

Turtleford Centennial Homecoming Closing Ceremony, 31 July 2005
Address by Doug Reichel

A hundred year coming of age is certainly an excuse for a birthday party...if you're Canadian. If you're European you tend to celebrate in thousand year increments, in which case turning 100 seems rather youthful. As a village, Turtleford's beginnings go back nearly 100 years to around 1907 when John Bloom and Frank Webb met at a ford in the Turtle River and decided to settle. The rest of us followed.

Have you noticed all the community get-togethers all over this province? In back yards, on farms, in old school houses and churches and stadiums, in Hamlets and towns that aren't even really there anymore (I expect even Cleeves will be throwing a homecoming – not sure what buildings they'll use). People are re-gathering in Saskatchewan from just about everywhere. It's rumoured that when former Saskatchewan people come back to their roots for a visit in the summers, the BC and Alberta economies grind to a halt – there's no one left in those places to actually do the work!

And people are coming back to Turtleford from just about everywhere - from Mervin, Livelong, from Spruce Lake, from Moose Jaw and even further. And many of you don't come back to Turtleford: this is your home. Almost all of us here have emotional connections to this place, and we are something of an elite group in the world: attenders of the Turtleford Elementary School or one of a number of one room schools in the surrounding area that were once so central but are no more. And how many people in the world can say they are a graduate of Turtleford High School or Thunderchild School?

I've spent some time pondering this returning to our village in this province. If you'll allow me I'll share them for what they're worth. Treat what I say like a salad bar – please take what you want and try not to spit on the rest.

I've noticed that to think about Saskatchewan is to think about rural, about space and pace, relationships and land and seasons. When I think of my growing up in Turtleford, my thoughts are corralled along these ideas.

Space and Pace. If you spend much time listening to the Toronto Broadcasting Corporation—otherwise known as the CBC evening news -- over time you get a sense that rural is fundamentally confusing for hardcore urban dwellers. Space walks and interplanetary travel are easier to grasp than a stroll in a Canola field. I taught at a college located in a small town in the south of the province for 5 years and we used to get students from all over Canada. It was easy to spot the

newcomers from BC and Ontario – they were the ones walking nervously, sometimes fearfully out on the open roads where you could see for miles – no mountains, no 56 story office buildings to block the scenery – just miles and miles of sky and land. Rural is invariably about space, about aloneness which allows you space to meet yourself. Rural spoons out that dreaded Buckley’s of the soul.....silence. Kalle Lasn, in his book *Culture Jam*, writes of the noise toxins that have left us with dangerous levels of media poison in our systems. It seems that knowing ourselves in silence must be avoided at all costs so we work hard to surround ourselves 24 hour radio, satellite dishes and 510 channels of which we can only ever watch 118 channels at once, computers, internet, etc.

But I don’t think we come back to Turtleford to admire each other’s computers or sit and watch another DVD or tune into boredom channel 147. Maybe in some ways we come back because we need space and perhaps we hope we can catch snippets of silence again and maybe know ourselves a bit better in the process. As a boy I remember the silence of roaming Snake hill and experiencing the delight of the season’s first crocuses or the discovery of one of those rare tiger lilies, wondering back even further in the hills checking my snare lines, or silently stalking partridges with my pellet gun and Rick Starnes.

When we let rural silence do its thing in us we find the frenetic pace of our lives gently rebuked by the call to slow down to a more human pace. There’s a certain arrogance in busyness that becomes a way of life. Busy trying to control the outcomes, busy for God, busy earning money for payments on things we say we need, or our kids say they need. One of my professors called busyness a narcotic. And so maybe we’re here in Turtleford this weekend to do some detox. A detox homecoming where we come off busyness cold turkey. We want to pace ourselves for a more humanizing journey.

Connectedness with one another. Necessarily rural is about simplicity of connectedness – connectedness with one another and with the land and seasons. Some urban dwellers would equate rural simplicity to a sort of redneck, backwoods, cross between Beverly Hillbillies Jethro and Don Cherry. But for me, Turtleford was about a simplicity of connectedness with people who knew you by name and by face and whom you knew by name and by face. Growing up on main street Turtleford (a rare advantage) I was constantly surprised that so many people knew so many of the same people I did.

