

Friday, 16 July 2004

It's now Friday morning. I returned to Moosonee on last Monday's train. The train pulls into Moosonee around 4:30 PM. The last barge from Moosonee to Moose Factory departs Moosonee at 4 PM. That means that I have to stall a night in Moosonee before I can get the truck over to Moose Factory. Last year I slept in the truck. This year I slept in the basement of the Anglican Church in Moosonee. I'm getting smarter; and the Church of the Apostles was very kind.

The barge, incidentally, is operated by the same company as the train -- Ontario Northland. The train company is the single one most compelling argument for a paved highway into Moosonee and bridge to Moose Factory.

Tuesday morning I was up early, as usual. A little after six I ventured out. I wanted to find out who, if anyone, also was lined up waiting for the morning barge. Already there were several people standing around The River's edge -- and watching The River. Then I saw an OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) vehicle. Then I noticed several canoes and boats being put into The River. One was from the Fire Department's Fire & Rescue. Obviously they were looking for someone.

It was an eleven year old boy. He had been out on The River, Monday afternoon, with his friends. At low tide they had gone out to a sandbar. After the tide had started to come back in they started to think about heading back. This one got into trouble in a deep stretch between the sandbar and the mainland where the current was brisk. His friends ran for help. But, of course, by then it was too late.

Christopher and his fiancée were over to the house last night. I'll be doing their wedding in August. Christopher is a volunteer fireman in Moosonee. He was one of the people who searched. The drowning occurred late Monday afternoon. The body was not found until about 9 PM on Tuesday -- more or less in the same place. I asked Christopher how often something like this happens. 'Every year.'

The current is just as treacherous over here on The Island. There was a moderately experienced canoeist, I've been told, who got lost not long before I arrived in 2002. He had been paddling -- by himself -- on the East side (my side) of The River.

The funeral for the youngster will be tomorrow, in Moosonee.

Tuesday, 19 July 2004

Yesterday's Sunday Morning Service was in The Old Church. The Congregation has been worshipping there since just after I had left for vacation in June. (We had a late, cold Spring.) Yesterday was my first time in The Old Church for quite some time. Bobby led The Service over in Moosonee.

We prayed for Zachary -- the lad who had drowned -- as well as for others who had died over the last few weeks. This coming Saturday I preside at a wedding. There will be two more in August. At least one child will be baptized next Sunday. There were only 45 of us in the Church yesterday. Many are still away on vacation and travels. But regardless of the number of people in Church in a given Sunday, the issues of life and death go on.

Yesterday was overcast and hazy. There was smoke in the air. This morning's rising sun was beet red. Bobby tells me the ground is burning somewhere.

We are getting many clouds of bull flies. They are about half the size of a humming bird. They bite. Very nasty.

This morning, at dawn, we had 60 degrees with cloudy skies. Yesterday, which was overcast, saw us up to over 80 degrees. Friday morning dawned with clear skies and forty degrees.

Monday, 2 August 2004

Some time after my last posting we got some chilly weather. Around here the temperature went into the low forties. I would not be at all surprised if somewhere out there in the bush -- and not all that far north to us -- there was a good frost. Then, more recently, we got temperatures in the high eighties. This morning we have a civilized 60 degrees.

Yesterday, the first Sunday of August, was the day for the annual Memorial Service. There were about 500 of us. The Service takes about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. People are clustered throughout the Cemetery in extended families nearby the graves of their relatives. They spread out in lawn chairs, blankets, umbrellas (if there is threat of rain). They don't pack a picnic, but there is bottled water, pop, and chips. There always are many of the very young. Several of us were there this year for the first time.

There are lots of the old songs, readings, and prayers. And then there is a procession around the cemetery. Some persons are remembered, specifically, by name. Those certainly include the folks who have died in the last year or so. It's all very much like All Saints Day -- or All Souls Day -- elsewhere. In fact we use the Collect from All Souls Day.

One might wonder why we do an All Souls day in the middle of the summer. For one thing, November 1 can be right in the middle of freeze-up. And freeze-up effectively isolates The Island. Families visit with each other especially this particular weekend. It is a long weekend. The first Monday in August is a holiday. In addition to that The Moose Cree Band schedules its Gathering of Our People to end with this (long) weekend. So, of all the times of the year, this weekend may be the one when more families are gathered than on any other weekend of the year.

