

## Not my Religion



Sports plays an important role in my life. In my family hockey dominates at this time of year. I play hockey, and so do my three sons. Much of our March Break was consumed by hockey. And, this is only our winter sporting activity. In spring and summer there is soccer, baseball, tennis, swimming, windsurfing.

The monetary cost involved in all of this can be considerable. Registration, equipment, transportation and out of town accommodations are major layouts. How do we assess the importance of sports, and the overall cost it exacts in our life?

Sports can be a healthy, constructive means to exercise, develop a skill, network with others, and learn team play. The Fredericton community recognizes this, and invests considerable time and energy in sports, and not only for the young. Numerous individuals willingly devote hours of volunteer time to coaching and managing leagues and teams. They especially are to be commended for their devotion and generosity.

Our approach to sports is all important. Team sports develop team effort. Positive conduct develops positive attitude. The intent is to have sports bring the best out of us.

But sports can easily do the opposite. It can become something more than physical exercise, team play and the development of a skill. It can come to pervade our heart and soul. Then it can potentially become something religious. It can become an idol. And, that which we idolize has a tendency to (re)create us in its own (distorted) image.

Professional sports is perhaps the most glaring example. The skill involved at this level is exciting and appealing to watch, without doubt. However, the manipulation of people, the staggering salaries, the business dealings, and the corporate sponsorships have changed professional sports into something

else, something that changes us. That change is not necessarily for the better.

We find this occurring with the Olympic Games. At this level winning has become more than triumph over opponents. Today winning represents millions of dollars in potential corporate endorsements. The 1996 (American) version of the Olympics was a virtual corporate takeover.

What many accept as normal also changes when it comes to sports. Violence is not tolerated on our

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streets. But in hockey many regard it as part of the game. Is it tolerated (if not encouraged) because hockey has become entertainment, and entertainment requires constant titillation to hold audience attention? The Nova Scotia government hopes to turn this around. It is legislating proper conduct for all its sports arenas. Abusive language and behaviour from fans, coaches and players will be dealt with severely. And so it should.

Interesting also is what we accept as highly contradictory. Tobacco sponsorship for Grand Prix racing in Quebec is deemed "vital". The word "vital", however, means "giving life." Can a product clearly linked to thousands of deaths in that province be "vital" — giving life — to any event, let alone a sporting event?

Sports as religion can also alter our moral judgement, so much so that it slips dangerously. The directors of Maple Leaf Gardens felt no moral obligation to notify police that sexual abuse of teens was occurring within this hockey "shrine". "Shrine" is an apt (religious) word indeed. Maple Leaf Gardens plays a formative role in the lives (hearts and souls) of young children. With that comes responsibility, moral as well as legal.

Then there are the sports heroes. Many attribute their success to God, all the while flaunting their own god-like status. Argentine soccer superstar Diego Maradona is one example. But each sport has its superstars — individuals elevated to superhuman status. That status, more often than not, becomes self-serving.

Some insist that to truly understand sport one must understand it as religion. If so, our traditional perception of religion — as confined to church, synagogue and mosque — is much too narrow. In fact, modern day cathedrals are as much the ubiquitous arena complexes as they are the church spires which used to dominate city, town and village. But each "cathedral" represents a vastly different faith. Each declares a different god, demands different modes of behaviour, conduct, and devotion, and judges success and failure in radically different ways.

I enjoy sports. I encourage my sons to engage in them. But sports is not my religion. The shift may be subtle in perception, but it is evident in attitude and practice. Sports as a recreational activity can add to who we are as humans. Sports as a religion shapes us as humans. The former cost is time and money. The latter cost is spiritual.

The God or gods to whom we give devotion (re)creates us in its image. We have the freedom to choose. And, our human nature is such that we do choose. The consequences of our choice, however, has a life-changing impact.

