



Yellow breasted chat/Gene Herzberg

Your Voice

MUN Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) Newsletter • Vol. 19, No. 1, Feb. 2021
Editor: Bernadette Power • Design and layout: Mark Graesser

From the Editor

Happy February to all! We have been experiencing different winter weather for a second year in a row, each on opposite ends of the spectrum! Covid is still very much a topic of conversation and I think Newfoundland and Labrador dwellers are holding their breath that we will remain relatively safe! Suffice to say that these two issues (weather and pandemic) have been the main topics of conversation for most of us with, well yes, a bit(?) of politics thrown in the mix!

For a change of pace, I welcome you to the February's Your Voice. Our members will delight you with stories far removed from the issues referenced above. There is the charming story of Philip Hiscock becoming the Accidental Birder; Keith Storey's tale of Garbage Boxes and "Pop's Penitentiary" (you'll have to read this one to understand); Tony Chadwick writes of the "indeed" grand celebration of Queen Elizabeth II Coronation, the painful part he played, and his mother crying tears of emotion throughout! Jo Sawyer tells the story of the challenge of learning to ride a bicycle on farm roads, and later selecting a bike as her vehicle of choice on research field trips; and finally, Joan Scott's visit from Newfoundland to Norwich, which offers a great deal of humour and makes one wonder if the gulls may have followed her there and back??

This is, indeed, "your voice." MUNPA members have so much talent, and we always enjoy a good story to take us out of the regular routine of life. Please consider sharing your memories, current thoughts and any other pieces of intrigue that may bring a smile or spark a memory in others.

Bernadette

President's Message

"Good riddance to 2020." All of us heard it often, either in place of "Happy New Year" or in one form or another immediately after.

It's no surprise that people were ready to see the back of 2020. The start of a new decade, most of its promises never materialized. Instead, it was a year of aborted travel, cancelled plans, lockdowns, and sheltering in place or moving in constricted space, and — for those of us who remained in St. John's — a snow-dump that ground normal life to a halt.

Few of us knew that snowmageddon was a practice run for what would follow. A pandemic that began in China spread to Europe and then North America. In March, what seemed remote became immediate: People who were travelling scurried home. Universities pivoted to online classes, offices emptied, and those who could began working from home. Most of us learned a new vocabulary: COVID-19, corona viruses, sheltering in place, and personal bubbles. For those who were interested, medical officers of health, and rock-star immunologists and virologists provided us with a crash course in immunology.

Temporary relief came in the summer and fall: Stores opened and we could move in broader spheres. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we enjoyed a nice summer and the warmest fall most people could remember, perfect for the "staycations" that

substituted for travel further afield. Nevertheless, 2020 was still the year of trips not taken and events postponed or downsized — frustrating if they were happy occasions, much harder if they were not.

With vaccines developed in record time and rolling out, 2021 was to be different. It is and is not. Case numbers crept up in November and December and reached alarming levels in January. The predicted second wave engulfed not only the United States, but also Quebec and Ontario and provinces further west. Increases were lower in Atlantic Canada, but high enough that the "Atlantic bubble," opened earlier, closed. In Newfoundland and Labrador numbers are in single digits and staff are returning to Memorial's campuses. However, many of us, vulnerable because we are older, are still moving in constricted circles. But that is here: Odds are that those of you who moved away are experiencing renewed lockdowns, curfews, and constricted movements, all the more frustrating if you thought that was behind you.

Nor has 2021 been as benign as many hoped. I am a political scientist, addicted to following politics more closely than is medically indicated. Arriving home on the afternoon of January 6th, I sat down to do something I had never done before: Watch the Congress of United States certify the results of the electoral college, an event barely noticed in normal election years. I am American by birth, a Canadian and Newfoundlander by choice. Settling in, I wasn't sure what I was seeing: Mayhem to be sure, but a real event, a video substituted, or a premonition of things to come?

What I was watching was real: A mob storming the United States Capitol. Had it come to this? No system of government lasts forever, but in literatures that I had taught, the United States, however flawed its democracy has been, was the epitome of stable democratic rule. No more. But January 20th has come and gone. Like many others, I counted the hours until Joe Biden was sworn in as President of the United States.

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Accidental Birder

Philip Hiscock

Working, I paid only limited attention to certain things outside work. After I retired, I could look more carefully at them. Like the birds that visit our backyard. I'm not a very determined birder. No life list. No difficult trips in search of birds, although, if my wife and I can turn a walk into a low-key bird search, we'll do that. Mostly we watch through the back windows for what we can see. And we feed the ones that show up.



