

**Friday, 2 January 2004**

I must have slept through New Year's Eve last year. I doubt Gwendolyn would have slept. And I **\*\*know\*\*** she would have disapproved mightily.

At about ten minutes before twelve midnight, the fireworks begin. Only, it isn't all fireworks. It's an Island-wide artillery barrage that continues for about 20 minutes, unabated. Smoke hangs over The Island at the end all of this, and I sincerely believe the last shot comes only after the last cartridge is fired. The street lights get a bit lost in the fog. Some enterprising grandson -- or great-grandson -- always ventures out and rings The Old Church Tower Bell at **\*\*precisely\*\*** midnight. Throughout the fusillade, the NAPS (Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service) Truck flits (over sheer, wet, unsanded ice) from one end of The Island to the other. Generally, when the NAPS truck is in the neighborhood, the nearby guns go silent -- momentarily. You can discern the truck's approximate location, sometimes, in the barrage, from sudden silences heard (or not heard) from specific directions.

I never thought to ring The Little Church's Bell. (That's where the Rectory is located.) I'm glad didn't ring it, actually. Most certainly, if I had, I would then have had a succession of guests until dawn -- guests in various states of disrepair.

Yesterday morning was quiet -- very quiet. Around four in the afternoon I headed over to Lynn & Clayton Cheechoo's house. There were some revelers still reveling, as best they could revel, around the Community Center. Another friend of the Cheechoo's, Greg, was supposed to come for dinner as well. But he is the manager at the Eco-Lodge -- Moose Factory's class act motel. Last night was not a good night for him to be away from that building. After supper we sent him a take-out plate of the dinner.

And what a dinner it was! Clayton had decided to do the turkey right. That meant a backyard barbecue -- Cree style -- in 0 degree weather.

First you have to build the teepee. About 30 feet in diameter. Plywood sides coming up about three feet from the ground. Then, many poles coming up from the circular side and meeting at the top, to make the cone. Over the poles, tarps, except at the top -- to let the smoke out. In the center of the teepee: a cooking fire. In front of the fire: the bannock loaves -- on sticks -- roasting/baking. Over the fire, and somewhat to the side: the turkey -- trussed & hanging on twine. A pan below catches the grease. The turkey spins on the rope -- clockwise and then counter-clockwise -- constantly, for about six hours. The cooking fire keeps the whole interior warm. The smoke infuses the turkey and the bannock (and the cook). The meal is delectable. The cook sneezes a lot.

**Saturday, 3 January 2004**

There was a fire last night or early this morning at one of the houses in 'The Village' -- that part of Moose Factory Island which is set aside as a Reserve (in this case, Moose Cree First Nation Reserve.) I have been hearing reports all day from folks -- each of whom is variously worried. Reportedly, there were two fatalities. Authorities are investigating and have not yet released the number or name(s) of the deceased -- or any information regarding the circumstances of the tragedy.

**Monday, 5 January 2004**

No announcements concerning the fire have been made by the authorities; and The Island is waiting.

When fighting the fire, the Fire Department called for the water reserved by the water treatment plant to be used only in emergencies. That reserve is now spent. AND, there is a

leak somewhere in the system -- somewhere deep under the dirt, the ice, and the snow. Water pressure has been low, variously, all over The Island. Whenever the leak is found, some of us will be without water for several hours; and, once again, there may be no school.

Last night, after Evening Service, some of us lingered and talked about the fire. Other fires were remembered. Once, several years ago, when Bobby was Fire Chief, there was a similar house fire -- with fatalities. The blaze was so intense that the fire fighters could not get into, or even near, the building. Screams could be heard from inside, and there was nothing anybody could do about it. The memory persists.

**Tuesday, 13 January 2004**

Two funerals since my last post.... One was for one of the house-fire victims. There was a third fatality -- at about the same time as the first two. This one, also, was tragic, though it occurred far away from Moose Factory. But her family brought her back 'home', and she rests - with other members of her family -- behind the Old Church. Her burial was yesterday afternoon.

I'm now repeating myself, somewhat, from posts of last year. But one of the major strengths of this world shows itself in times like these. Usually, in addition to the actual Funeral there is a Family Service the night before. It lasts one to three hours. It is like a Funeral in that it is largely made up of hymns and readings and prayers. But it is not as structured, usually, as a distinct piece of liturgy. And there is a lot of informal sharing -- and weeping. Death is part of life here. It is openly and honestly confronted and experienced. Open grief is strongly supported by the whole community; no one needs to hide from it. Whatever time is needed by the family is there for them. The casket is closed for the last time only after everyone is ready and the last person has said 'good-bye and I love you.' There is no such thing as a clock, no sense of time, until after the last member of the family has left the cemetery.

The time of preparation for a funeral can run several days (and nights.) The family tries to reach a consensus -- a plan that everyone can buy into. Sometimes that's very difficult for a family -- particularly if it is as stressed as each of these families were -- and are. The Church then tries to put into a plan of action all of the desires of the family -- a plan of action that will actually work. (This last time around it took me about four or five hours, in the middle of the night, to take the family's desires and map out a coherent Service.)