- Alan Chambers at the butcher shop and Lorna in school as my grade 6 teacher.
- the Woffs while hunting on their land and then at the hockey arena
- Stuart Banks as the Pioneer elevator man who was miraculously transformed once a year into snowmobile-riding, slightly jollied Santa

- Claus dispensing goodie bags to all the vicinities children
- Alan Salmon the painter and joker who golfed with my dad, Jean Salmon who could cook the most incredible turkey meals, and was also a caring nurse
 - Win Textor, the ever kindly bus driver and our neighbour. His wife Doris Textor who sewed me my own 3 piece suit - my first and only personal tailor – who, it was also rumoured, was one of the Turtleford Fair Judges – a position we all know to be just one level below a Supreme Court judge
 - Ruth Weber as the faithful deliverer of eggs who was also the world’s most faithful Sunday school teacher and maker of lemon marange pies at Fall Suppers and Island Lake Bible Camp.
 - John Ramsay, the Esso man and Joan Ramsay the dispenser of encouraging comments and caring smiles.

While I grew up here in the 60’s and 70’s many of your memories go back so much further to you and your classmates arriving on horsedrawn buggies and sleighs in winter to snugly warmed one room schools where the teacher had arrived very early to start and stoke the fire because that’s just what teachers did. You have memories of a classmate who became your husband or wife or who went off to a far away war never to return. Connections. My mother, who was the daughter of Dougald and Christine McMurphy, talked of the harshness of the winters but also the presence of neighbours, be it the Gustovsons or Edwards or McDermets, or Bannermans. Tough times, alone often, but connected, for living in and around Turtleford meant you were not anonymous. It did not make any of us immune from times of loneliness – that’s part of the human lot- but it was hard to be anonymous. And having a face and a name is one of the most basic of human dignities.

Perhaps this sort of connectedness explains the spirit of generosity that so characterizes rural Saskatchewan and certainly Turtleford. Projects requiring immense time and energy without any financial remuneration have been the fibre of volunteerism here for so long:

- Many of you know what it is to re-build a farmer’s barn that has burnt down.
- When my step-dad, Frank Dopson, took on the building of this curling rink, many, many people helped make it happen
- When we lost Bill Quinn’s beloved Veronica during the harvest some years back, many of you moved in with equipment and simply finished the work that Bill could not
- When hospitals were shutting down all over the province, the people here sunk thousands of hours and dollars into a new Health Centre.

These are the more visible projects, but most volunteer work around here has gladly and quietly happened out of the public eye, like neighbours driving neighbours to the city for a specialist appointment, etc. Connectedness with others.

Connectedness to land and seasons. And lastly, rural is about the simplicity of being connected to the land and the seasons that change and mark the land. Our native citizens have somehow intrinsically embraced this attentiveness to the land. Have you ever noticed how detached from reality –a land and season reality- so much of our society has become? The further removed you are from the rhythms of the seasons and the ways of the land –the breaking, the tilling, the seeding, the weather-watching, the elation or heartbreak of the harvest, the movement of the ducks and geese– the further removed from these the more detached from reality you become: milk comes from plastic jugs in climate controlled stores, margarine is chemicals made in a factory, and what does frost in the Prairies in the middle of August have to do with me? To be back in Saskatchewan and in Turtleford (I think the most beautiful part of Saskatchewan) is to have to notice the crops and land, pay attention to the weather. And being in touch with seasons and soil means we can have a bit more of hearing heart for people in the world whose seasons have brought crop devastation as with the flooding and washed out crops in Manitoba, and people for whom the land has died and they are as well as is happening right now in Niger, Africa.

In closing, I was talking with my Uncle Dave McMurphy visiting from BC last night, who said, “It’s so good to be back; I come from good soil here.” I asked what he meant by “good soil” and he said, “People had respect for you. We all had our problems, but people respected each other.”

I am so grateful to God for the privilege of growing up in Turtleford; grateful to God for the space of this place, the rhythm of seasons and for the many, many people who knew me, interacted with me, tolerated me and helped bestow dignity. If I had a glass of wine right now (and I could recommend a few good wines!) I would raise it to the Turtleford district and her people –past, present, and future. Thank you.

Doug came to Turtleford with his mother and sister in 1966. Doug is married to Catherine and lives in Moose Jaw, SK along with their three teenage children. Lately Doug started a wine marketing company marketing quality wines from around the world in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. His business e-mail = doug.reichel.wine@sasktel.net