Nuthatch outside our bathroom window

This came slowly, starting almost accidentally: the house we moved into almost twenty years ago came with a small bird feeder. In downtown St John's, we didn't expect to see much activity. But we filled the feeder and watched a few birds coming around. Like juncos, which my father called snowbirds. And chickadees, which his friend in Charleston, Bonavista Bay,

President's Message, continued

The nightmare — or at least this phase of it — is over and calmer governance and orderly administration are replacing government by tweet. However, few things revert to the status quo ante. Not only politics but also the pandemic have changed our lives, in all likelihood, not as dramatically as some predict but nevertheless in ways we've yet to fathom.

I am not president of the United States but of the MUN Pensioners' Association. We are rolling out winter and spring programming and, as always, monitoring pensions and benefits. Our annual general meeting will take place on June 8th. This isn't my last president's message, but my last opportunity to wish you a new year that lives up to some, if not all, of its expectations. Please keep safe and look out for others. We are not out of the woods yet.

called pitchpeeps. Nothing, it seemed, out of the ordinary. When late fall brought snow, goldfinches came, birds I had never seen before. Or, rather, I had never paid attention to them. I was taken by the bright yellow goldfinches and, in paying attention, I started to learn about the sexes of birds. Until then, it had never occurred to me that you could tell male birds from females. Wow!, thought I.

We were startled one Christmas morning when dozens of what looked like parrots were outside our

window, murmuring and feeding. It turned out they were evening grosbeaks. That was not just a memorable sight, it was a turning point as we realised there was a natural world around us that we simply were not paying enough attention to. We still call them Christmas parrots.

Over time, we improved the feeder situation, and we are adding ways of feeding birds: small seed for the smallest birds; peanuts for jays and crows; suet primarily for woodpeckers; and sunflower seeds for everyone. And they keep coming.

If I totalled up all the species that have come to our feeders, I expect it would be two or three dozen. The juncos, boring at first are boring no more with their huge variety, and for a year or two we even had a blotchy tan and white (leucistic) junco, like a palomino horse. Being a supply of mostly little birds, our feeder attracts the occasional predator: a few times a year a sharp-shinned hawk hangs around, and sometimes it gets lucky. We share a local crow family with a neighbour — she started feeding them before we did, but they come back and forth between the houses now, from us looking primarily for peanuts. Young crows are born,

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Accidental Birder, continued

some die, some move away. The family was three, then up to five, then down to three again, now up to five or six this winter. We can tell them apart a little, by looks and by behaviour; a young one this year is least afraid of being close to us.

We get colourful birds, and not just the goldfinches, bluejays and evening grosbeaks. What I call raspberry finches (purple finches) come around regularly, and we also have a few bright sparrows like the fox and the white-throated sparrow. All through the year we see the northern flicker, and the blue jay, both of whom have amazingly bright colours, especially so for a townie like me who paid no attention through most of his life. The flicker is a woodpecker, and we see downy and hairy woodpeckers, too, brilliant black and white birds. Waxwings. Warblers. Lots of colour.

Once I started paying more attention, I put my best bird camera right next to that back window where we saw the birds. It is in the kitchen and I spend a lot of time there anyway. So I take lots of pictures. Luckily for me, the birds mostly cannot see me on the inside of the glass, so I can be pretty close to them, two or three metres, or even closer sometimes.



Northern flicker sticking out her tongue

I sometimes stand outside the door while they feed. Now that I'm retired, I have lots of time not just to pay attention, but also to stand stock still if I want. I still haven't got one to land on my hand, though I often get close enough that I could touch them if I were bold enough. No doubt, that'll come. The accidental birder can afford to wait.



Young crow waiting for peanuts



Purple finch on the clothesline

Garbage Boxes

Keith Storey

Covid-19 has brought us few benefits, but for me one has been the opportunity to spend more time than would otherwise have been the case with my 9-year old grandson – home-schooling him between March and June. He may not have fully agreed, as he named his new school “Pop’s Penitentiary” and at school council meetings he was always the first to propose his expulsion, though the Board of Governors, his mother, always refused to ratify the vote. For me the experience was unexpected and wonderful, and I came to appreciate the truth in the statement that “while it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a whole vineyard to home-school one.”

