. A weird sort of collectible.



Clare did most of the sleuthing since those involved were from her generation, and Chester was busy in the shop repairing a myriad of typewriters. All the Mormons I know\*\* use computers, but apparently there were enough old-fashioned ones in Utah to keep the shop busy.

Most of the uncovered background had to do with jealousies present and high school. Some of the invitees were ostensibly successful businessmen, but as Clare poked into their lives, she found they were mostly living on promissory notes and shaky credit. Only Gavin was truly rich, which obviously didn't help him against one of his old classmates.

The story mostly skated along on the verge of becoming a set of idiot plots, Clare included. The culprit was indeed an old school friend. The amount of business generated for the Henry shop did not seem believable. Perhaps in a big city, but not a ski resort.

### **Not-So-Cozy Mysteries.**

Nero Wolfe, a mountain of a man, was a private detective loath to leave the security of his brownstone, preferring to tend his orchids in a rooftop greenhouse of his Manhattan brownstone, eat gourmet meals prepared by his chef, and read books. The practical work of investigating his cases was done by his secretary Archie Goodwin.

Murder was often done during the cases or is the cause of the investigation. The duo were therefore well acquainted with the local NYPD Homicide Squad, headed by Inspector Cramer.

The original stories and novels by Rex Stout (died 1975) are referred to as the corpus, and stories by other authors as pastiches. A radio series ran from 1943 to 1951, licenced by Stout but written by others as pastiches.

“The Telltale Ribbon” was a 1951 episode of the old-time radio series, written by John Edison. It began with a messenger delivering a typewritten note and \$500 cash asking Wolfe to visit the country residence of the Mailots because the sender, Edward Mailot, feared being murdered. Goodwin headed out but upon arrival found that no one admitted sending the note.

\*\*Southern Alberta was the second diaspora of the Mormons, and they have many stakes in the province.

Mailot was baffled because the note was on his letterhead. He denied sending it and pointed out the signature was typewritten, whereas he always signed his letters in ink and as a handwritten signature. Other characters appeared. The snooty maid took an instant dislike to Goodwin. Dorothy Davis was the pretty young secretary, Eva was Edward's sickly wife, and Larry his obnoxious son.

A storm was rising, so Edward somewhat graciously allowed Goodwin to stay the night. Later that night Goodwin had a clandestine meeting with Eva, who admitted sending the note. She said she had received several threatening letters, all typewritten, and showed them to Goodwin. Eva said she thought she was being slowly poisoned and would die despite a doctor's care. She suspected Edward and Dorothy were having an affair and wanted her out of the way.

Eva soon left this world for the next one. She was taking sleeping pills. After her death, it was noticed that the jar was almost empty. The question arose as to whether she committed suicide or was assisted on her way against her wishes. Everyone was a suspect until proven innocent.

Wolfe bestirred himself from his brownstone and came out to the Mailot manor, with Inspector Cramer not far behind. After being briefed about the threatening letters, Wolfe sent Goodwin up to Eva's room to do a full search. He came back with a portable noiseless typewriter. Larry was the only one who knew about it, but denied any part in murder.

Every typewriter, once well used, develops its own characteristics, such as a given letter slightly out of alignment or another one with a small chip in it. That allows documents to be compared to a sample text and identify the exact individual typewriter that was used to produce the document. Goodwin tested the threatening letters and found they came from Eva's typewriter.

A second search turned up a book of mystery stories Eva had been reading, one of which detailed similar methodology to her death. In fact, some of the phrases of the threatening letters were copied from the story. The clincher was that the note Eva sent to Wolfe asking for help was typed on the same machine as the threatening letters she claimed to have received.

The conclusion was that Eva knew she was going to die anyway, and wanted to set up the rest of her family on a murder charge. She committed suicide in a manner well calculated to look like it was a murder carried out by Edward and Dorothy. A clever and substantial use of typewriters in fiction.

# TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 25

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 24 appeared in OPUNTIA #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, 341, 348, 357, 359, 365, 369, 371, 392, 394, 396, 407, 412, AND 426.]

## Watching From Above.

The new Central Library in Calgary (see OPUNTIA #428) is built directly overtop an LRT line. The top floor offers a panoramic view of trains. I took this view looking northeast at a train inbound for the city centre.

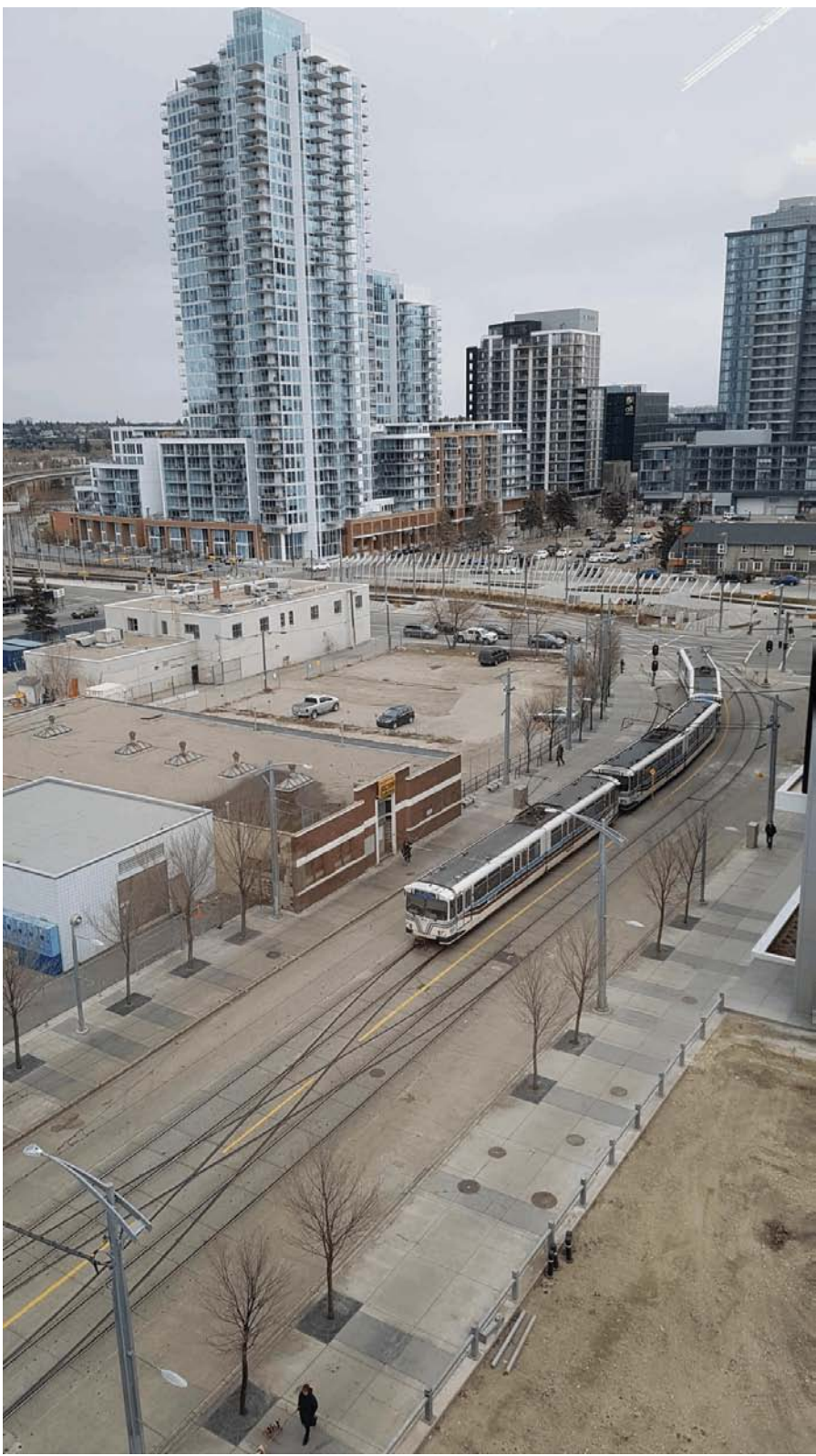
## You Are Being Watched.

