

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

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*from*  
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*Rhododendrons in my garden (variety OLGA)*

Yes, it's that time of year again in my garden! From about five o'clock in the morning until about eight – the best light of the day – you'll know where to find my camera and me. Although the rhododendron and azalea season is a long one, the first blooms appearing in late April and the last in mid to late August, the grand visual crescendo usually occurs here in early to mid-June. Here's a tiny sample of the 175 varieties of rhododendrons in the garden.



## TOTALLY ECLIPSED

On April 8 the path of totality for the solar eclipse missed Shamber's Bluff by a fraction of one per cent. However, as I had no intention of missing this rare natural event, I jumped in my car and headed north. An hour later I found a parking spot on a secondary road with a large lake on one side and the St. John River on the other. The sky was cloudless – a totally unimpeded view.

Although I made a few hand-held photographs during totality, my main goal was the experience, which did not disappoint. The moment the sun fully disappeared behind the moon, I ripped off my eclipse glasses to view not only the corona, but also the planets and visible stars. The temperature dropped dramatically and an audible hush seemed to confirm emotionally this once-in-a-lifetime moment. Then in a dramatic flash, totality ended.

Here are a couple of my images of the corona. The first picture shows how the corona appears to the naked eye. The second reveals colours of the sun's "chromosphere," which I made visible by reducing image brightness in my computer, not by adding or saturating hues. No doubt many of you achieved far better results than I, but my images will be the souvenirs "that bring it all back" for me.



Although a total solar eclipse occurs somewhere on the planet approximately every 18 months, it may occur largely over water. The track of a total eclipse is a very narrow path over Earth's surface, averaging approximately 95-115 kilometres in width. Thus, a total eclipse happens at any given place on Earth only once in about 360 years.

This helps to explain why people from as far away as India came to New Brunswick to witness this eclipse and why I drove a few kilometres north. Also, a physicist friend of mine from Israel, who had flown to Texas because he loves being present for unusual astronomical events, made a last-minute decision to switch to Arkansas because of the cloud cover in Texas.

Just in case you're interested, there's a total solar eclipse with a long period of totality coming up in Egypt in 2027. You can read all about it on line and start making plans.

## The LAST LAP

When you're young, you anticipate. When you're old, you contemplate. It happens quite naturally.

I'm an early riser, well before sunrise most days, no matter what the season. Once I've done my toilet, I settle into my comfortable kitchen easy chair with a cup of hot coffee, which is more of an inducement to mental wandering than to physical activity. I never know in advance where I'll be going and I often find myself touching down here, or pausing there, before settling on subjects as diverse as questioning how well I explained my support for a community initiative, to why I should rework a particular visual presentation, to re-living the hilarity of yesterday's lunch with three high-school classmates.

This last topic, like many other things these days, is cause for reflecting on how both I and others in my general age bracket are reacting to the constant awareness that our time on Earth is short, although the speed of change in most societies is rapid beyond anything we could have imagined as children.

I walked more than a kilometre and a half to the one-room school that I attended the first year. As there were only six pupils spread over four grades, the school was closed permanently at year's end and from grade two through grade eight I attended a second one-room school with between 16 and 21 students. For these seven years I was the only pupil in my grade and had the unique privilege of standing simultaneously at the bottom and the top of my class. Both schools taught me the enormous value of having several grade levels in one room.



*Grey's Mills one-room school 1943 (I'm on the right.) I showed this picture before, but without much context.*

The second school was well over six kilometres from my home, so I travelled to school in a "van." On winter days when the snow was deep and the road not ploughed, which it often wasn't, the van was a big closed box (with an open front) that sat on bob-sleds furnished with benches and buffalo robes. The horses never failed to reach their destination.

The rest of the year the van was a half-ton pickup with a similar box and the same benches, but on warm spring and autumn days our driver replaced the box with railings, so we could stand up and see the bursting leaves or autumn colours as we travelled to school and home again. A nearly identical van brought students from "down the road," the other side of the school.

Every morning two older students went to the house nearest the school to fetch the day's pail of drinking water for the school's glass cooler. Outdoor wooden toilets, of course! The teacher, who always boarded within a kilometre of the school, walked home for lunch, leaving the 16 to 21 children totally unsupervised. Neither our parents nor the teacher ever gave it a second thought.

And then for grade nine came my big move to Macdonald Consolidated School with primary, elementary, junior high, and high school – only three grade levels in each of the four rooms! The school van didn't change much, however, except that the roads were ploughed regularly now, so there were no more horses and bob-sleds.

