

SWLDA



#41 Annual February 2022

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SWILL is published annually every February.

SWILL

Issue #41 Annual 2022 published August 2024

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Editorial: Cast Off

Neil Williams

Now, I have always been a dissident. Part of it may be inherent.

My great-grandfather left the farm (where he would just be another generation of tenant farmers) and went to work in the local pit (coal mine). Because he was smart, he apprenticed as a plumber for the mine. He would later be a journeyman in Newport, and become a master plumber in Islington. He and his small family moved to Canada in 1908.

They were supposed to settle in Alberta. However, one child died in the voyage to Canada. And so they settled at the first port the ship made in Canada -- Montreal. They were not well off, but could afford to live on the south shore in the town of St. Lambert; a bilingual town between the more affluent Anglophone Greenfield Park and the Francophone Longueuil. Although my great-grandfather was a tradesman and successful, he did not want his sons entering into this profession. My grandfather went to business college to become an accountant, and his sons (my father's brothers) were also accountants. My generation broke that template with zero accountants. Instead, we have one engineer and three educators.

And a major part would be learned behaviour.

From what I have been told of the household that my father grew up in; although the career goal was already set in stone, other things were not. Having an opinion was valued, provided that you could argue in favour of your opinion. Thus, the dinner table discussions were lively. I recall this as a child when my uncles came over for family

gatherings. And dissenting views were welcomed; though, they would be challenged. Unlike with games (where the adults would allow the children to sometimes win, or to just barely lose), there were no "velvet gloves" when it came to discussions. And much of the discussions centred around politics and economics and sometimes religion. If you were age ten, you were old enough to participate.

During the 1979 federal election, I was living in Toronto and came home for the weekend to find a Progressive Conservative lawn sign on the property (that my sister had put up). I went and got a lawn sign from the Communist Party of Canada and put it on the lawn. My other sister put up a NDP lawn sign. My brother put up a lawn sign for the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). Then my mother called the local Liberal candidate and request the largest sign possible for the lawn and they did, when you looked out the front bay window all your could see was the back of that enormous sign. Only my parents and I were old enough to vote in this election. In the end, I voted for my first and only time for the Progressive Conservatives. The major reason was that the Progressive Conservative leader was young (not yet age 40) and promised to tackle the issue of youth unemployment.

Anyway, dissenting voices were always a part of my family ;)

I have remained a leftist, but I have always had issues with dogma (be that religious or political). My father was a strong Roman Catholic, but not a dogmatic one. He attended mass almost every Sunday and had no problem stating that the Church were total fools on particular positions or that a Pope was a complete idiot. I have always had a massive problem with the near-religious adherence to dogma within the Western forms of Marxist. The central problem being that "religious" view that there is one true path to "salvation" and all others are "wrong", "evil", and to be destroyed for the "revisionists" that they are. And I have been in enough socialist collectives that fragment over who is following the "one true path". This is why I have referred to myself as an anarcho-syndicalist over the

decades; I cannot accept any of the Procrustean beds that the Canadian Marxists demand that I be fitted to.

And I have always had a problem with believing the "Word" as communicated by senior management or Human Resources at any place of work. Because, once you parse through the current management and/or HR clichés and catch-phrases, the policy is authoritarian and/or bullshit (and more often the latter). There is, based on my observations, a Canadian business goto of "cherry-picking" from business management and/or human resources and/or (as this is my field) pedagogical theories and creating the unique policy or set of policies for the organisation. However, in most cases, the theories that are being utilised and quoted and referenced had been designed as whole systems or an entire four course meal to be consumed in a specific order. If you view the theory as options within a buffet of theories, that you can pick and choose pieces from, the result may be an amalgam of what management wants, that isn't going to work in practice as it is a cobbled together Frankenstein's creature. And management will insist that this MUST be made to work. And who will be blamed if it doesn't? Not management who designed this mess. The front-line workers who have to attempt to implement and use this dog's breakfast will be the people blamed.

So, I have been a dissident and grumbler in the workplace. It is very Canadian to be a grumbler. We are known to have our own minds, but at the same time a pragmatic understanding that the work has to be done, even though we think that the way we are being ordered to do the work is stupid. We do our job and grumble about it. Or we do our job and try and find work-arounds so that it is more pragmatic and less stupid. And we will covertly defy management to get the job done properly. The British didn't always like this about us Canadians, but if it was working, they would look in the other direction (unless we fucked up, and then it would be our fault for not following the system). The same happens with Canadian corporations and the employees they rule over.

