

*Northeast Avalon Times December 2020*

**So this is Christmas**

**Birds I View**

**Bill Montevercchi**



“There must be some kind of way outta here, said the joker to the thief,  
There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief,  
Business men, they drink my wine, Plowmen dig my earth  
None of them will level on the line, for what any of it is worth”

All Along the Watchtower, Bob Dylan

So this is Christmas, and I probably shouldn't have headed the column with a Good Friday (whoever came up with that name) lament. But it's that time of when I am always shackled with writer's block.

Could it be the overwhelming appalling consumerism that clouds my feeling of joy? Sharing and caring also seem so prevalent at this time of year. Or is all of that joy and caring overdone and exaggerated as well? It feels that way as I struggle to write.

I am not an ogre. I am inspired continually by the positivity and sincerity of most people I know and meet. Maybe I am just an outlier with a poor attitude but I don't feel that way either. I am positive, I revel in natural beauty and I truly enjoy helping others when the opportunity arises, and when it doesn't.

Yet I just don't feel like being over the top with any of those things at this time of year. And maybe that's it – just because - it is this time of year. Whatever benevolence and

generosity I or you might have has no greater validity now than in did in say March or on any other day of the year. How could it?

Thanksgiving is the holiday that gets it right. Affirming family bonds and friendships while sharing food and giving only thanks. Being grateful not wanting. To the extent that these values can be integrated into Christmas festivities – so much the better.

Christmas spirit does not escape me. I see and appreciate wonder in the eyes of children including my grandchildren. And I enjoy enhancing that wonder with fantastic stories about Santa, flying reindeers, and the baby and adult Jesus. Yet the children's wonderment is in no way limited to the Christmas season, and I don't think that mine should be either.

Yes, Jesus was a great guy. I will tell my grandchildren about some of his many adventures and trials. Yet I have little doubt that he would be taken aback by what has been done to his birthday celebration. His birth was one of authentic simplicity. And granted he was fortunate to carry a preordained legacy and have a brilliant planetary convergence above his birthplace, he just didn't make a big deal about it or much else during the rest of his life.

My most enjoyable events during the holidays? The thanksgiving ones ... salt fish cakes with the family on Christmas Eve. Christmas breakfast with panettone and rich coffee by the tree in front of the wood stove. Christmas dinner with family and friends (some from away or on their own).

The same holds for my earliest reminiscences of Christmas ... Nana's kitchen. Thick white pizza garnished with anchovies, oregano and black olives coming out of the oven. Eels twisting and spattering in olive oil in the black iron frying pan on the stove. Loud carefree happy voices, laughing, homemade wine. Sugar-powdered dough bows, little fried doughballs coated in honey with tiny colored candies (the precursors of timbits) ... anise, robust coffee, grappa.

This was the kitchen of my Italian grandmother from Naples in southern Italy. The kitchen of my Noni from Santarcangelo in northern Italy was very different - more elegant and austere. Her food was more delicate with a grandeur of presentation, style and subtle complex tastes. Her meals were based on exacting recipes and were detailed and delicious. Those of my Nana from the south were based on touch and feel [no measurements, no written recipes, just experience] and were basic, grounded and delicious. I was fortunate to experience such a polarity growing up though I didn't understand or appreciate it at the time. It was just sort of confusing.

With maturity, I came to understand and integrate the perspectives and advantages of my two very different grandmothers from the same but very different cultures. Overall I tend to the southern Italian strategy - especially when I find my in times trouble and need comfort. Fortunately however I experienced the best of two worlds. Doing so gave me an awareness and appreciation of so many other worlds, so many cultures, orientations and indeed circumstances. It is truly a privilege to be here. Merry Christmas.

## **The turr hunt**

The murre hunt is on the go along the Newfoundland coast. It has an intensity that gives me pause. Some images on the turr hunter facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/115356961925140>) are disturbing. The numbers of birds killed and processed are at times in excess of bag and possession limits - far more than any single family would consume. The numbers of common murre, our locally breeding species also seem high.

Some of the hunters' comments reaffirm the value they place on the birds. Many however are yahoo perspectives of the thrill of simply killing birds. For some it's more of a target shoot than a hunt.

There is no enforcement of the regulations of the murre hunt, and every hunter knows it. Something must be done to counter the disturbance and overkilling and to make the hunt sustainable. A tag system whereby each hunter had an annual allotment of 40 or 60 tags could help. Yet for such a system to work there has to be committed effective reinforcement. And therein lies the big problem.

## **Birds in area**

Except for a few stragglers, some sanderlings and the recently arrived hardy purple sandpipers, the shorebirds have abandoned our coasts for their warmer southern haunts. As they move away other less-transient northern migrants have returned for their winter vacations in our waters and along our coasts.

The Iceland and glaucous gulls and dovekeys are back. Flocks of snow buntings cheerfully flutter on our frigid windswept headlands. Snowy owls have been seen at Cape Race, Peter's River and in Gros Morne National Park.

On some exceptionally warm days interspersed some brutally chilling ones, small flying insects appear as if spring has arrived early. They could provide sustenance for some of wayward warblers still hanging on in the area.

Small flocks of mourning doves and pine grosbeaks and are in Musgrave Harbour (Chrys Hogan) and in Portugal Cove (Carolyn Mayo).

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