The second year that I attended MCS I entered high school and "lucked out." The Principal always taught all the high-school subjects and the disaster of the previous year had been replaced by a 28-year-old Francophone with the very English name of Robert Hay. Mr. Hay cared about education and made sure all the "big guys" used up their testosterone in sports, so his classroom was a "peaceable kingdom" of learning.

And then real change began for me! Four years later I was at Union Theological Seminary on the Columbia University campus in New York City, but Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, provided the perfect transition for me from the farm to the heart of a major metropolis. This brings me to today!

I have become extremely conscious of how persons of my generation deal with rapid technological and social change and how their willingness to accept it affects their lives.

First of all, to speak personally! I am not on any social media platforms and gave up television more than 20 years ago for one simple reason: I don't have time. My days are filled with photographing, gardening, reading, and writing. Through e-mails, the telephone, many in-person contacts, and reading newspapers and books, both as hard copy and on line, I stay better and more accurately informed than many people who are regularly on social media.

However, some people in my age bracket would benefit tremendously from being on Facebook/ META. They feel lonely because they did not take the time to learn how to use a computer, a pad, or a mobile phone, so their social lives are now limited to snail mail, land-line telephone calls and an occasional visitor, especially if they can no longer drive. They failed to adapt as the world was changing around them and now they are suffering for it.

Some people of "a certain age" talk mostly about are their ailments, seemingly oblivious to the fact that nearly every elderly person has something or other wrong with him or her and that dealing emotionally with their own physical problems and deficiencies is quite sufficient, thank you very much.

Others, if asked, freely acknowledge their physical difficulties, but seldom elaborate beyond satisfying the person who has enquired. This often includes persons who have no end of physical deficiencies or a serious illness. These seniors recognize the value of sharing basic details and, when appropriate, offering helpful guidance to others who are experiencing similar circumstances. Then, they steer the conversation in a more interesting direction.

And, a not insignificant number celebrate! They are excited about having reached 70, or 83, or 96, or 101. They are extremely grateful for the opportunities that these years are providing, because they realize that to a considerable extent they are entering territory that's up to them to chart. They feel liberated, more free than they ever have been to pursue many of the activities (armchair and otherwise) they have always wanted.

Apparently, the group to which a person will eventually belong is reasonably predictable. It all begins with one's childhood circumstances. However, this is not to say that a person is doomed to be a complainer, for example. Re-routing one's path is possible and the second half of life is fertile ground for change. Old dogs can learn new tricks.

One thing of which I've become very aware is that while most elderly people are in no hurry to depart this life, almost none of them fears death. There's a quiet acceptance of the fact that every living thing eventually dies and every non-living thing decays. Personally, I more or less think and feel as if I'm on a holiday with no fixed terminal date.

**"I expected this."**

*Epitaph on the tombstone of my neighbour, Sanford Henderson, who lived to 94.*

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*Lunch with three of my high-school classmates; graduated June 1955, photo July 2023*

## Random Notes

1/ When I began work in my garden this spring, I soon realized that I had not been getting enough regular exercise during the winter – despite my belief to the contrary. It took me a month to get back in shape, at least back to a level where the day did not end in an agony of sore muscles concentrated in my lower back. I'm thinking that next winter I should be going to the nearest gym (a half hour away) two or three days a week, as I did in the winters of 2001 and 2002, the two years following my liver transplants and complete muscle loss due to being six weeks in an induced coma. My workout regime was one day for lower body exercises, a day off, then the next day for upper body exercises followed by two days off. It worked well.

I remember beginning on the treadmill at the lowest speed it would go and slowly being able to increase the speed until over a year later I broke into a run. A few days after my breakthrough a 91-year-old woman whom I knew stepped onto the treadmill beside me and, when she realized who was beside her, said quite apologetically, "Freeman, this machine won't go any slower and I can't go any faster."

Did I ever feel good to offer her encouragement by telling her that her current speed had been my speed a year earlier – and congratulating her for her effort!

2/ During May I taught five one-day workshops at my home – always one to three persons. The content varied considerably, because the photographers had vastly different levels of knowledge and experience and very different interests.

With one couple it was back to the basics of camera operation, including how to change depth of field and why knowing how matters. It had been a long time since I'd worked with anybody with very limited knowledge of camera operation and I found that I benefited from the review myself.

