

Wednesday February 1, 2012

## Invisible security shields

By Jim Taylor

I had to drive through downtown Vancouver, recently. Steady rain turned the roads into pools of shiny blackness between gaudy reflections of neon signs.

On just such a night, 55 years ago, I hit a pedestrian. The memory flooded back.

I was going to a party. It must have been a costume party, because I was wearing a grass skirt. As I made a left turn, I glimpsed a police car in the lane on my right. I glanced over for barely a second – an automatic reflex for teenage drivers.

The girl beside me screamed, “Jim! Look out!” I slammed on the brakes. But it wasn’t soon enough. One instant, a startled man transfixed by my headlights stared back at me. The next, he was gone.

I leaped out of the car. I helped him up off the pavement. The cop car had made a U-turn and parked beside me.

## Difficult situations

The cop wanted to see my driver’s licence.

Where, in a grass skirt, does one carry a wallet?

I must have given my wallet, with the tickets for the event, to the girl to carry in her purse. Because the cop didn’t arrest me. But he did give me a ticket for failing to yield the right of way to a pedestrian.

The guy I hit didn’t want to press charges. He was more concerned that the liquor store down the block would close in ten minutes. He hobbled off.

I went to see him two days later, although I don’t remember how I got his address. He lived in a shabby boarding house, about ten blocks away. He had managed to walk that far after the accident.

Now he lay on his bed, obviously in pain. I asked if I could do anything for him. He wanted me to go buy him a bottle. I said I couldn’t – I wasn’t old enough yet.

“Then you’re no use to me, kid,” he said, and rolled over to face the wall.

So I left.

## Mindless of risks

All those memories rushed back as I drove downtown, and made me particularly conscious of the pedestrians I saw around me. I was astounded at the disregard that they showed for their own safety.

They walked in groups, chattering animatedly. They wore dark clothes. They pulled hoodies up over their heads, cutting off their peripheral vision. Or they lurked behind open umbrellas. Many had earphones stuffed in their ears, limiting their ability to hear oncoming cars.

What people DO reveals a lot more about what they believe than what they SAY they believe. These pedestrians must believe that Somebody Up There is looking after them, because they certainly aren’t looking after themselves. They act as if they’re surrounded by an invisible force field.

They seem to believe that their time for an accident has not yet come. So they don’t need to take care.

They’re probably far too sophisticated to say they believe that Fate – or God – determines what will happen to them. But they obviously believe in some kind of miraculous protection. And they believe in it strongly enough to bet their lives on it.

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## YOUR TURN

Last week's column, you may recall, focussed on taking a different view of things, and thus responding differently.

"Preach On!" Charles Hill urged. "It's called Behavioral Cognitive Therapy! If you re-label or re-define a situation, your attitude towards it changes, and hopefully your behavioral functioning changes.

"There is a hazard, of course, that the attitude and behavior could change towards the negative. I know of an instance when an in-law, who accepted a particular racial group, was assaulted and injured by a member of that racial group. For the rest of his life he has been very hateful towards that group. The snake has a head at both ends!"

The column reminded Margaret Carr of a recent John Spong mailing, in which he suggested, "think different and accept uncertainty."

"He wasn't talking about death or undercooked eggs," Margaret explained, "but it seems to me we could use it in all circumstances. Open our minds to new thoughts. I am a nurse who just came out of hospital after a bout of severe flu. Nursing has changed a lot since I graduated in '53 but death is still death, and I know for a fact that something leaves that person and they are changed from who they are. I call it their soul -- you can almost see it go from the dying person and definitely feel it go."

The piece on dying and our visualizations of life after death continues to prompt responses. Bob Warrick wrote from Australia, "Your piece on the language used for dying and death struck a chord with me. My mum died last November and I was the only one of her four children who used the word 'die'. The death announcement in the local paper used 'deceased' in a most strange way -- not sure if it was local custom or the work of my siblings!

"I too hope that when my death is recorded, it is not with some euphemism. I note that Wikipedia says that a euphemism is the substitution of a mild, inoffensive, relatively uncontroversial phrase, for a frank expression that might offend or otherwise suggest something unpleasant to the audience. Based on that definition, 'die' is offensive - - to many."

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## ABOUT MY BOOKS, ETC.

I still have a few copies of a book my father wrote exploring Christian theology through Christian art.

The problem with art, of course, is that it cannot put an abstract concept on canvas. An artist cannot paint an Incarnation or a Resurrection without putting real humans, in real situations, into the picture. The expression, therefore, has to be grounded in a particular culture and society; the infinite and universal has to be represented in finite terms.

My father -- who once took art lessons from members of Canada's Group of Seven -- spent much of his life after retiring as principal of the Vancouver School of Theology, seeking out the ways artists through the centuries had attempted to deal with this dilemma. I'm probably biased, but I think that in examining the ways art portrays theological concepts, he explained those concepts better than most theological texts.

The book is "Seeing the Mystery: Exploring Christian Faith through the Eyes of Artists," by William S. Taylor, 94 pages. There are only about 20 copies left in the world. Most of the illustrations are in full colour.

If you would like a copy, write to me -- Jim Taylor, 1300 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Lake Country, BC, Canada, V4V 2H7.

Unfortunately, I can't send these out on the honour system, as I do with my biblical paraphrases. I will have to charge \$30 Canadian to include postage, paid in advance.

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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 "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- 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

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of [Woodlakebooks.com](http://Woodlakebooks.com).

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>.

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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