

*Wednesday September 4, 2013*

## **The poignant pleasures of last times**

By Jim Taylor

I bought my last set of tires a week ago.

I mean that literally – I expect them to be the last set of tires I ever buy for this car. It's already at 245,000 km. We've owned it for 13 years. Which works out to approximately 18,000 km a year.

The new tires are guaranteed for 130,000 km. But they're only used for eight or nine months of the year – the rest of the time, we install winter tires. These new tires shouldn't wear out for another ten years. By then, the car will have gone over 400,000 km; I'll be close to 90.

Will I still be driving? Will the rest of the car last as long as the tires? I'm inclined to doubt both possibilities.

Which makes this, therefore, the last set of tires I will buy.

That realization lent a slightly different flavor to the transaction. I looked around, thinking I might never see the inside of that tire store again.

Did I feel any pangs of regret? I have to admit that I didn't. Haggling over a set of tires that are more expensive than I need is not one of those life experiences that I want to perform any more often than necessary.

And if there is a life after death, whatever it may be, I don't expect tire stores to be part of it. In another existence, why would we need tires, if we don't have cars?

Wait – no cars...?

## **Precious moments**

At my age, I'm increasingly recognizing that many daily experiences may be "the last time." I say goodbye to friends who live half a world away; we only see each other face to face every seven years or so. It may well be the last time I see them.

I go for my annual hike in the Rockies. A man my age, apparently in good health, keels over on the trail. That could be me. Even if I recover, as he did, it might be the last time I'm capable of back-country hiking.

The dog snores gently on her mat beside my chair. She's a big dog, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever, a hardworking breed who needs lots of exercise. But she has just had her eighth birthday. She's slowing down. A few more years, and we won't have her any more. Is she the last big dog we will ever have?

Will I have sufficient stamina – mental, physical, emotional – to befriend another large animal, for another ten years?

"Give us this day our daily bread," say the familiar words of what we call The Lord's Prayer. Increasingly, I think the important phrase is not "Give me" but "daily". It invites us to appreciate our daily bread. Our daily relationships. Our daily duties.

They are – or they can be – precious moments.

If this is my last loaf, I want to savour it fully. If this is my last dog, I want to enjoy her as much as possible. If this is my last hike, I want to breathe in every aspect of it.

And if this is my last tire store, well, so be it.

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## YOUR TURN

Last week's column about the woman who wrote an anonymous letter denouncing the behaviour of an autistic boy was not the usual fare I try to offer on Wednesdays. Normally, I try to deal fairly gently with issues of life and faith. But I was not in any mood to be gentle.

And the reactions, generally, tended to agree with me. Ted Wilson, in northern BC, commented, "You're almost too kind."

I had argued for considering the letter as a hate crime. Isabel Gibson wrote, "For me, that dreadful letter was just that: dreadful, but not a crime. Sometimes we need to feel the pain to see things as they are."

Similarly, Dennis Hayden wrote, "I have heard of some foolish decisions made by Human Rights Boards across this country. Here is a letter suggesting Max [the autistic boy] has no rights and the Law tells us it is not hate. Go figure....."

Sue Kiryluk of Zebulon, NC, defined herself as "grandmother of a special needs child whom I have raised... The sad thing is that, not only is this woman not capable of love, she can't/doesn't allow herself to be loved or to feel love. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to 'love God...and your neighbor as (you love) yourself.' Obviously she doesn't love herself [and certainly of her neighbor: JT]. How sad."

Nan Erbaugh also took the letter personally: "As the advocate and guardian for my mentally retarded 57 year old sister, I am appalled and horrified by the letter writer. The hate and rage expressed are unbelievable."

Mary Faith Blackburn noted, "Don't we all have 'special needs' in one way or another? And this letter clearly showed hate towards a particular person as well as all with his condition. Thank you for articulating that for which I could only find tears."

Beth Burgess was also moved to tears: "I am sickened and in tears from this writing. And it doesn't even make a difference to me that the person didn't sign their name for those two emotions -- as I don't want to believe anyone could write those words. If they feel this way and refuse to sign their name, doesn't that mean that they know they are wrong?"

Beth Richardson runs a newspaper, in Chataqua, a town that thrives on free speech: "If a person can't say something in person or sign their name, they should keep their views to themselves. I own a newspaper and the rule is that all Letters to the Editor have to be signed before I print them. They may request not to have their name published, but the original letter must have a signature and they know that I will reveal their name if I am asked point-blank..."

Charles Hill has had to deal with people like the anonymous letter writer: "I am in full agreement with your response. Shame on the coward."

But he added, "However, some 'special needs' children can be a threat to other children due to inappropriate emotions and/or lack of cognitive ability. As a teacher, I've seen one such child destroy the ability of other children to learn, another be a constant risk of physical violence.

"As a society, we are in denial. The problem of people who cannot function in the existing society has been with us throughout recorded history. Give Brenda Millson a medal of valor."

Laurina Tallman thought about how people develop entrenched opinions: “The hardest work of love we do is to try to educate people out of their prejudices. I imagine that is because most prejudices are picked up at such an early age they have become part of the unexamined bedrock of the person's thought processes. I imagine also that it would be almost as difficult to educate Max's mom about the possibility for improvement or even healing of her son's autism - and for the same reason: our trust of the medical profession however misplaced is drummed into us from childhood.”

Cliff Boldt offered a dose of reality: “These people walk amongst us, they procreate and they vote. It is important to understand that this person speaks for a chunk of our population, and accept that fact and try to deal with it.”

John Shaffer, like me, drew connections to the Robert Latimer case. He recommended “the play at Pacific Theatre in Vancouver BC titled ‘Mourning Dove,’ which dealt with the moral implications of the Robert Latimer case.” I don’t know if the play is still running.

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

Psalm 139 is one of the all-time great psalms, so I feel slightly miffed that the developers of the RCL break it up into smaller chunks for different purposes. But if that’s what they want, I guess I must comply.

1 You know everything, God.

You know me inside and out.

2 You know when I sit down, you know when I stand up;  
you can read my mind.

3 Before I take a step, you know where my foot will fall.

4 You know what I will say before I say it.

13 No wonder you know me so well, God.

Even before my mother knew I existed,  
you wrote the genetic code of my cells.

14 You created my life.

15 Wombs and worlds are one to you;  
they have no secrets from you;  
you are the essence of all life.

16 As once you shaped the cells that formed my fingernails and my hair,  
so you still guide me through the events of each day.

17 Even if I am only a fleeting thought flickering through the mind of God, I am in good company.

18 All of creation owes its existence to you, God.

I can no more imagine your thoughts than I can recall every detail of my dreams.

But you are not a dream, for when I wake, you are still with me.

For this and other paraphrases, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publications,  
[info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com).

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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

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.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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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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