Calgary Transit doesn't yet have smartcards and still uses paper tickets and monthly passes. The time will come, and will be another way of tracking people. China is already using smartcards and facial recognition software to prevent dissidents from traveling by airplane or train. This paper came from Beijing.

Huang, J., et al (2018) **Tracking job and housing dynamics with smartcard data.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1815928115

Authors' abstract: *This paper uses transit smartcards from travelers in Beijing retained over a 7-year period to track boarding and alighting stations, which are associated with home and work location. This allows us to track who moves and who remains at their homes and workplaces. Therefore, this paper provides a longitudinal study of job and housing dynamics with group conceptualization and characterization. This paper identifies four mobility groups and then infers their socioeconomic profiles. How these groups trade off housing expenditure and travel time budget is examined.*

*Residential locations, the jobs-housing relationship, and commuting patterns are key elements to understand urban spatial structure and how city dwellers live. Their successive interaction is important for various fields including urban planning, transport, intraurban migration studies, and social science. However, understanding of the long-term trajectories of workplace and home location, and the resulting commuting patterns, is still limited due to lack of year-to-year data tracking individual behavior.*





*With a 7-year transit smartcard dataset, this paper traces individual trajectories of residences and workplaces. Based on in-metro travel times before and after job and/or home moves, we find that 45 min is an inflection point where the behavioral preference changes.*

*Commuters whose travel time exceeds the point prefer to shorten commutes via moves, while others with shorter commutes tend to increase travel time for better jobs and/or residences. Moreover, we capture four mobility groups: home mover, job hopper, job-and- residence switcher, and stayer.*

*This paper studies how these groups trade off travel time and housing expenditure with their job and housing patterns. Stayers with high job and housing stability tend to be home (apartment unit) owners subject to middle to high-income groups. Home movers work at places similar to stayers, while they may upgrade from tenancy to ownership.*

*Switchers increase commute time as well as housing expenditure via job and home moves, as they pay for better residences and work farther from home. Job hoppers mainly reside in the suburbs, suffer from long commutes, change jobs frequently, and are likely to be low-income migrants.*

**Fiction: Old-Time Radio.**

SUSPENSE was an anthology series that aired from 1942 to 1962. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).) The 1947 episode “Subway”, written by Mel Dinelli, took place almost entirely on a subway train and platforms.

The narrator was Paula Stevens, an unsuccessful aspiring actress who worked a menial job and lived with her mother. She had a bad day at work, and a bad commute on her subway trip home. The train was packed and she was jammed in like sardines. What made it worse was that she found herself sitting next to Ruth Carney, a classmate from drama school who was up-and-coming, and had just gotten a job as a general understudy in a Broadway theatre.

As Carney nattered on about her successful career, Stevens grew angrier and angrier, to the point of seriously plotting murdering her and applying for the vacant position. Stevens was feeling suicidal and thinking about throwing herself in front of a train. She convinced Carney to visit her at home, planning to kill her as they walked past a suitable dark locality.

On the platform, Stevens almost fell into a train but was saved by Carney. Saul on the road to Damascus never had such a conversion. Stevens changed her viewpoint and saw the world in a new light. Carney never knew what Stevens had been planning.

Stevens suddenly became optimistic about her future, the sun came out from behind the clouds, and the orchestra worked itself into a frenzy. There was rejoicing in Heaven, no doubt, over the sinner who repented.

CANDY MATSON was an old-time radio series that ran from 1949 to 1951, about a female private investigator. It was unusual for the time; Matson didn’t scream or have fainting spells in her job and was as tough as her male counterparts when it came to violent situations. She lived in a penthouse apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, where most of her cases took place. The dialogue was snappy and the action brisk.