So, Sunday afternoon is a good time for a solemn Service. We cancel the morning Service on this particular Sunday. There is too much coming and going in preparation leading up to the Memorial Service for anybody to think about anything else. This year we have had good weather for grass. For the last two or three weeks people have been hacking away at the grass. Most years there is a weed whacker at work right into the Processional. Also, this year a couple of very young little girls decided that the flowers at different graves were improperly distributed. That is, there were some graves with no flowers at all. The young citizens decided to fix that -- much to the consternation of some older people -- who thought the 'minister' should do something about it -- which is how I heard about the matter. I told everybody to be thankful the youngsters are taking an *active* interest in the place. This has to be one of the very few places in North America where really young people know exactly what is going on, who are active in the care of the place, and who understand it as ****their**** place.

The Memorial Service is the largest Service of the year. Because it is held outside (weather permitting) we don't get over crowded in The Old Church. This year there were two drops of rain in the middle of the Service -- immediately following my homily. But the weather quickly changed its mind, and we didn't miss a beat. In fact, the clouds (and breeze) kept the heat and bright sunlight moderated.

Tuesday, 17 August 2004

The week following the Memorial Service saw three weddings and three deaths. I'm told these things happen in threes. By 8 August I was a basket case. Fortunately The Bishop made a quick trip to Moosonee for the weekend of 8 August and bailed me out of the wedding I was scheduled for there -- compacted between the burial of a newborn and wedding over here.

The Beast, ordered 4 June 2004, has not yet shipped. I am impatient. Apple, in June, indicated a shipping date of '4-6 weeks'. July came and went. Then 'on or before August 20' was posted. This week I am watching my mail closely. Rumor has it that IBM is the culprit. Reportedly, they cannot make the chips fast enough. I have more or less decided not to post anything new on the website until I get the new machine. Somewhere I read it pushes PhotoShop around 15 times faster than what I have on the desk right now. So the wait should be worth it. When you read this you'll know I got the machine -- and that I got the machine to work.

There are bears milling around in the Hospital Parking Lot. Or so I gather from posters around town. We are being told to be circumspect at night. I'm lucky. I can move around on the Island by car. Most people here don't have cars. They are expensive, and one really doesn't need a car - - just so long as you're not in a rush and are smart enough to elude the bears.

Last week Kashechewan had a drowning. Three young men were heading up River in a canoe, I gather. The canoe overturned at the foot of a rapids. Two people survived; one was lost. Many people showed up for the funeral on Saturday in Kashechewan. I had the opportunity to be there for the funeral, but I turned it down; I was worried about the hearth here. ...I also wondered about the 1960's and 1970's when my generation was inspired by whole families going UP the Albany in their motor canoes. It's because I heard stories about the loaded canoes going UP Tom Flett Falls that I decided we could go DOWN it -- and we did -- nicely. But the indigenous culture no longer has those skills -- or not like they did.

Moose Factory Island, it turned out, was virtually deserted this last weekend. For one thing, there was the funeral to the north of us. Also, CreeFest has been going on, in Cochrane, to the south of us. That was a big thing. Much singing and dancing. I actually was in Cochrane last week just before the CreeFest -- getting the truck inspected for Canada Customs. But I came back here the day it started down there.

Theresa was here yesterday -- politiking. She is running for Deputy Chief of the Mushkegowuk Council. (That is the consortium of Bands included in Treaty #9.) She had lost the election at Attawapiskat earlier this year. Somehow people there, in the Village, managed to exclude the out-of-town registered Band members from the voting. A locally more popular person was elected. In my exceptionally humble opinion the only hope of several of these villages lies precisely amongst those who have been able to leave the communities and who are able (and willing) to go back and forth freely. If the villages completely insulate themselves from the rest of the world they and the culture(s) they represent will cease to exist in a generation or so.

Saturday, 21 August 2004

Email received at 2 AM this morning reports that the BEAST is MOVING! It shipped yesterday. All Canada now waits. Breathless with expectation. ...Actually, not really. Just this little bit of Canada. And I've been waiting since June 4. Breathless and expectant.

Canada's media, if not all of Canada, is focused on the Olympics. Unlike the Americans, the Canadians do not get obsessed. They focus. I get my all political rants from the American media. (I'm trying to figure out how to get The Rev. Al Sharpton to come up here and lead us all in a revival. THAT should get the juices flowing...)

From time to time I get polar bear pictures from friends in the States. Cuddly, Fuzzy little things. The real thing is neither cuddly nor fuzzy -- particularly when it wants YOU for its lunch. As it did, the other day, reportedly, just up our western coast. It was preparing to dine on a lady when her husband shot it dead.

When I paddled around here I never thought about Polar Bears. Never knew they came this far

south. And maybe they didn't, so much, in the 1970's. The locals here, however, cannot believe we didn't travel -- even in the summer -- without a gun.

