

TAKE ONE!**THEY ARE FREE!****TAKE ONE!****THEY ARE FREE!****TAKE ONE!**

...from the bush

Charlie Plays**Number 23 June 2008**

I turned 65 last year, so now I'm retired. I've had three separate careers in my life, Student, Engineer and Psych Patient, and now I have to learn this new one, Retirement. At my age! I ask you!

The Student one lasted seventeen years and all I really learned was how to show up on time at somewhere I didn't like and do something I hated doing before I could go home at an immovable and arbitrary time. In other words, I learned Good Work Habits and that's about it. I also got, at my parent's insistence, a gilt-edged piece of paper, but I forgot anything of substance once the exam was over, retaining only scraps of useless trivia for the cocktail parties I never went to.

I started over at the bottom of the pile as a Graduate Engineer after finally reaching the top of the Student one. I was quickly introduced to my new world by a melt shop supervisor. He took me round the back of his furnace full of molten iron and said "I've been making steel here for twenty seven years, and you're telling me I'm making it wrong?" Need I say any more about that golden piece of paper?

This phase of my life ended when I started to think about what I was doing. The house I didn't live in would never be paid for, the mother of my children had gone back to work and my children didn't need me. I certainly wasn't going to pay for them to go to some college to learn a profession they didn't want. I decided that my parental responsibilities would end when they passed their driving tests. After that, they would be on their own. I didn't know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, but it certainly wasn't what I was doing, so I quit. And went nuts.

The start of my next career was somewhat sudden and dramatic and began in 1976. I'll leave out all the exciting bits and merely tell you that I'm fairly safe now as my last hospitalisation was in 1997. Part of our decision to come North included a cast iron guarantee by me that I wouldn't come off my pills again

unless clearly medically indicated and agreed by all parties beforehand. I've dug down into the deepest parts of my mind and talked them all out to someone who was paid to listen and all the little monsters under control or gone. Even my doctor agrees. And so now I I really am retired.

How do I do this one? First of all, it goes against all those seventeen years of schooling and those fifteen or so years of working for someone else. Money isn't a problem if I'm careful with it, as the Government who I rail against sends me monthly checks just for having survived this long I don't have to get up or be anywhere I don't want to be, or really do anything I don't want to do.

This could look like a long grey nothingness with only a gravestone at the end of it, or I could revert back to my childhood and learn to play in the mud or in the woods all over again. You know what? I'll take that option.

When I was a kid my favourite play was building wonky-looking houses all over my parent's garden, although I called them Dens. Now I call them Barns or Chicken Houses and as long as I finish the outside with the same board and batten as the main house, Linda indulges me. In fact, as far as her little studio's concerned, she likes them. I escaped my crazy family by reading voraciously and can quickly tell a bad book from a good one, so now I've time to write my own.

I know that as long as I keep active, I won't lose my physical health and as long as I keep my mind busy, I won't lose my mental marbles either. At my stage in life, I've gone through the School of Hard Knocks sufficiently well to know that I don't want to spent the rest of it planning what to put on my headstone. I want to "spend my children's inheritance, and make my insurance company lose money on me" as I heard someone say one time. I want to write and build and play in the woods. All the best from the bush, Charlie



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voice from the bush

THE ABSENCE OF BEES

by Charlie Johnson

A lot of you'll know by now that the honey bee population of North America's in a state of serious collapse, after many years of slow decline. This'll cause a huge drop in the production of those fruits and veggies that require pollination, about a third to a half of those we usually eat.

I used to keep honey bees some thirty years ago before I developed an allergy to their stings. Since then, I've always had my eye open to bees working the flowers around me, especially during dandelion season. That's when the honey bees would build up their strength and plan their swarming strategies for that year. About twelve years ago, I noticed that there were almost no bees of any kind working the dandelion flowers, instead of the two or three per blossom that were usually there. Though these were mostly the tiny "sweat bees", suddenly there were none. I didn't realize at the time how serious this problem would become. I do now. Last year, I only saw one or two insects working the pussy willow catkins out here instead of the hundreds that had been there the year before. In fact, the only flying pollinators I saw last year were bumble bees.

