

View from the Rear Pew

Brent Skinner - April 2013 1.1

The older I get, the more I like things just as they are.

In my humble opinion, the world has now reached the apogee of civilization and technological progress and we should just quit while we are ahead. We don't need any more hand held communications gizmos, apps, car models, emerging nation states or plastic dollar bills. We should just send all those inventors and innovators home and tell them to take an extended vacation (with the possible exception of medical researchers who should maybe stay at work until they find a cure for cancer).

You see, I am having a difficult time assimilating all this change and feel very much like a hiker in Banff National Park with a 50 year old map. There is comfort in predictability.

Let me give you two examples:

- Bill paying. I still get my bills in the mail and pay them by return mail. I enjoy the ritual. First, the friendly letter carrier clinks the bill into our home mail box (we have a cast iron mail box that looks like it was manufactured in a Victorian stove factory in Stoke-on -Trent). Then I grab the mail and loudly complain that all we seem to get these days is bills and L.L. Bean catalogues before heading to my basement office where I study the bill in awe that my simple lifestyle costs so much (I blame the cold weather and the growing number of Winners outlets), before getting out my cheque book, writing a cheque, putting it the return self addressed envelope, putting a stamp on it and walking down to the nearest post box where I drop it in the slot with a gratifying clink sound (I think the Canada post boxes were also made in Stoke-on Trent but I don't know who had the idea of pre-empting local graffiti artists by blanketing the boxes with an even more ugly Government issued version). I then marvel at the miracle of the humble postage stamp that can whisk a simple paper envelope to the furthest , most primitive,

jungle infested corner of the globe or even the Telus accounts Payable Office in Burnaby. My kids shake their heads and tell me that they pay all their bills on line. My bank keeps sending me notes about the advantages of on line banking. One of these days, I anticipate that the utility companies will switch over from paper to electronic bills. Even our own Riverbend United Church is promoting the idea of automatic debiting of bank accounts in place of church envelopes. I am uncertain as to what I will do when compulsory electronic billing sweeps into my private world. I have visions of barricading myself, Jimmy Cagney like, in my basement office screaming “ come and get me you dirty coppers”. This could be an over reaction but I don't like change that much.

- Daylight Savings Time. I hate it. I come from a province which just ignores it. The level headed people of Saskatchewan realize that dairy cattle, chickens, and grandchildren are governed by some ancient but internal biological clock. The twice annual adjustment to and from daylight savings time is a horrible inconvenience to millions of shift workers, parents, and dairy cows. Audrey and I spend a lot of time wandering around our house resetting clocks (we must have about a hundred or so) and then about a week wondering if every clock we see has been changed or not. Changing the time on my car clock alone requires a PhD in astrophysics. I don't even know why we have daylight savings time. I read that it was a temporary wartime measure in England to support increased shell production in World War I munitions factories. It was invented by the same bureaucrats who came up with the concept of income tax. People! The great war ended 95 years ago and we won! I think the whole thing is a conspiracy by golf course owners and sunglass manufacturers. The amazing thing is that everybody

complains, nobody can explain it and we keep changing our clocks year after year.

Sorry for the rant but you get the idea. In my world, same is good and change is bad.

Somebody once called me a “Luddite”. I had to look it up. Luddites were groups of English working men who banded together between 1811 and 1816 to destroy labour saving devices that had been introduced into British textile mills. Good on them! Where did I put that scarf that my daughter hand knit for me last Christmas? Change. Who needs it?