Among our various activities we conducted a number of surveys - and here we get to the point of this note - one of which was to look at the types of end-of-driveway garbage boxes in our area. In St. John’s you may have come to accept and expect the effective, but aesthetically uninspiring black plastic wheelie bin. Out of town, Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s in our case, the variety of designs, colours and conditions is quite remarkable.

By far the most popular type is what we came to call the “Newfoundland Octagonal”, though my personal favourite is what the grandson called the “Pirate Treasure Chest.” We were unable to find out very much about the octagonal bin – its origins, reason for this design, etc. The “NO” would seem to be less practical than other designs (more time consuming to construct and less stable, for example), but it is clearly the bin of choice for the majority – or at least those who live along Thorburn Road, our survey route. If anyone can offer any information on this probably-soon-to-disappear local phenomenon, we would be most appreciative. “Nico, stop rolling your eyes!”



The popular “Newfoundland Octagonal”



Nico’s choice, the “Pirate Treasure Chest”

Coronation 1953

Tony Chadwick

As soon as Princess Elizabeth was declared the next monarch of the United Kingdom, the pottery industry began a period of intense activity. The end of the war in 1945 had provided the first springboard for a renewal of the industry. Mementos of all kinds were produced for sale throughout the empire, from the cheapest of cheap mugs, to the most expensive Wedgwood, Doulton, and Minton. On these were unabashedly displayed images of King George VI and the Queen, Union Jacks, excerpts from "Rule Britannia", and of course Winston Churchill, whose image was used for Toby mugs and jugs, a fitting shape for his rotund figure.

A smaller range of earthen- and china-ware was produced in 1947 for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, as the pottery industry had discovered that anything connected to the monarchy would sell quickly, not for daily use, but for ornamentation and a burgeoning trade in collectables. (I don't know if the coronation of George VI inspired a similar surge in production.)

The coronation of 1953, however, saw every organization enter into competition with every other one to provide at least one coronation mug for every child in the UK (and perhaps in the empire), with the result that I had one from my school, one from the City of Stoke-on-Trent, and one from an unspecified group who organized a party for all the children in Fenton. Fortunately, the weather on Coronation Day was fine, since the meal for the children was set out on trestle tables that stretched the length of several streets centred on the Baptist Church where the food was prepared. I can't remember all the details of the food, but I do recall seeing what might be called an industrial serving of tea. On a separate trestle table, teacups were set out in rows, their lips touching, while women brought out enormous kettles of tea (already primed with milk and sugar) and proceeded to pour continuously, one on each side of the table. No sooner was the tea poured than a little army of men carried the cups to the waiting children, and in no time several hundred were served.



This party took place, of course, after the ceremony. After my ordeal of the FA Cup Final, holding a wire aloft for the best part of two hours, my sister took pity on me and a proper H aerial was installed. For once, my mother was allowed to sit and watch, while my sister and brother-in-law did the necessary in the kitchen, making sandwiches and tea to help us through the marathon. I can't remember the exact times, but the journey by coach to Westminster Abbey took a long time since the three armed forces had each a contingent, the Royal Horse Guards, Chelsea Pensioners, several bands, and so on had to lead the parade from Buckingham Palace. Then the ceremony itself which, since it was the first to be televised, every detail and its significance had to be commented on, a magnificent feat by Richard Dimbleby who had become the BBC's go-to commentator for Royal Events. Then the parade back to Buckingham Palace, and eventually, after a long wait, the appearance of the Royal Family on the balcony to be greeted by the hundreds of thousands of spectators who had crowded into Pall Mall.

My mother sat through it all, one handkerchief not being enough to gather the tears of emotion she shed.

My Bicycle

Jo Shawyer

When I was a child, to have a bicycle was a vision, a goal, a dream. Especially after each of my two older brothers acquired one. We children had to buy our own bicycles. That was difficult when our income was sporadic: pennies and dimes from kindly spinster aunties when we visited; Christmas always yielded little more. And birthdays.

By the age of eight or nine I had enough savings to open a bank account, safely deposited with Dad. And I was old enough to earn a little by doing tasks and errands for grown-ups as the opportunities arose. At some point along the way, my parents offered each of us an allowance – ten cents? A quarter? I can't remember. All of it was saved. Dad assured me that my bank account was growing. I needed fifty dollars. One day when I was ten years old, I had enough – enough to buy a brand new red bicycle - ladies' style for easy mounting.