Yesterday's Funeral started at 11 in the morning -- with several hours of 'visiting'; and I was back into the Rectory at five in the afternoon. Even at 30 to 40 degrees below zero, there is a grave dug. A jackhammer is used to penetrate the frost. Then, the grave is dug -- by hand, with shovels; no back-hoe is used. And the Committal is read at the grave, after the casket is lowered -- by the guys in the family -- by hand, with straps. At yesterday's burial, a youngster of about five years was standing right next to me. I gave him a clump of earth to hold, so that I could take it from him and sprinkle dirt on the lowered casket at the words 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. He stood there holding the dirt at reverent attention while an adult bent over and spoke softly and gently into his ear, explaining what we were doing and why. After the last prayer is read, the grave is filled completely, by hand, and covered with flowers; and a white wooden cross is planted at the Head. Only then, does the family begin to drift away. And after that, ordinarily, there is a Feast. And, then, yes, life does go on.

**Wednesday, 14 January 2004**

Some old friends (of some 30 years ago) have been writing. All canoers. Many with kids the age they were (or older) when I paddled with them. Gradually old journals and pix are finding their way to Moose Factory. These materials are precious beyond description, especially when they relate to territory traversed on the East/Quebec side of The Bay, because of the Hydro

development. As I get the time, I'll post them. There are several stories remembered that I long since (conveniently) forgot.

**Thursday, 15 January 2004**

I drove the Moose Factory/Moosonee Expressway for the first time this morning -- at a brisk -37\*. Only one road (on the ice) was open. But it was good. And Moose Factory is now officially (in my mind, anyway) reconnected to the rest of the world.

Over the last several days I have been getting phone calls and E-mails from folks in the northeastern USA, remarking upon the chilly weather. It seems that we, who live in Canada, are responsible for New England's inconvenience. To add insult to New England's injury we generally don't notice anything -- at least, not in the way that New Englanders do.

True, the kids here are starting to wear hats -- often only a baseball hat; but that's a start. (Actually, they'll wear the same hat in July....) Schools and restaurants remain open -- for the most part -- except when the pipes freeze -- and they do, sometimes, in the ground.

Garbage continues to be collected, daily and on schedule. Skidoos shoot across the snow (and ice) just as fast as always -- at full throttle. Elders, however, tend to be somewhat more circumspect about taking their daily walks.

And life goes on all day, every day while the temperature hovers between 20 and 45 degrees below zero -- with a 10 to 15 mph west wind.

There are inconveniences. Air Creebec had to cancel some flights; the planes succumbed to the cold. Fresh milk sometimes gets here -- and often does not. (There's A LOT of ice cream, however.) Cars can be temperamental. But not the Cree. Freeze-up is done. The roads are opening up. On a skidoo one can go ANYWHERE. And we're all thankful that there are no bugs.

**Saturday, 17 January 2004**

Raymond, our Deacon, had a serious heart attack yesterday. It may have started around noon. He wasn't feeling very well anyway -- but not badly enough to do anything about it. Towards the afternoon he had difficulty breathing. He called Iris and the rescue squad. By five he was in The Hospital. Even then the doctor didn't know there had been a heart attack -- at first.

At midnight last night (this morning) he was airlifted to Kingston. When he left here he was in stable but critical condition. Marion, his wife, goes tomorrow. His plane was filled with technicians and equipment.

This last night most of us have been up, and watching, and waiting.

**Monday, 19 January 2004**

Raymond is doing better but remains in critical condition. Marion and their youngest son are there in Kingston with him.

Last night we held our annual Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We had to hold it at the Community Center, because the Parish Hall had frozen solid. Even in the cold over a hundred showed up. Bishop Cadieux preached (in English and in Cree) and led us in The Lord's Prayer (which he spoke in French whilst the rest of us followed along in Cree and English.)

A news report on the CBC states that the Inuit at Rankin Inlet are chilly. An outdoor seminar for young people whose purpose is to demonstrate the construction of an igloo has been postponed until the weather warms a little.

The Moose Factory Sewer System -- always a temperamental beast -- is having a very tough time. We all are being urged not to bathe, wash, or flush.

The Moose Factory Water Works -- another temperamental beast -- is pumping A LOT of water somewhere into the ground. It's been doing this since New Year's Day at least. At any other time of the year the water would eventually rise to the surface; and the leak would be found. But not now....

**Tuesday, 27 January 2004**

*WATER WOES*

The Moose Factory Island Sewer System is fixed. Our local TV channel has been advertising the problem: People have been flushing their laundry and various unmentionables down the toilet. The sewer mega-pumps didn't like that; they complained; they quit. But all of that is behind us now -- until the pumps jam again.

HOWEVER, the Water System still has an underground leak. Nobody knows where that leak is -- except that it's way down there, somewhere, under several feet of snow and frost. We are being told that the location of the leak will be discovered when the water bubbles to the surface. Nothing much bubbles anywhere this time of year. All we know is that our water table, underground, is getting cleaner by the day.

In the mean time the water supply plant is having a bad day. On a really bad day, nobody gets any water at all -- all day. And our local water system has been having many, many bad days. On Sunday the water ran for about an hour -- during Church and when I couldn't (decently) take a shower. On Monday (yesterday) there was NO water -- all day or all night. This morning there was water at 8 AM. (We've all been watching our water taps like thirsty dogs.) I took a shower IMMEDIATELY and washed clothes IMMEDIATELY. Now, at 12 Noon, there is no water. Schools are closed. Parents, Teachers, Principal, and kids are all going crazy -- each in their own little way.

**Friday, 30 January 2004**

We're having a heat wave. Over Zero (Fahrenheit) yesterday. At 8 AM this morning we're already up to 5\* -- ABOVE. This is helping the search for the water leak. All day yesterday various crews and dignitaries were turning the big zone valves on and off. No School, of course, until at least Monday. No repairs, yet. No leak found, yet.

**Saturday, 31 January 2004**

The water continues to leak. Raymond continues to improve.