Being active in the union also never won me favours with any company I worked for that was unionised. I would usually be a shop steward or be on the Health and Safety Committee. And I was a dissident in my own union too. My division brought in a substantial portion of union revenue through our dues, but our needs were ignored by the union leadership. The specific needs of community college faculty were different to the needs of many other members of OPSEU (Ontario Public Sector Employees Union) in respects to issues such as intellectual property rights, some level of control over curriculum development, and some level of academic freedom. We were demanding from the union our own legal expert (rather than one from the retained pool) and our own strike fund (we would still be major contributors to the overall union strike fund, we just wanted out of our dues, an additional strike fund to give us stronger leverage when bargaining with management (College Employers' Council)). In the end, we received most of what we wanted, though the initial response from the union executive was very punitive.

So, my plans were to work until I was about 70 and then retire and teach part-time until I tired of it. But, the pandemic came. My institution was shut down for two semesters and haemorrhaging money; it was "bleeding out". This was partly management's own problems as they had shifted the focus onto bringing in large numbers of international students (who paid foreign student tuition fees at 10 to 15 times the rate Canadian students did) and during the pandemic, that revenue dried up to near zero. When the loss of revenue reached a point that it met the definition of "a crisis", many of the faculty at or near the top of the pay grid were forced into retirement. I was now in unplanned unemployment.

As this happened to a lot of faculty in Ontario at the same time, work was hard to find. The worst being that I was informed that my education was worthless and that my years of experience were also worthless. All I was good for was for unskilled labour; except that I was over-qualified for

that. Although it took months to find work, I found work at an Amazon Fulfilment Centre.

This was not a joy. The money was okay (\$1.35 above the Ontario minimum wage) but you were worked like serfs. You really were "meat robots" for his lordship, the Grand PooBah Bezos. The environment was very competitive. As a temporary seasonal employee, I was on the bottom of the hierarchy. Then above me were the temporary employees, above them were the permanent employees on probation, and then the full-time permanent employees, and above them, the lowest tier of supervisors. The shifts were 12 hours in length but you were encouraged to complete your work in less than 12 hours and the permanent employees pushed for this. Their incentive was that if the 12 hours of work was completed in 9.5 hours, they still were paid for 12 hours work. The temporary employees (the majority) would just be paid for the hours worked. Permanent employees also received a monthly bonus for how many less hours the work was completed in compared to the planned hours for completion.

I had years of experience in warehousing. The system used at an Amazon Fulfilment Centre was in contradiction to all of my experience. Part of the reason was that Amazon does not tell you why they do things the way they do them; you are just to do them that way. It took me a couple of weeks to figure out that the system was designed not to be the most efficient way to store things, but the most efficient way to load and place in position the drivers' bags of compartmentalised orders. Items are only supposed to be in the centre for a maximum 72 hours, preferably less, before they are loaded onto a van and delivered to a customer. Asking questions was frowned upon. And the answer was always, "work harder; work faster!" And I hated the mandatory ten minute exercise breaks, when you could be getting ahead of the belt...

In southern Ontario, most of the delivery drivers are South Asian. These are subcontractors not directly employed by Amazon. Because of this demographic, most of low end

supervisors hired are also South Asian as they have the most interaction with the drivers. Most of the permanent workers hired in the warehouse part of the centre are also South Asian. The temporary workers are more diverse. There is an ethnocentric bias at the centre that I worked at. South Asian supervisors tended to recommend South Asians to be permanent hires. Permanent hires were assigned the lighter physical tasks. Temporary workers were assigned the heavier physical tasks. And the usual interaction between supervisors and temporary workers was to scream at the temporary workers the Amazon motto: "Work harder; work faster".

My time at Amazon did allow me to save up enough money for first and last and a deposit, plus moving expenses. My unexpected retirement (and reduced pension) meant that I could no longer afford to live in Dundas anymore ((And so, we moved...

Thrashing Trufen: Life In a Small Town

Neil Williams

I had no intention of moving to Listowel, Ontario. To be honest, I had never heard of the town before. It is possible that I had once upon a time passed through the town when en route from KW (Kitchener-Waterloo) to Goderich, but that is something that I cannot confirm nor deny.

Why the interest in Listowel?