I've heard lots of theories about the cause of this disaster, but the best one was on the radio the other day. This research guy'd studied the effects of our soup of pollution on a flower's scent. He found out that when there's no pollution, this scent can travel down-wind for two or three miles, maybe more. Now-a-days, it's lucky if the scent can survive half a mile and still be recognizable, as the pollution chemicals react with it and destroy it. Since the honey bee hunts its nectar by scent and usually flies up to five miles in search of a good supply, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what's going wrong.

I suspect that bumble bees don't fly as far as honey bees to find their dinners, maybe because they're not such good fliers. I've heard that aeronautical engineers think they shouldn't be able to fly at all! Here's one case where being poor at something is a distinct advantage.

There are a couple of positives in this stream of gloom, however. First, the number of yellow jacket wasps was noticeably down last year, which means less chance of being stung by one of them. The other positive concerns our southern neighbour more than us Canadians and that's the likely end of the African killer bee invasion. This sweetie was imported from Africa into a research lab in Brazil about twenty years ago, from where they escaped and they've been slowly spreading northwards ever since. Now, when one of these bees stings, the other bees in the colony pick up on the scent of that sting and come and add their own poison to the victim, often with fatal results.

I'm not sure which most people would prefer, one or two folk dying of bee stings while the rest of us eat our apples and cherries, feeling sorry for them, or all of us safe from such a horrible death, but without those fruits and nuts. Hmm. Interesting problem, but it's mainly a theoretical question now, isn't it?

What we're planning to do out here in the absence of the small professional pollinators is wander around our flowers with soft brushes in hand, buzzing the while. We've also put up in jars as many perennial greens such as fiddleheads, young nettles and green cat-tail spikes as we can. Like always we have to do the best we can with what we've got.

It's still a wonderful place to be.

All the best from the bush, Charlie.

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...from the community

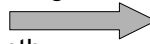
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If you think your venture would be of interest to our readers PLEASE drop me a line and I'll let them know you're out there! There is no fee for "community page" info. We are, however, open to bribery.

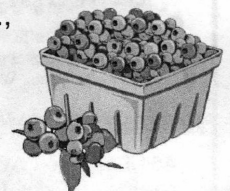
A recent trip to town found us lunching in fine style at *the Signs of the Times Café* again. Look for a chat with the new management next month! This week, for the first time, I was able to take a quick peek at some of the incredible objects collected in the museum off of the main dining area. I also spoke briefly to the man behind the establishment and its fascinating artifacts, Dan Spiegelman. He is looking for people to participate in another venture involving  Blueberries! I hope to speak with him later this month to find out more about the entrepreneur, the blueberry project, the café and whatever else comes up...(see July's issue)

For a **SUBSCRIPTION** to "**...from the bush**" send your address and stamps to **Charlie Johnson, RR#1, North Cobalt, On P0J 1R0**

I was able to visit Janice on Hwy. 11 next to the *Greatest Bookshop in the World* (just our opinion) and found that her small, home  based business had bloomed into a real show of wonderful flowers. The annuals and perennials on display were all in great shape and the prices were excellent. I found just the right additions for our "chicken-free" rock gardens and will be back for the lupens! We try to spread our few pennies around and I will, as usual, be up to **Willard's** for her perky pansies (Charlie's favourites) and to see if there are still a few veggies available. Last year I took my first visit out to the **Greenhaus** and will be there for a bush or two as soon as my sprained foot heals...
...(don't even ask)! Linda

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CRAFTS...from the bush

Kitchen Garden

by little bear

To enjoy easy, fresh herbs and greens, along with my favourite snack, the tiny tim tomato, requires little effort or expense. This time of year the planter can live outside the door, on the porch or balcony or in a sunny window.