Monday, 30 August 2004

We had nine baptisms yesterday. Families are scrambling to 'get it done' before we migrate back to The Little Church. Right now, except for BIG services, we'll be back on September 12.

The 'Little Church' has several names. Sometimes it's the 'Way-Down Church' -- for, 'way down The River...' Or, the G-G Church -- because it's next to G'G's Corner & Gift Shoppe. Or, St Thomas' Chapel -- it's smaller than the Big/Old Church. Or sometimes just, The Old Catholic Church.

Wednesday, 8 September

Last week we had another two funerals. There were two large, extended families grieving. In addition to that the annual Big Stone Memorial Service was held -- again on Big Stone Island.

Five years ago eight souls perished in The Bay -- somewhere around Big Stone Island. It was weeks later that the last body was recovered. The community was devastated. And the memory continues.

About fifty folks gathered on The Island. Most were from the families affected. There were some others -- like myself -- who had no blood relationship. Chief Hardisty was there. Raymond is doing better, and he was there as well. Most of the people went out to The Island on Thursday for a week. The Service was on Sunday. I flew out on a chopper. Around 3 in the afternoon we had a short Service. And then the Feast! And what a feast it was. But I couldn't linger for long. I had to take the first chopper returning to Moose Factory.

And in the middle of all of that The Beast arrived.

Apple had shipped The Beast on August 21. It showed up on my doorstep on Thursday, September 2. For some reason Apple changed freight companies. This one -- whose name I never got -- pulled the UPS maneuver and simply sent the stuff by train to Moosonee and to the ONR (Ontario Northland Railway) warehouse. I would have known none of this -- except that one of the employees in the warehouse was kind enough to give me a call.

Now I had to figure out how to get the stuff over to Moose Factory. The fastest (and cheapest) delivery service is with the taxis. I simply called one of the taxis. A guy picked the stuff up in Moosonee and transported it to The River. There the loot was loaded into a canoe and hauled to Moose Factory. Finally another taxi (four wheeler, this time) picked the parcels up and brought them directly to me. The whole project cost me \$25. I never signed for the merchandise. And it never dropped into The River. If it had mysteriously gone missing, I don't know who would have been responsible. When I told the fellow driving the cab what the stuff was worth, he couldn't believe it. Anyway, I am claiming that my G-5 is the only one in North America delivered by canoe.

By now I have all the data transferred from the old machine (eMAC) to the new machine (G-5). Tomorrow I head south for the Clergy Conference for a week. Possibly I can start doing some map work in October.

Monday, 20 September 2004

I'm now back from my travels.... On September 9 I headed south on the train. I spent Friday morning getting a new eMAC up and running in Cochrane. Then, off to Temagami where I

picked up the new (and very beautiful) canoe. I lingered around Temagami until Monday. Then I headed to the annual Clergy Conference in Haileybury on Lake Temiscamingue. By Friday evening, 17 September 2004, I was back on Moose Factory Island.

Thursday, 23 September 2004

On Wednesday, yesterday, during the day, Raymond was doing fine. However, late last night, shortly before midnight, he was feeling badly and had trouble breathing.

Marion called the ambulance, and Raymond was brought to the Hospital. This time, he didn't make it.

The Reverend Deacon Raymond Maybee died shortly before 2 AM on Thursday, 23 September, at Weeneebayko General Hospital, Moose Factory, Ontario.

The family has now gone back to Marion's house from the Hospital. Parishioners are beginning to show up there as well.

Tuesday, 28 September 2004

Yesterday, Monday, 27 September, we buried Raymond.

The Bishop came just for the funeral, spent the night here at my place and left on this morning's plane.

There were over 600 of us yesterday saying our last good byes. Old friends from the Hudson's Bay Company had flown in for the funeral. And, of course, the family convened here at Moose Factory for the weekend. Marion's family comes from Wemindji (formerly Paint Hills). Raymond's family comes from southern Ontario. And the families are spread out all over the place. It took a few days for everyone to get here. And, even at that, there were some who couldn't do it.

Tuesday afternoon I had another funeral -- in Moosonee.

Wednesday, 29 September 2004

Today I atone for my running around the last several days. I have the 24 hour bug. (I HOPE it's only a 24 hr bug....)

Thursday, 30 September 2004

It WAS only a 24 hour bug. Evidently it's making the rounds. I was not the first; nor will I have been the last. Sometimes the bugs tell us what we need to hear; this was the first full day of rest that I've taken on The Island since I got here.