“The Cable Car Case” was a 1949 episode written and produced by Monte Masters, whose wife Natalie Park played the lead role. It began with Matson taking the cable car down the hill to do some shopping. The car was crowded, and she had to squeeze in next to a man reading a newspaper. He was alive when she got on because they exchanged a few words.

It was a different matter at the end of the line. She got off and only then it was discovered that the man, subsequently identified as Dwight Ellsworth, had his nose deep in his newspaper because he had been shot once through the heart sometime during the ride. Matson hadn’t noticed a thing. Whoever fired the shot was a very good sniper with a silenced rifle.

This sort of thing is embarrassing to any detective, and needless to say Matson had to save face. She found the dead man’s brother Roger, and convinced him to hire her to investigate. Roger’s wife was a stern and snobbish shrew who tried to block Matson but didn’t succeed.

Matson’s investigation revealed the Dwight Ellsworth’s shipping company was having trouble with damage claims and likely to lose its insurance coverage because of it. The company would revert to his brother, except that Roger soon joined Dwight in the next world.

The widow would inherit, which was fine by her. Subsequent events revealed that she had rented an apartment overlooking the cable car line because she

knew her brother-in-law rode it every day. She was a crack shot with a rifle, and eventually was able to line up a kill shot as the car went by. With a silenced weapon, the single shot wasn't noticed.

Eventually the widow was tracked to a rooftop overlooking Matson's apartment, as she wished to eliminate one last detail. The police begged to differ, and in the shootout that followed killed the woman. There were several minutes exposition as Matson explained all the loose threads. Once more the cable cars would be safe to ride.

On the lighter side was the series THE EASY ACES, a 15-minute episodic show that aired in various forms from 1930 to 1948, featuring Goodman and Jane Ace. He wrote the scripts and in later life worked at \$3,500 per week as one of the highest paid comedy writers in the world. His wife played a Dumb Dora routine, with a Missouri drawl thick enough to cut with a knife.

The series had long story arcs, not zero-reset episodes or gag-a-minute lines. There was no studio audience because Goodman's dry wit would have passed them by. Worth downloading a batch of mp3s.

"Jane Is Driving A Bus For The War Effort" was a 1943 episode about her taking a war job as a bus driver. She wasn't very good at it, and ran her route up to 35 minutes behind schedule. Her passengers were war workers on their way to vital factory jobs. This episode, while comedic, was also serious propaganda, warning listeners that every minute on the job mattered.

The bus company manager couldn't get through to Jane that she couldn't be lackadaisical about her driving, so he brought in an Army major to emphasize the point. They both confused her with talk about man-hours lost because she was late getting the workers to their jobs. They were caught in a downward spiral trying to get through to her but never did.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Brenhin Kellera, C., et al (2019) **Neoproterozoic glacial origin of the Great Unconformity.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:/doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804350116

[The Neoproterozoic era was 1,000 to 542 megayears ago. At its beginning, life was unicellular. At its ending, life became multicellular as the Cambrian era began.]

Authors' abstract: *It has long been observed that the sequence of sedimentary rocks deposited in the past half-billion years often sharply overlies older igneous or metamorphic basement at an erosional surface known as the Great Unconformity. We provide evidence that this unconformity may record rapid erosion during Neoproterozoic "snowball Earth" glaciations.*

*We show that the extent of Phanerozoic sedimentation in shallow continental seas can be accurately reproduced by modeling the accommodation space produced by the proposed glacial erosion, underlining the importance of glaciation as a means for lowering erosional base level. These results provide constraints on the sedimentary and geochemical environment in which the first multicellular animals evolved and diversified in the "Cambrian explosion" following the unconformity.*

*The Great Unconformity, a profound gap in Earth's stratigraphic record often evident below the base of the Cambrian system, has remained among the most enigmatic field observations in Earth science for over a century. While long associated directly or indirectly with the occurrence of the earliest complex animal fossils, a conclusive explanation for the formation and global extent of the Great Unconformity has remained elusive.*