Next, I had to learn to ride the bicycle. No easy task when living on a farm. There was no asphalt or pavement to practice on. Just the bumpy lawn around the house and the shallow grade which led up to the large door of our barn. I could mount the bike at the barn and hang on as it careened down the slope. After balance was accomplished there, I graduated to a steeper slope, the entrance lane into the farm, and then – freedom. On to the open road.

The country road was surfaced with loose gravel. It took a certain skill to manoeuvre the bicycle along a gravel surface. In the summer, passing traffic gradually swept the gravel to the sides of the road. This left a hard bare stretch in the middle of the road, easy to ride on. But periodically the road grader would pass and spread the gravel back across the centre of the road. This was disastrous for

anyone riding a bicycle. It was very difficult to hold the bicycle against the slippery, loose gravel. However, I literally pushed on.

I loved the freedom of my bike: long rides on the country roads to explore the woods and creeks farther afield. Working hard to climb up the steep hills and then swooping down.



Bouncing over gullies opened in the road by summer rainstorms. Wobbling and rattling over loose boards on wooden bridges across the creeks. This was the life.

As I grew older, I rode my bike every day from the farm down the road to the village to catch the country bus into town to attend high school, and later, university. In the summer, I rode my bike to summer jobs. Later still, when I was a graduate student at the University of Nottingham, my field research included interviewing a number of farmers. I bought a bicycle. A blue one this time. Five pounds at the Red Cross store. I took it on the train to a small country railway station in my field area where the station master kept it for me overnight. Every day I took the train out from Nottingham (a fifteen minute ride), collected my bike from the station master, and peddled through the lovely country lanes to interview farmers. The best possible way to do field work.

Take Note
Annual General Meeting
Tuesday, June 8th

Norwich, 2019

Joan Scott

Here in Newfoundland, with the windows open in summer, I wake to the sound of gulls. In summer 2019 I spent three weeks in Norwich, in the U.K., in modest but central accommodations, in a hotel built over shops around the bus station and gulls were a constant there too. It was not at all sordid. The view from my 4th floor room was fairly splendid: above and beyond the busses there was a sort of amphitheatre made of buildings, including some medieval churches, and the castle, and beyond the castle, the cathedral.



Norwich skyline

/Mark Bullimore, The National

Busses sailed through the narrow entrance of the bus station, onto the stage of the amphitheatre and then departed, south to London, west to the Midlands, and north and east to the three quarters of a circle of Norfolk coastline. Up in my room, except for Saturday nights, it was surprisingly quiet.

Why was I spending high summer living close to a city bus station? My adult daughter was accepted into a three-week Japanese Art History course based at the University of East Anglia, in Norwich. My mother had spent her last years in Norwich and I am nostalgic for special visits to the city then, and so decided to loosely accompany my daughter. I do not like to drive on British roads, but I do love the countryside and sea shore, hence my choice of accommodation.

Each day I had my "free" hotel breakfast with British television, and went down to choose my destination for the day. Coastal options stretched westward to Wells-next-the-sea and eastward to Southwold, in Suffolk, or I could stay in the city. I did not get to the castle or to the magnificent Holkam Hall this time. Lunch was fish and chips, or fresh crab sandwiches, on a cliff top, or the sands, enjoying sun and the freshest of air in abundance. In the evening, I could eat out or stop at somewhere like Sainsbury's to pick up a good picnic supper to eat in my room. When daughter surfaced, we went to an exhibition or

event and to an eatery out at the University of East Anglia, or to one of my urban finds.

One such place was the Adam and Eve Pub. I found it after checking out the famous peregrine falcons who annually occupy a nest-box, under the scrutiny of cameras, high up on the cathedral spire. I can watch them on my home computer in St. John's. They lay eggs while it is still winter both there and here. I enjoy close-ups of the adult's faithful shared incubation and then the hatching of the tiny white fluffy babes, and of the careful feedings, by parents equipped with lethal beaks and talons. Talons are tucked under as hooked beaks present tiny fibres of pigeon meat.

I got myself comfortably seated with my binoculars on a bench in the cathedral Precinct. The peregrines seemed very small and far away, and of course I could not see the babes at all, but still had the thrill of directly watching the fastest of birds as they hunted and defended their nest.