Well, we had to move as we could no longer afford to live in Dundas. Our daughter and her husband could not to purchase a home in the KW area, where they were currently renting. They were looking at homes in Woodstock and Listowel. For a time, it really looked as if they were going to move to Listowel. We began looking in Listowel and found a suitable apartment and moved. Then, "the kids" bought a house in Woodstock...

Listowel surrounds the junction of County Line 86 and Highway 23. Highway 23 inters the town from the north, dog-legs it west along 86, and heads south again as Highway 23. Of course, according to the Government of Ontario, Listowel does not exist. That is okay, I lived for many years in another (according to the Government of Ontario) non-existing place, Dundas. The forced amalgamations of the late 1990s and early 2000s by the Ontario government resulted in many villages, towns, and small cities ceasing to exist. Technically, Listowel was "dissolved" and became part of the Municipality of North Perth; though it is the largest community within North Perth.

Listowel is roughly 100 km north of London, Ontario. 60 kms to the west of Waterloo. 120 km north west of Hamilton and 160 km from Toronto. It is surrounded by farmland and is a community of 8,000 people. It is a SMALL town from my perspective. However, it does have its own LCBO, Canadian Tire, Walmart, Zehrs (Loblaws), Shopper's Drug Mart, McDonalds, two Tim Horton's, a Beer Store, a Food Basics, and some other chain stores. It is not the "back of beyond", but it is the smallest community I have ever lived in.

I am, at my core, a city boy. I have lived in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Hamilton. With periods of time, in cities such as Brampton, KW, Guelph, and Burlington. Brampton was a choice made by my parents and once I became an adult and left the city, I had no desire to return to live there. KW and Guelph are where I completed my undergraduate degree and my post-graduate degrees. Burlington was an experiment that failed. We are NOT suburban people (which is why I never returned to live in Brampton). I like a city of a substantial size, enough to have a bookseller and some form of public transit access to a larger city (in particular, to the nearest cosmopolitan major city). I am happiest when I am residing in a major cosmopolitan centre (like Toronto or Vancouver or Montreal) or in a nearby major city with regular GO Transit service into Toronto. Listowel did not fit that description at all. BUT, it was affordable. It took me eight months to discover (this was during the COVID pandemic) that there actually WAS a way to get out of town other than by car. There was a bus service to KW, London, and Stratford. Not really good enough for a day trip, but good enough to plan a trip into Toronto for a weekend.

And so, I began life in this very small town. Overall, the people were very friendly and nice. But, there really wasn't much to do. Part of the problem had to do with the pandemic. Several restaurants and pubs had closed in 2020 during the height of COVID, and that was before we moved to Listowel in January of 2021. Even that was an issue. We had to get permission from the municipality to move in within the midst of the pandemic, prove that we could no longer afford our Dundas rent and needed to move to the Listowel apartment that we had already paid first and last on. And all through 2021 there were several waves of COVID and several periods of restriction zones. In a way, we were lucky.

For the first two periods of restriction, the effects were minor. Listowel was either in the Green or Yellow restriction zone. Life continued on pretty much normally with limitation of hours of operation and number of patrons permitted in at one time. There were a few weeks of being in the Orange zone, but those periods were just one of two weeks. The hardest was the final restrictions that were province-wide. This was done as people from the near permanent Grey zone areas that were in complete lockdown for months on end (eg. Toronto and Peel) were driving hours to get to Green and Yellow zone areas where they could go out for dinner or a drink or a movie (though in the process were also spreading the virus).

While the things to do in Listowel were reduced, it could have been much worse.

Yet, other than going to the cinema every two weeks. Hanging out at the one bar (The Back 9) that had a nice patio (actually a deck) and craft beer in the warm months. Spending the day in Listowel Memorial Park when it wasn't raining. Having an evening out at Crabby Joe's. The little theatre had closed down at the start of COVID. There was no semi-pro theatre in town. And so, not very much to do. Especially during the late fall and winter months. We watched a lot of Netflix and Prime ;)

The only exciting thing happened on January 21, 2022 when a transport truck crashed into the building we lived in. Our apartment was one of several that existed as part of what was once a large dance hall prior to WWI that had been converted to offices and apartments; the ground floor had always been retail shops. It hit the restaurant Diana Sweets and stopped at the entrance to Corley's Sports. I was already up that morning writing at the time of the accident. At first it felt like an earthquake, the whole building shook. But there was noise of a vehicle and things breaking from outside. I looked out the front window and sure enough there was a transport truck now imbedded into the building below. Before I could call the police, they had arrived. Because the city was concerned about the stability of the building, we had to stay at our daughter's for three days before we were allowed to return home. Otherwise, it was an uneventful year...