*Here we show that the Great Unconformity is associated with a set of large global oxygen and hafnium isotope excursions in magmatic zircon that suggest a late Neoproterozoic crustal erosion and sediment subduction event of unprecedented scale.*

*These excursions, the Great Unconformity, preservational irregularities in the terrestrial bolide impact record, and the first-order pattern of Phanerozoic sedimentation can together be explained by spatially heterogeneous Neoproterozoic glacial erosion totaling a global average of 3 to 5 vertical*



kilometers, along with the subsequent thermal and isostatic consequences of this erosion for global continental freeboard.

Speirs: What this means is that when Snowball Earth ended, the glaciers had scraped off 3 to 5 vertical km of the continents. This not only removed a huge amount of the geological record (the Great Unconformity), it caused the continents to float higher on the tectonic plates.

Rozek, C.S., et al (2019) **Reducing socioeconomic disparities in the STEM pipeline through student emotion regulation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:1553-1558

Authors' abstract: *Educational attainment is one lever that can increase opportunity for economically disadvantaged families, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Unfortunately, students from lower-income backgrounds often perform poorly and fail high school STEM courses, which are a necessary step in pursuing fast-growing and lucrative STEM careers, graduating high school, and matriculating to college.*

*We reasoned that, because high school STEM courses often use high-stakes tests to gauge performance, and such tests can be especially stressful for lower income students, interventions that help students regulate their negative emotions during tests should reduce the achievement gap between higher and lower-income students.*

*In a large-scale (n = 1,175) field experiment conducted in ninth grade science classrooms, students were asked to complete a control exercise, or they were given the opportunity to complete an exercise to help them regulate their worries and reinterpret their anxious arousal before their tests.*

*We found significant benefits of emotion regulation activities for lower-income students in terms of their science examination scores, science course passing rate, and students' attitudes toward examination stress, suggesting that students' emotions are one factor that impacts performance.*

*For example, 39% of lower-income students failed the course in the control group compared with only 18% of students failing the course if they participated in the emotion regulation interventions, a reduction in course failure rate by half. Our work underscores the crucial importance of targeting students'*

*emotions during impactful points in their academic trajectories for improving STEM preparedness and enhancing overall academic success.*

Stephoe, A., and D. Fancourt (2019) **Leading a meaningful life at older ages and its relationship with social engagement, prosperity, health, biology, and time use.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1814723116

Authors' abstract: *Ratings of the meaningfulness of life have been adopted in UK national surveys and are advocated internationally. This study demonstrates the value of a simple rating of the extent to which people feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile, by documenting positive associations with social relationships and broader social engagement, economic prosperity, mental and physical health, biomarkers, health-related behaviors, and time use.*

*These associations were observed both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, suggesting that feeling life is worthwhile contributes to subsequent well-being and human flourishing at older ages. Given the widely recognized policy importance of promoting subjective well-being at older ages, a wider adoption of worthwhile ratings in large-scale surveys would provide valuable policy-relevant evidence internationally.*

*The sense that one is living a worthwhile and meaningful life is fundamental to human flourishing and subjective well-being. Here, we investigate the wider implications of feeling that the things one does in life are worthwhile with a sample of 7,304 men and women aged 50 and older (mean 67.2 y).*

*We show that independently of age, sex, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status, higher worthwhile ratings are associated with: stronger personal relationships (marriage/partnership, contact with friends), broader social engagement (involvement in civic society, cultural activity, volunteering), less loneliness, greater prosperity (wealth, income), better mental and physical health (self-rated health, depressive symptoms, chronic disease), less chronic pain, less disability, greater upper body strength, faster walking, less obesity and central adiposity, more favorable biomarker profiles (C-reactive protein, plasma fibrinogen, white blood cell count, vitamin D,*

*high-density lipoprotein cholesterol),  
healthier lifestyles (physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, sleep  
quality, not smoking),  
more time spent in social activities and exercising, and less time spent alone or  
watching television.*

