

State of the Art-Nancy Bauer-Salon, TJ-Saturday July 16, 2016

One admirable trait in North Americans is that most of us try hard not to offend whole groups of people. We modify our language to that end and get nervous when we forget the proper words. I no sooner had mastered the acronym LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) than more letters were added, LGBTQ and then LGBTQ2S, and then LGBTQ2SIA. The added Q stands for Queer, once thought offensive, now being proudly owned. The A stands for Ally—which I claim. The appropriate designation for a person whose ancestry is Malecite was Indian, then it became Native, then Aboriginal, then Indigenous, then First Nation. The classification of someone of African slave ancestry was Nigger (now so offensive that it perhaps can't be printed here), became Negro, then Colored Person (as in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP), then Black, now African- American (or African-Canadian). Lately I've read "Brown", but I don't know what that signifies.

As a woman I could be called many derogatory names not allowable in a family paper, and most people hearing someone hollering such a name at me would be horrified. If I were to be in an accident, the media would call me an elderly woman. That's been my category for 20 years, and for 30 years my old age would've been signified by my being described as "a grandmother." I wouldn't be offended. Police profiling would render harmless an elderly grandmother who referred to herself as "colored". As a person whose ancestry is of many groups inhabiting New England, I could be called a Yankee—not always a complimentary term, but I like it. Words in hymns and creeds have been modified from "men" to "people", and the Canadian anthem, always in a state of flux, has been changed from "all thy sons command" to "all of us command." My father, a kindly soul I should emphasize, was tickled to discover that he could tell my kids Newfoundland jokes by merely substituting "Newfie" for "Polack." I don't understand how this joke originated—the Newfies I've met are the wittiest people I know.

But we do become kinder; the way our language evolves is indicative of this. If people quote from the bible, they're more likely to quote from the New Testament than from the harsher parts of the Old Testament.

Reading Wayne Curtis' book of essays, *Of Earthly and River Things: An Angler's Memoir*, I'm struck with what a great gift Curtis has been given to be able to connect his childhood with his adulthood, to revisit youthful haunts. He'll probably be able to continue this into his old age.

As I was reading, I would stop and daydream about canoeing down the Cains River with Curtis. His writing is so vivid, so affectionate, that I've fallen in love with his place—the farmhouse, the river, the broken dam, the smell of hawthorn. I didn't even know what a hawthorn is, so looked it up, but I'm no closer to knowing what the shrub growing on the Cains River smells like.

I daydream until I get to the end of the river when I realize that I could never get in a canoe. I have trouble getting in and out of my son's pontoon boat when our lake is quiet—could I get out of a canoe on the turbulent Cains? Curtis talks about the "people from away"—American sports fishermen, academics. He writes, "the new river people brought with them attitudes of

sacrilege". I haven't earned the right to canoe down the river, but I'm happy that Curtis has given me the experience vicariously. It's for sure my favourite of his books.

Marilyn Lerch, poet, climate change activist, and former president of the Writers' Federation of New Brunswick, sent me a copy of her keynote address to the spring meeting of the federation. Her talk is first an accounting of the trouble the world is in, and then it becomes a clarion call to writers. "And for all of us, yes, let us keep the fire in our bellies, as we walk through the rubble, through the gigantic pain befalling us, let us whirl with the Sufis, laugh with the Buddha, do no harm, celebrate and create rituals for the love of whatever we love, write the meaning of being one with the cosmos, be eccentric and crazy, above all trust yourselves, create, witness and resist."

Curtis is doing just this, witnessing. He's keeping alive the language of the river: Spey cast, cock-of-the-woods, kype-faced hook-bills of autumn. "It was Saturday, June 28. Already, so early in the day, it was hot, but the Cains had a cool, morning smell. And there was that unique atmosphere that always signifies this river as a state of mind, a state of soul, more than just a place." Curtis is celebrating this state of soul.