

Great excitement has been transpiring on Stanley Street: new curbs are being installed. One morning I watched with amazement at the performance of an excavator operator. He swung the bucket to a truck and picked up a metal top of a sewer and set it down oh so gently, precisely, nudging it an inch this way and that until it was exact. I didn't know what to call the machine, so I hollered to a workman. When I exclaimed about it, he said, "It's only as good as the man operating it." The operator probably had years of experience, but his skill had to involve more than that. He had to have incredible hand/eye coordination, athleticism, and the ability to sense the whereabouts of the bucket at the end of the boom and stick. This involves a certain kind of imagination, an empathy with the machine. The workmen watching him were obviously confident in his ability, standing relaxed. I can appreciate a little of that empathy because I've driven the same make of car for 33 years and the same car for 12. But to do what the operator of the excavator was doing is far beyond most people's abilities.

That same afternoon Mike Pacey and Karen Estabrooks visited me, bringing lunch and his new poems to read and two of her new paintings to show. The poem "Needles", about threading a needle, had these lines: "The eye inside a storm/that shoves your hand away/as you try aiming it repeatedly./Your eyes grow dim with the years/--between the thread and the needle--/deserts of time.//How hard it is now to pass through." Oh wow, I thought, the excavator operator was threading a needle.

I'm continuing to read Apollon Grigoryev's autobiography, *My literary and moral wanderings*. Partly because I write this column, I restrict my reading to work by New Brunswick writers. But over the years Russian works have inspired me: Vasily Rozanov's *Solitaria*, Viktor Shklovsky's *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs*, Sergey Aksakov's *A Family Chronicle*.

Grigoryev writes, "...I wanted to expound as truthfully as possible my beliefs in regard to what I have become used to calling *life's drifts*, to expound it directly and bravely..." The translator says that he renders the word Grigoryev uses for the "intellectual and cultural temper that is in the air" as "drift". It must be like "zeitgeist." Strange that English doesn't have a word for this--the spirit of the age or of the time. Whatever your politics, I think you have to agree that Justin Trudeau caught the spirit of our times in Canada with his quotation of Laurier's "sunny ways, my friends, sunny ways." And has Donald Trump caught the American zeitgeist, life's drift? We will know November 9.

I use Google for many things I want to know, but if I googled Uncle Al's piccalilli, I wouldn't get the recipe. Uncle Al wrote it down for me and I wrote it down for other members of the family. A couple decides to buy a farm. They may have taken courses on farming, maybe even have majored in university in the practice, but there are still things about the individual place that are known only by the people who have farmed there for years. The couple visits an old-timer who tells them some of the things he has learned from experience. If he has written it down, kept a journal, "May 2, 1972, planted peas", that is even better. There is an old joke: A brain surgeon says to a novelist, "I'm going to write a novel when I retire", and the novelist replies, "I'm going to do brain surgery when I retire." How much better, more useful it would be if the surgeon would write his memoirs.

I hadn't been downtown to see the new art gallery, Gallery on Queen, but I couldn't miss the exhibit that is there right now, the work of five Acadian artists. Four of them constitute the history of contemporary Acadian visual art, so I could see history in one place. Claude Roussel and Roméo Savoie taught art at the Université de Moncton and so were hugely influential. Herménégilde Chiasson led the artists of all persuasions—writing and theatre as well as visual arts. Marie Hélène Allain's sculpture is well-known; hers is a compelling story. I didn't know the work of Éveline Gallant Fournier, so I was

happy to be able to see it. Under Roussel's and Savoie's influence, as well as the influence of Quebec and France, Acadian artists embraced abstract art.

The new gallery is not only hosting the five artists, but also has reserved several corners for the work of other artists—Michael and Chantal Khoury's paintings, Judy Blake's pottery and Melissa Le Blanc's whimsical animal ceramics among others. Nadia Khoury has created a warm, bright, welcoming art centre.