*Longitudinally over a 4-y period, worthwhile ratings predict positive changes in social, economic, health, and behavioral outcomes independently of baseline levels. Sensitivity analyses indicate that these associations are not driven by factors such as prosperity or depressive symptoms, or by outcome levels before the measurement of worthwhile ratings. The feeling that life is filled with worthwhile activities may promote healthy aging and help sustain meaningful social relationships and optimal use of time at older ages.*

Speirs: Since I retired in 2010 at age 55, I've paid more attention to articles such as this one.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
Etobicoke, Ontario

2019-01-31

You're probably colder in Calgary, but it's pretty close here, and I'd rather be inside than outside.

[We've had a mild winter so far, with daily highs in the -5° to -15°C range. It is a dry cold, not the same as what eastern Canada feels at the same temperatures. As you sent your letter, southern Alberta was bracing for a few days of -25° temperatures, but we can't complain.]

OPUNTIA 432: Everyone trying to stay warm? I don't like the cold, but I did grow up in it. I do remember -40° temperatures when I was a kid.

The Calgary Tower makes a great torch with the fireworks coming off the top.  
And a chiss sweeze sandwich does sound pretty good right about now.

If I recall, Dog River, Saskatchewan, site of CTV's CORNER GAS television series, was referenced more than once as not far away from Mercy, Saskatchewan, site of CBC's LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE. Too bad they were on different networks. Seeing the characters interact could have been some fun.

[For those interested, both comedy series are available on DVD. Very enjoyable. No laugh tracks because they were shot on location. Realistic behaviours, not characters shouting “Shut yo mouth!” at each other.]

All the pictures of cupcakes is making me hungry. Food-based mystery novels can be fun. Yvonne has a copy of THE 27-INGREDIENT CHILI CON CARNE MURDERS by Nancy Pickard. I need to check to see if she has any other food-based titles.

Re: my previous letter of comment: I am pleased to learn there is no real separatist movement in Alberta, even with the dissatisfaction some have with the Notley government.

And, the tenth CFL franchise will be named the Atlantic Schooners. I wish them luck, but pro sports can be a cash fountain or a cash sink.

OPUNTIA 433: It has been a long time since there's been cacti on the front cover, I suspect.

I keep hearing about the benefits of hemp for good foods and a replacement for paper, saving a lot of forested land. It sounds like a minor miracle, but how much farmable land would we need to grow enough hemp for all our needs? The legalization of marijuana seems a big deal for some, but how come we can't legalize all hemp for our benefit? Too much money in forestry, I guess...

[Hemp has been legal for years. The problem is that the land it uses could be used for growing food, whereas the forestry industry uses land unsuitable for cultivation. That is why north-central and northeastern Alberta and northern Saskatchewan were never colonized by homesteaders and are still covered by boreal forest.]



I do like some of the Oka cheeses from Québec, but there's never enough money to enjoy it again. A little stinky Camembert is always good, too.

OPUNTIA 434: Re: Bitching about Trudeau; some things never change. It was dull before, and it's dull now. Let me know if they come up with a new tune to sing. Not even the yellow vests are original.

[Unfortunately it appears the movement has been hijacked by other special interest groups such as anti-immigration. It will die out in the same manner as the Occupy movement, which trashed public parks in protest against Wall Street brokers.]

Any kind of matter transmitter can be fun, especially if the originals aren't destroyed, and the copies replace them. Wil McCarthy's Queendom of Sol series was a great read, where people would fax themselves all over the known universe, and all the copies might gather to compare notes.

The chocolate is worse than the above cupcakes. Good thing I'm making dinner shortly! Purdy's [chocolate shop] is great, and the closest Purdy's to me is in Mississauga.

**SEEN AROUND COWTOWN**

photo by Dale Speirs

It seems I'm not the only one anticipating the next Stampede rodeo. I saw this sandwich board sign downtown on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall.