You will need;

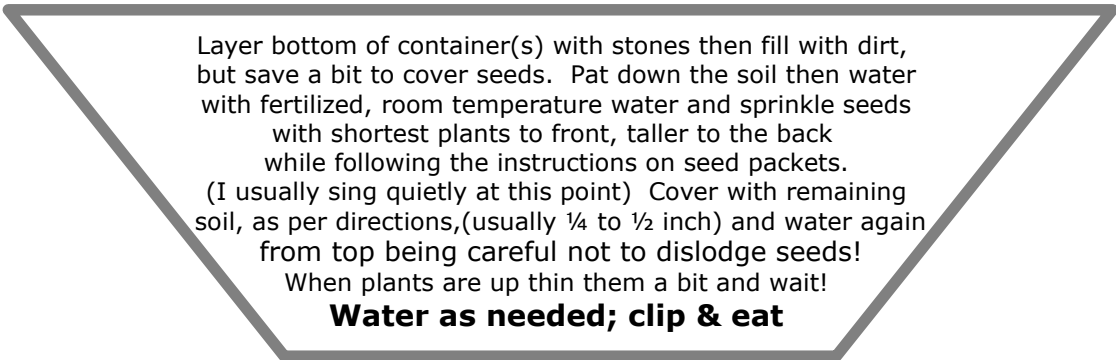
a container or two sized to fit the chosen window sill (to be able to bring inside in the fall)
(south or east is best I've found)

small stones for bottom of pot to allow drainage,

clean soil *(without other seeds to confuse the issue),*

seed packets *(salad greens, thyme, mint, small tomato variety, swiss chard, kale, etc.)*

fertilizer specifically for food crops *(BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVER DO IT!)* or a bit of compost instead.



Layer bottom of container(s) with stones then fill with dirt, but save a bit to cover seeds. Pat down the soil then water with fertilized, room temperature water and sprinkle seeds with shortest plants to front, taller to the back while following the instructions on seed packets.

(I usually sing quietly at this point) Cover with remaining soil, as per directions, (usually ¼ to ½ inch) and water again from top being careful not to dislodge seeds!

When plants are up thin them a bit and wait!

Water as needed; clip & eat



Helpful Hints for First Time Growers

- **Harvest** only some leaves and ripe fruit, while leaving the plants to keep growing. (I clip from our big salad bed with my kitchen scissors and plant some leaf veggies 2 weeks apart so the harvest can go on.)
- **Fertilize** with a pinch of your favorite fertilizer or compost to ensure good growth of greens (I use Miracle Gro) and plants will flourish through the winter in a sunny window. Remove any fruiting plants when season is over (like tomatoes, chilis etc.) and replant your favourite greens.
- **Water** when needed. Keep an eye on the container so you become familiar with the *droop* associated with need for water. Resist the strong urge common to most new plant growers by "killing with kindness". In other words; don't over water your container.

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...from the cave

Legends & Stories

This month's story thanks to Sandra

Why Wolves Howl

A very long time ago, just after the First People were given the Gift of Fire, the Wolves got together to talk about this new development. They saw that the People were Warm while the Wolves shivered with Cold; that the Fire lit up the night while the Wolves skulked about the edges of the Camp in Darkness; that delicious smells of Cooking meat wafted through the Air while the Wolves gnawed on frozen left overs and old bones.

The Wolves were Cold and Hungry in the Dark; and they were Envious.

They were also very, very Clever.

Their Leader chose an small, attractive female obviously pregnant and told her his Plan. "You are to go to the Camp of the People, Crawl and Cry, Roll and Beg. Be Humble and they will take Pity on you and invite you in. When the People are all Sleeping, take an Ember from the Fire and bring it to your Pack."

The little Wolf approached the center of the Camp slowly. As she arrived at the circle of People surrounding the Fire she crawled, tail wagging, into their midst. The People welcomed her just as the Leader of the Wolf Pack had said they would and she was given Food, Water & a place by the Fire. Within a short time she had curled up and fallen asleep.

The next morning the People were awakened by the mewling of Wolf pups and the she Wolf, busy with her babies, forgot all about the reason she had come to the Camp of the People in the first place.

Her pups are the ancestors of our
Domestic Dogs.

Dogs helped the People keep the wild animals away from their Camp, guarded the babies in their Cradleboards, pulled the Travois and helped keep everyone warm in their Wigwams during the cold winter months.