Okay, there was some additional noise and excitement. North Perth is what I call a "dead rat" riding. If it was legal to run a dead rat as a candidate; so long as that dead rat was a Conservative, it would win by a landslide. When all the "Freedom Convoy" idiocy began, there was major support for this in Listowel. However, there were no occupations. Just pickup trucks and vans with "Fuck Trudeau" signs, Confederate flags, and the Canadian flag displayed upside down driving around the downtown between 9:00 AM and 11:00 AM honking their horns. It would be a small convoy of maybe 10 to 20 vehicles, depending on the weekend; they would make noise and then depart. After the Ottawa Occupation was removed, the frequency dropped off. By October when the provincial government introduced its phased in return to normal, the Saturday convoy ended.

In November we applied and we accepted into an apartment building in Woodstock, a four minute drive from our daughter. And we began planning for our move, again...

Flogging a Dead Trekkie: Moving Plans and Dangerous Roads...

Neil Williams

This was easier than moving to Listowel. Much of our things were never unpacked during our stay. Seasonal things were in moving boxes piled in the spare bedroom, as were seasonal food processors, baking trays, roasting pans, and etcetera. Amidst the boxes, was my small desk for writing and job search.

The rest of our things were in a storage area (free of charge) that was in the actual remaining dance hall stage and dance floor. The roof was in poor repair and would eventually collapse in, so it was use at your own risk for storage. These would be books that we didn't have the space for bookcases to put them in, and seasonal decorations (not just Christmas, but Valentine's Day, and Easter, and Autumn, and Halloween). Most of our things were already packed, which was great. This made the planning easier.

And not. We still had to live in the apartment. As the moving day grew closer (January 16, 2023) we were living more and more among boxes. And end was in sight.

Christmas was less festive than usual. We decided not to put up much in decorations and not to get a tree. It just didn't make sense when we would be moving so soon after Christmas. Also, we would be spending most of Christmas in Woodstock at our daughter's and then New Year's with friends in Mississauga.

But, the drive from Listowel to Woodstock was long and harrowing. We did listen to the Weather Network that was talking about severe blizzard conditions and whiteouts. We were also looking out our window and it appeared that the Weather Network was exaggerating the situation (not an uncommon occurrence...). We packed the care and left for Woodstock. All was fine until we passed Perth Road 147 and then it began to get bad. It was worse

when we turned onto Perth Road 131 and became steadily worse. Fortunately, at the intersection with Perth Line 72, a UPS truck turned onto 131 ahead of us. We just stayed with that UPS truck slow and steady all the way down 131 to 119 until we entered Stratford. The UPS continued on along Highway 7 and we turned east onto Highway 8. At Shakespeare, we turned south onto 107 till it became 59 and entered into Woodstock. It took over four hours to do an hour and 25 minute drive, but we made it!

Thanks "Brown" and all the gods above.

It was a wonderful holiday season and New Year's celebration)))

Scribbling on the Bog Wall:

Letters of Comment

Neil Williams

Due to temporal warps, we present the single LoC received for this issue prior to its official publication date. Astounding..

Dear Neil:

Hey, another helping of Swill! No. 4! this time around, and I do have some comments to make about this bowl of Swill, so here it comes with a ladle.

The section titles mean little, this is a story of trying to find a place to live in this province. I get that, we are making it living in Etobicoke, but just. It is always good to know where you come from. There are genealogical services out there who seem able to instantly set up your family tree, but are trying to sell it to you a twig at a time. We sometimes watch a genealogy show on PBS called Finding Your Roots...if every I was to be presented with my family tree and Book of Life, as they call it, I would call it one of the greatest gifts I could be given.

We have a partial family tree based on 23 and Me and research I did when I was over in the UK in 1977 to mid 1978. And my sister gathered a lot of information on our matrilineage. I tried to get information on our patrilineage. The big problem on my part was ignorance. In the late 1970s when I was over in Wales, I did not know anything about the old system of Welsh patronymics. In tracing my father's side I hit a dead zone around the mid-1600s.

My original thoughts and speculations was that the gap was due to records being lost when the Puritans destroyed many of the Roman Catholic churches during the English Civil War. My father's side were Roman Catholic. But, now I know that the English surname system, that had been forced onto the Welsh nobility in the 1500s was slowly spreading out to the commoners as well.

