

*Wednesday August 22, 2012*

## **The burden on my back**

By Jim Taylor

For the last few weeks I've been training for my annual hiking trip in the Rockies. At first, I put one four-litre milk-jug full of water in my backpack. Then two. Finally, three.

It's easy to calculate the weight of water. In the imperial measures that we don't use any more, a gallon of water weighed ten pounds. (A U.S. gallon weighs 8.35 pounds. Go figure.)

Fortunately, there's an equally clear metric equation – one litre of water weighs one kilogram. Three milk-jugs = 12 litres = 12 kilograms, about 26 pounds.

That's probably more than the lunch and emergency supplies I will actually carry during my day hikes. Still, carrying a pack reminds me how my body is aging.

While I was a university student, I worked one glorious summer in the coastal rain forest upriver from Kitimat, on B.C.'s north coast. We had no freeze-dried pork chops or flyweight tents in those days. We carried canvas tents, wool sleeping bags, raw meat, fresh vegetables.... Everything except water – we were in a rain forest, after all. On our backs.

The company issued each of us a "Trapper Nelson" pack frame. The genius of its design kept hard objects – like the sharp corners of cookstoves – from digging into one's back. The only thing that actually touched one's back was a sheet of canvas, stretched tight across a concave wooden frame.

The design was brilliant, and simple.

As the new kid in the bush crew, I got away with packing just 40-50 pounds. My trail boss typically hoisted 60 pounds or more onto his shoulders.

## **Stolen idea**

And even 60 pounds was comparatively light. When Captain James Dun-Waters of Fintry (across the lake from my home) introduced what he called the "Yukon" pack to the allied forces fighting on the Western Front during World War I, he claimed that with his pack a soldier could carry a 160-pound artillery shell.

The Trapper Nelson got its name from Lloyd Nelson of Seattle. After a hiking trip to Alaska, Nelson patented the design of an Indian pack he had used there. My computer skills couldn't crack the Patent Office's database for details, but patent 1,505,661 looks as if it was issued around 1924.

Whoa! Dun-Waters had introduced thousands of that pack frame to the allied forces in 1916, eight years earlier! In a published booklet extolling the Yukon pack's virtues, Dun-Waters said the design was widely known throughout the North.

Essentially, then Nelson privatized what had once been public.

That pattern recurs through history.

"Enclosures" forced peasant farmers in England and Scotland off traditional lands, to make room for huge private estates. The vast open Canadian prairies were carved up into privately owned quarter-section homesteads. Gold miners in the Yukon and Alaska staked claims on land that once belonged to no one, and everyone.

In 1997, the U.S. Patent Office even granted a patent (5,663,484) to a Texas corporation for basmati rice, a staple grown for millennia in northern India and Pakistan.

My pack is a technological marvel, light and comfortable. But it's a direct descendent of the "Trapper Nelson."

I try not to think about its historical implications when I wear it.

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## YOUR TURN

No mail today. No, that's not true, there was mail. But some of it was very personal, as readers found that last week's column for some reason coincided with their anniversaries, or their renewal of past relationships. A couple of writers rang their own changes on my comment about learning "to tolerate, respect, and even celebrate our differences."

I was a little disappointed that no one (unless I missed a letter somewhere) picked up on the implications of my column for some traditional understandings of theology. After all, the story of Adam and Eve was the basis for Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin; if it is simply a wistful looking-back, what happens to the thousands of tomes that have elaborated upon Augustine's theories?

I will include a bit of one letter from Ivan Gamble: "A few decades ago, I attended a meeting of 'the Women's World Day Of Prayer'. As a part of the program, a First Nations Lady Elder read the first chapter of Genesis. I was deeply moved. I could picture in my mind ancient humans, sitting around their campfire, with an Elder reciting this Creation Story."

And since I've quoted Ivan, here's one more, this time from Clare Neufeld (which, coincidentally, ties in nicely with my column above): "I am intrigued by the strong language in regard to the voracity of the 'paradise'. How do we/you know what constitutes paradise? The 'land flowing with milk and honey' is often misinterpreted as surplus supply of food, (a gluttonous view, of those who already have more than enough, or more accurately never seem to have 'enough?'). In my experience, paradise is more aptly seen metaphorically as a place/time suitable for us to live our lives with meaningful satisfaction, hope, and love (of the world and humanity, etc.). It is less an idealized place [than a place or time] whereby/wherein we might be content."

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## PSALM PARAPHRASES

Psalm 84 is a song of joy, of happiness. We rarely think of the psalms as love poems -- but how better can you describe this feeling?

- 1 I love you, God.
- 2 My heart races when I am in your presence;  
my blood pulses with joy when I think of you.
- 3 Nothing is beyond your love.  
You encourage even starlings to nest under your eaves  
and worms to tunnel in your earth.
- 4 Each creature has its part to play in your universal symphony.
- 5 Whatever strength we have, we get from you.  
Refreshed and renewed, we rise to face each new day,  
and find that every road leads back to you.
- 6 In apartment blocks and office towers that rise  
like filing cabinets filled with despair,  
you comfort us;  
When narrow minds turn into cold shoulders,  
you nurture us.

7 When we cannot cope, you carry us.  
9 You see us, you know us, you look into our eyes.  
You lift us up when our bones melt with weariness;  
8 You hear our prayers.

You stand beside us, even when we cannot recognize you.  
So we call on you, O God of Gods.  
Creator of the universe, hear the plea of your creation.

10 Let me stay with you.  
I would rather be dirt swept before your broom  
than a polished brass plaque in anyone else's boardroom.  
An hour in your company is more stimulating than a day at Disneyland.  
11 You are like the sun that burns away the morning fog;  
You are as clear and clean as the air after a spring shower;  
Deceit and deception have no part in your personality.  
12 You are the kind of God I want to spend my life with.

For this and other paraphrases, you can order *Everyday Psalms* through Wood Lake Publications,  
[info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com) or 1-800-663-2775.

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#### YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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#### TECHNICAL STUFF

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If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

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