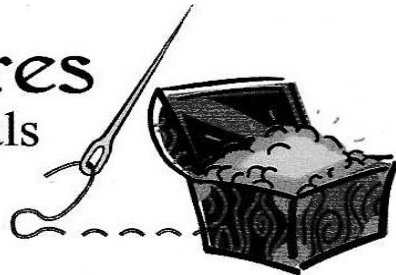
Today we can hear the wild Howl of the Wolves as they cry out their sadness. Even with their great Plan they did not get the Gift of Fire....

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Herbs & Recipes...from the bush

BANNOCK

from Linda Gauthier's copy of her Uncle's Recipe Book modified for us!

JOHN'S LEGENDARY BANNOCK

Many of us remember camping trips when we wrapped a simple mixture of flour, salt, sugar and water around a stick, baked it in the fire, then burned our lips and fingers in our hurry to taste the delicacy we had made.

It is a rite of passage for Northern kids of all backgrounds to make bannock, whether that's what it was called or not. The real chefs among us would go on to wrap the batter around a hot dog and proudly paint the result with mustard. The birth of the Pogo!

Today lots of people are making bannock and adding their own twist to the simple recipe.

Linda's Uncle's recipe used beer but, since I have an allergy to alcohol, I've substituted water. I've seen the batter made with milk as well so its up to you what liquid to use.

I know that I really appreciate this simple biscuit in its many forms!

INGREDIENTS

3 CUPS	FLOUR
1 Tsp.	SALT
2 Tbsp.	BAKING POWDER
¼ CUP	LARD
1½ CUPS	WATER

MIX flour, salt & baking powder.

ADD lard, crumbling until the mixture forms small (pea sized) pieces.

FORM A WELL in center and pour in water.

BLEND lightly, remove from bowl and

KNEAD the dough about 10 times only.

FORM patties (like hamburgers) then

DEEP FRY patties in hot oil until outside is brown (about 2 minutes)

DRAIN well and serve.

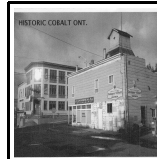
Or PAN FRY about 15 minutes

DRAIN & serve

Or FLATTEN OUT ON BAKING SHEET,

score top and **BAKE** for 30 min. at 350 degrees.

ADD raisins, sugar & cinnamon to taste, cook then cover with powdered sugar for **BEARPAWS!**



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OPINIONS from the Bush

Reasonable Risk

by A. Buschmann

There's a curious bill, C51, going through Parliament right now that's supposed to help shoppers sort out what's Canadian and what isn't by putting better labels on things. This isn't easy, as the phrases "Packaged in Canada", "Canadian Grade A," "Grown in Canada" and "Canadian made" have very different meanings. These labels don't necessarily mean it's been made or processed here. There is a 14 page summary available online at the Government of Canada's website. Linda took a look.

She told me it was virtually incomprehensible by any ordinary person and that the document included all products consumed by Canadians including Herbal Remedies. The explosive part was covered in one single paragraph out of the 14 pages. This says that "The Minister" has absolute authority to remove any herbal product from store shelves if he or she deems it to be of possible risk to the consumer.

This brings up three interesting points.

First, does any Minister or their inspector know herbs and their risks well enough to make such a judgment? I doubt it. I'm a reasonably good amateur botanist, although my legal qualifications are as a Metallurgical Engineer. I know first hand how hard it is to be sure that the plant I'm holding is what I think it is. Even the Latin name for a given plant varies sometimes and these are supposed to be the ultimate in botanical certainty. I don't think many people in Government, either permanent civil servants or the ever-changing Ministers, can reliably tell the difference between a dandelion flower and a coltsfoot flower, never mind estimate the risks involved in using them for a remedy. Incidentally, old-time folk lore says coltsfoot is good for coughs and dandelion's for liver problems.

Risk is the pivotal word in this explosive paragraph and brings me to my second point. There's a risk in everything we do or don't do. For instance, there's a risk to my long-term health involved in my taking psychiatric

medication because of its inevitable side effects. But there's a much bigger risk if I choose to not to take my pills. Weighed in the balance, my long term health risks are trumped in favour of my ongoing mental health. So when it comes to taking a herb or not, whether out of a bottle from the store or as picked in the field, of course there's a risk, but it's my risk, not the Minister's. As far as risks go, even drinking water can kill, but I risk it at every meal.