In the old Welsh system, my surname would have been Richard after my father's given name. My father would have been Richard Reginald, I would have been Neil Richard, and my daughter would have been Rhiannon Neil. So the problem in searching the records was that I was still searching for people with the surname of Williams.

Voting...I always vote ABC (Anyone But Conservative). The modern-day right-wing politicians seem to be making it up as they go. They want the job and mega-salary that comes with these powerful positions, but they don't want to do the job because they have no fresh ideas. They abandoned the adjective Progressive a long time ago. Too many of them are campaigning Trump-style, and lately, Polievre looks and sounds like a petulant and angry little boy. I dislike dogma as well, but I will vote for whoever looks progressive.

I am inclined to agree, Lloyd... It all depends on what policies the Liberals are running on. I strongly disagree on increasing immigration when we are now uncertain what jobs humans will be still doing in ten years time, if any. Some people in the AI field claim that most human jobs will be redundant by 2030, and the more "conservative" say by 2040. Bringing in 500,000 new immigrants per year when there will not be jobs for these people in five years is not a brilliant plan... But, yes - ABC. Though I may end up voting for the Communists or the Rhinoceros Party (if either have a candidate in my riding).

I had a couple of friends in Listowel comics fans. Our family moved from Orillia to Victoria, BC close to 50 years ago, and we were there for a few years. I moved to Toronto for university, got married to Yvonne, and stayed. We moved to Brampton for a few years, but felt exiled while the Big City was just over there. We have been on Eva Road in Etobicoke for more than 25 years now. We have looked for other cities and town in Ontario to move to, but nothing else out there is even remotely affordable, so I expect to be in our current unit for the rest of our lives, unless 6/49 provides otherwise.

We moved to Woodstock. It is a much better fit for us than Listowel. That said, I am still a big city sort of guy...

My editorial experience has gotten me this plum position with Amazing Stories, and has kept me at least partially employed over the years. There now seems to be the beginning of demand for what I've been able to do, and I still send resumes out, even though I have passed my 65th birthday. I still owe the government for my CERB/CRB benefits, and getting some additional work would really help me out.

Congrats on the Amazing Stories gig))

Really, it shouldn't be this difficult to make a living, and I have no problem imagining my father telling me to pull myself up by my bootstraps, or some other ridiculous old phrase. But, it is, and we can't seem to make more money, and we can barely afford the rent, and we seem a little trapped where we are. Other than that, how are YOU?

I feel somewhat the same. With the property management company now moving in young people to what was a seniors' building, we have concerns. How long before the rents skyrocket and we have to move. Ford seems to believe that all seniors should be forced to live in remote northern Ontario communities (or just die)...

But, we love our apartment that we have now. It is spacious, with a larger walk-in storage space than what we had in Dundas, and with a great balcony. I mean great, it is super long and relatively wide.

Otherwise, we are good. That old, good, but could be better, situation normal of the lower middle class ;)

Thanks for the Swill, dish some more out very soon now.

More is coming in bits and bites; we'll be all caught up in time for Issue #44))

Endnote: In Demand)))

Neil Williams

After being informed back in 2020 that my undergraduate and post-graduate degrees were of less worth than a roll of Kirkland toilet paper, and that any and all of my work experience was without value -- I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to discover that this was no longer the case.

In September of 2022, I applied for a post-secondary teaching job. I was happy to be considered and make it through the first round on my resume. Then the second round of a one-on-one Zoom interview. And the final round of a Zoom panel interview. I was told that the ideal candidate would be Indigenous who spoke Ojibwe, and second an Indigenous candidate, and that I (who had taught Indigenous post-secondary students and who had worked providing technical training for Indigenous people) was the next best candidate. In October I was offered the job, which would begin in January.

But, there was a BUT. The job advertised was a remote position. With the phasing out of COVID restrictions, I would be teaching face-2-face at the Brampton Campus. This meant that I would need a drive to Kitchener, where I could catch the GO train to Brampton. The bus from Listowel would not connect up properly to get me there on time.

The first few weeks were difficult and very long days. But, after we moved to Woodstock, the trip was shorter and, when I could arrange it, I could get a ride into Guelph with my daughter (who worked in that city) and take the train from there.

But, I am getting ahead of myself and pre-empting Issue #42 ;)