Later I set out to look for lunch. The cathedral Precinct covers a large area, with no café in sight. I plodded on in the heat. It is amazing how such a totally quiet and empty place can exist in a city. I asked a man passing by on his bicycle if there was anywhere to eat in my

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Norwich, 2019 continued

direction. He looked at me for a second asking if I minded a pub. That's how I found the delightful Adam and Eve with its sign like a painting by William Allderdice, shameless and uncomplicated. The pub is old, small and low, in a courtyard full of flowers, built into an old wall close to the river Wensum. I went down some steps, found the crowded interior noisy and gave up, grateful to share a picnic table outside. Soon a waitress appeared and all was well. It was very well indeed. I enjoyed lunch with Adams ale, close to the river, while weeping willows swayed in the breeze, lightly sweeping the ground. Afterwards I set off on the riverside path, completed my circumnavigation of the cathedral, and returned to the noisy city.

Another find was an excellent bookstore close to the castle. It had a café where people sat at tables quietly enjoying their coffee, cake, and their books. Quiet that is until a guy working at a laptop received a telephone call. He seemed to think that the whole world wanted to listen in. On hearing his arrogant, and so English voice, (it takes one to know one), my inner wild colonial girl awoke. I looked up, and did my stare. He turned his face away, and his voice continued to boom. I got up and did my slow walk towards him. Hopefully I was civil. By then he and everyone else, 'tho carefully looking away, had got the message. He gathered his stuff muttering that people who wanted silence should go to a library, and left. Peace returned. Later a woman stopped at my table to thank me, saying that she would never have had the nerve. Even later, it occurred to me that this man was probably a local somebody. Perhaps he was big as an author or a theatrical producer, and, I, unlike the woman who stopped at my table, would soon be out of there.

On the coast there was a new archeological find. At the lowest tides, at Happisburgh (pronounced Haysbrough), an area of ancient human footprints had been uncovered and I wanted to see them. Outside of Africa, they are the oldest in the world. I chose a bus which travelled along the coast at that place. But it turned out that the cliffs were too high, and I was told by fellow (bus) travellers that the tide was not right and



The Adam and Eve Pub

/facebook

the team were not there, and that I should go to the Castle Museum in Norwich. So, I did not achieve my goal that day or since.

One evening I had to change busses at the town of Lowestoft, where I had stayed as a child on a family seaside holiday around 1946. It was then famous for its herring fishery, and the fleet of herring boats and young Scots women, who followed the migrating schools, down from the north of Scotland to harvest and process them. I imagined that I would still recognize the place. But no, at least not the part I was in.

I was put off the bus where I could catch my next one, behind the Britton Mall. I was close to a church with a big square tower whose ledges had been hugely colonized by gulls. In fact, it was a bit of a horror story. Too many gulls, too much screaming. It was bleak, I was hungry, and the evening was getting cool. I would have to wait some time for my bus, with only yobs as we used to call them, for company. They were undoubtedly somebody's loved sons, even if they did pee in the adjacent garden. Needing a toilet myself and perhaps jealous of their freedom, I set off to explore the mall and hopefully improve my mood. I was grateful that there was an unlocked toilet, but that was it. I was at liberty to walk alone, through the mall, ankle deep in dry leaves, but everything was closed. Sad for a place named for composer Benjamin Britton who had lived nearby. I left

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MUN in Motion Won Again

The April 2020 edition of ***Your Voice*** reported on the role of the East Coast Trail in healthy aging for many people on the Avalon, and about the role of MUN in Motion in helping to maintain and improve the Trail. I promised to keep MUNPA members up-to-date on developments.

Because of the pandemic the Trail Association could not have its usual fund-raising hike last year. Instead it partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association in a virtual trek. Again the MUN in Motion team finished first, raising over \$10,000. We are looking forward to enjoying our prize – a cod-jigging trip and fish barbeque – this June.

The Association is working on ideas for this year's fund-raiser. MUN in Motion will be there again. Last year we had seven members, most of them Memorial retirees. There is room for three more. We will remind the University once more of the important role MUNPA plays in the community. Anyone interested in taking part in 2021 can contact me at esimpson@mun.ca.

Evan Simpson



/Susan Matthews, ECTA

Norwich, 2019 continued

the mall and walked north between charmless terrace houses. Someone told me of a nearby Indian restaurant. My expectations were low, so I was thrilled to discover white table cloths, a spacious dining room, and excellent food. I went back to the bus stop a new woman.

In my three weeks in Norfolk, I had seen many wind generators far out at sea, lovely fields at

various stages of the harvest, and country towns crammed with old houses. At the end of each day, on the bus, there were tired youngsters, some fast asleep in comfy strollers, and some crabby. After visiting family, I left Norwich with its bus station amphitheatre, and returned home to St. John's, to once again wake to screaming gulls.