Water is at the root of my third point. A recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling seems to support my view of adults applying personal choice when it comes to risk. They gave precedence to "Reasonable Risk" over "Legal Compliance" in the case of "*Mustapha vs. The Culligan Water Co.*" The water company was found to be legally in the wrong to sell a bottle of water with a fly in it, but it was considered to be a reasonable risk so they weren't liable for damages. This Common Sense approach has applied to other things for quite a while.

For example; pickerel is one of the most popular eating fish in this part of the world, even though Ontario's MNR has found high heavy metal accumulations in them in certain lakes. Instead of banning pickerel all together, they've applied the principle of Reasonable Risk. They recommend only one pickerel meal a month for certain sizes of fish from posted lakes and rivers.

Another reasonable risk we take is with dairy products. These can cause high cholesterol, but here again we accept the risks involved as we drink our milk. Some of our house plants are extremely poisonous, but Linda and I think the risk of us biting on one of them is low enough for us to keep them around.

So, if the Federal Minister of Health or some other Friend of Big Pharma on "the Hill" legislates me **not** to risk using an herb, the recent Supreme Court Decision of "Reasonable Risk" renders their paper law recyclable.

As adults the choice is up to us.
At least that's my grown up opinion!

A. Buschmann.

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S P I R I T U A L I T Y

FEAR, COURAGE & LOVE

My sister, the philosophy professor, once told me about the man who prayed for courage. He went for a walk along a mountain trail and came face to face with a hungry Lion. Be careful what you ask for, you might get it. In a recent article, I asked for instructions on how to make yogourt and in the last few months I received two sets of directions that closely mirrored the several I already have. One kind person even included some kefir starter grains that my cheese book says are hard to find. The old Moslems called Kefir "The Grains Of The Prophet" and did their best to keep them out of the hands of the Infidel, the kefir was so good.

Now, in the names of The Incomparable Allah in His Boundless Mercy, Holy Mary Mother Of God, God The Father, God The Son and God The Holy Ghost, Shri Ram, The Lord Krishna Himself, Thor, Odin, Freya and Tyrs, The Holy Twins, Gitchi Manitou, The Great Mystery and Any One Else Up There, WHY CAN'T I MAKE YOGOURT?

The answer, my friends, is simple-- my fear of making a mistake, which is nuts on two counts. First, Linda told me that my last "mistake" was delicious and second, we're only talking about a quart of milk here, nothing more. Thinking about where this fear comes from though, it does make some sort of sense.

In my bad times, which lasted several years, a mistake could easily have been fatal. I only made incremental changes to my life when I could reasonably predict the results. The only reason I changed at all was because if I didn't, I was likely going to kill some innocent person in my active insanity. That made the

decisions I made very clear, if not always easy. If I do this, someone else and I may both survive; if I don't, we won't. This isn't quite in the same league as making yogourt but the habit remains.

I carry with me what I learned as a child. What if the milk boils over and fills the house with that burnt milk smell? Will my long-dead mother come back and threaten my life? Will my dad, who is also no longer with us, get jealous of my (as yet non-existent) yogourt making skills? Ho Boy! How long does it take for their ghosts to die?

I suppose I've been in the dark for a long time and am only now coming out of it. The guiding light and healing power all this time has been that mysterious force we call Love. First, the acceptance of me exactly as I was by the Hamilton 12-step meetings, then the arrival of Linda in my life and finally, the miraculous support of a whole community have made it possible for the biggest problem in my life to be making a pot of yogourt. So I made the Kefir and it really is delicious.

There's the antidote to my fears, perhaps everyone's fears, Love. I was loved enough by the people in my life to have had the courage to change what I could when I could. Slowly, slowly, as that love seeped in through the thick shell I'd created to survive, the damage done was healed and that same love's given me the freedom to be truly me. I give back what I can, when I can, although sometimes it doesn't seem very much compared to all that I've received. Thank you, all you known and unknown people for giving me myself. It really is love that makes the world go round.

The sharing continues, Charlie



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