On another workshop the participant and I spent much of the day discussing the nature of beauty. Both of us had selected a small number of images that we considered "beautiful" and explained why we felt that way about each one. This led us into a conversation about "feeling" being as good a way of knowing as "thinking."

For the third workshop I concentrated on the building blocks of visual design and principles for arranging them in picture space. We compared how fluency in visual design is to pictorial expression what fluency in the design of language - i.e., in grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary - is to verbal and written expression.

The participant in the fourth May workshop was returning for the third time and wanted to discuss the symbols of content and symbols of approach in his work. He shoots what turns him on, follows his energy, so to speak, and in the process tells his life story.

3/ I've been rereading James Hollis' 1995 book, UNDER SATURN'S SHADOW: The Wounding and Healing of Men. It was my introduction to Hollis and I remember saying aloud at the time, "Every man should read this book," then adding a moment later, "and so should every woman." I still feel the same way.

4/ Another book that I'm sure many of you will find worth perusing is Anthony Stevens, The Roots of War and Terror. Now retired in Greece, Stevens is a graduate of Oxford University and in addition to being an M.D., has two degrees in psychology, was a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and practised as a psychiatrist and analytical psychologist for more than 30 years.

To quote from the flyleaf: "In The Roots of War and Terror, Stevens provides profound insights into the nature of armed conflict, locating the problem primarily in the psychology and anatomy of the human male. The evolved propensities responsible for warlike behaviour, essentially unchanged since Palaeolithic times, continue to attempt to seek aggressive confrontation in groups, motivating modern soldiers and terrorists, armed with weapons of unprecedented destructiveness, to slaughter their enemies in the same spirit as Stone Age warriors.

"This is an indispensable work for anyone wishing to understand the psychological basis of war and terror or hoping to discover ways in which the unimaginable catastrophe of nuclear or biological war may be averted. So why do we do it? And, can it ever be stopped?" These two questions could not be more relevant today.

5/ Every Saturday morning from May through October that I'm at home, I head for the Kingston Farmers' Market, just five kilometres up the road. It's the second largest in the province, the one in Fredericton being larger, but having most of its vendors indoors. The Kingston Market is mostly outdoors, has between 90 and 125 vendors (depending on the time of year) and includes a musical stage.

I usually arrive by the opening hour of eight o'clock and do all my shopping in the first half hour or 45 minutes, carry my purchases back to my car, then head back in to order a Korean vegetable pancake (my Saturday morning breakfast,) meet local friends and people returning "home" for a spring, summer or autumn visit with their families. The weekly market is definitely a community-building event.

6/ Photographers: remember to keep your polarizer on your lens or otherwise instantly available. Time and again I'll ask a photographer I'm helping if she/he has a polarizer handy. All too often the response is "Oh, I left it at home or in my room." This always tells me that the photographer has not learned the polarizer's incredible usefulness.

Even though I'm not employing one for every image, I keep a polarizer on all my lenses (except my very wide-angle) and never remove it. It's the only "filter" I have used since I made the switch from film to digital, except for using a neutral-density filter rarely.

7/ I'm returning to Namaqualand on July 30 for all of August. Spring and flowers all over again!!! This will be my 50<sup>th</sup> trip to the continent, the 49<sup>th</sup> to southern Africa, and my 46<sup>th</sup> to Namaqualand in the northwest corner of South Africa. No soothsayer ever predicted this.

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**"Everything that happens to us has the potential to deepen us."**

*John O'Donohue*

## AZALEAS

Azaleas belong to the rhododendron family, and two native azaleas grow on Shamper's Bluff. The more common is Rhododendron canadense, which grows abundantly in the field below my house along with wild blueberries. Blueberries also grow among the hybrid azaleas in my large rhododendron garden and I sometimes breakfast on them there.



A couple of years ago I met two of my neighbours strolling along a path among the 550-600 hybrid azaleas. As soon as I greeted them, the husband, who is completely blind, exclaimed "Freeman, what a feast for the senses!" I've appreciated the heavenly fragrance of deciduous azaleas even more ever since.

Soon after I met his four-year-old grand-daughter racing along the paths under the canopy of colour. She paused at the last second before she bumped into me, expressing her frenzy of excitement and delight by jumping up and down in place until I stepped aside so she could continue racing through the magic woods.







*Lollipop (late-blooming deciduous azalea with intoxicating fragrance)*



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**Fleurs pour tous!      Blomme vir almal!**

**Flowers for everybody!**

**FREEMAN**

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