## Practice Random Acts of Kindness

In 1982, writer Anne Herbert coined the phrase, "practice random acts of kindness and acts of senseless beauty" which has spawned a movement to counteract random acts of violence. The first Random Acts of Kindness Week took place in February 1995. Since then, the non-profit Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has been formed in an effort to help the kindness movement grow. The goal is to work against anger and violence in society through the practice of simple, day-to-day kindness to our fellow humankind. Random Acts of Kindness is now celebrated by millions of people across

the United States and in parts of Canada, Scotland, England, and Australia. Individuals and groups design activities that reflect their energy, interests and imaginations. Acts of kindness need not be showy or expensive. Examples of activities are: -giving out hot cocoa to people on their way to work; -shoveling a neighbour's driveway; -offering flowers to a co-worker with whom you normally clash; -leave a muffin or handmade note of thanks for your delivery person; -giving another driver your parking spot;

-saying, "Hi, how are you?" to a stranger. We are organizing a Random Acts of Kindness Day to take place in the education building on March 14, 1997. We hope you, and your colleagues, decide to participate by making a special effort to do random acts of kindness on that day (and other days too). If you would like further information, or would like to share how you participated in promoting kindness, please do not hesitate to contact us. Be kind and beautiful

John Dalzell, Heather Trail, Kenzie Rushton

## Treeplanting - Is It For You?

May 1 1985 600 @ 6 = \$36.00  
Today I woke up early. Froze. Fell down countless times. Scraped the knuckles off my tree hand. Sunburnt my neck. Received about two million bug bites (they tell me it's not even bug season). Ripped my new fatigues. Starved (I forgot my lunch). Worked my butt off, and for what. Thirty six bucks. This is a dirty, boring, demoralizing job. I'm going to pound the butthead who told me treeplanting was great. This sucks.

Come spring many students across Canada will pack their bags and head for treeplanting jobs. You may be one of them, or you might be thinking about joining them. Treeplanting can be a fantastic way to finance your education, but it's not for everyone.

I had no idea what I was getting into on my first day of treeplanting in May of 1985. All I knew was that the work was supposed to be tough and the money good. Like so many others I had created my own image of what planting was going to be like. Ten planting seasons later I have a very clear understanding of the work involved, the commitment needed to have a successful season, and some tips to pass on to share with those of you thinking of giving it a try.

Many people try treeplanting only to fail. For every rookie who makes it there are two more who fail. Many new planters don't make it past their first two weeks on the block. In that time three things usually happen: frustration, fatigue, and the realization of the true nature of treeplanting.

Now, you're thinking "How hard can it be to learn to plant a tree? The green goes up, the roots go down!" Learning how to plant one tree doesn't take that long. Learning how to plant one to two thousand trees in one day does require a lot of learning. You must make every move productive. You have to learn how to feel soil through your shovel. You have to learn to read distances with your eyes. And so on and so on - a good planter is always learning, even after several seasons.

Most planters are paid by the tree. This means that during your first season you will make less money while you learn the job and get into shape. It's doubly hard when the experienced planter next to you is making five to ten times the money you are - and you're more tired and maybe worked harder than she did! It's frustrating to put in ten solid hours of tortuous labour, basically for nothing.

Once you've got that planting thing down, your body falls apart. You've been sitting at a desk in front of a computer for the past eight months, but now you expect it to run at one hundred percent ten hours a day and six days a week. Muscles you never knew existed will ache. Your hands will blister, crack and bleed. Your legs will be battered and bruised. The skin will wear right off your ankles. Then there are the mornings you wake up with "the claw": the muscles in your hands and wrists will tighten up during the night and you literally will not be able to open your hand. And, of course, there's a crotch rot. Sweat rashes will suddenly appear in the most embarrassing of locations, making every step excruciating. And don't forget tendonitis, a very painful condition that can grind your planting career to a halt even before you start.

The third, and sometimes highest hurdle, is that day the reality of treeplanting finally sets in. No matter how well a friend describes what you will go through, the reality is always worse. Physical pain intensifies, the

money isn't coming in the way you thought it would, mother nature turns vile and heartless, and man, is this job ever boring!

You'll face all three of those hurdles before the true ugliness of planting kicks in. Yes I've saved the best for last. Bug season. Most of you will be planting in the boreal forests of northern Canada, which is another term for The Black Fly Cafe where planters are the main course. Constant exposure to bugs can turn a logical human being into a half-crazed lunatic. The bug barrage takes its toll after a while. There is probably nothing more annoying than a black fly playing your eardrum like a set of bongos and then, for an encore, ripping a nice juicy steak out of your inner ear.

By now you may be thinking that I hate treeplanting. Not at all. I love planting. It can be really refreshing after so many days in a classroom to get out into the fresh air and put in a hard day of physical work. One of the best things about planting is the friendships you make. Working through hardships seems to draw people together. Planting can also instill in you a work ethic that will stay with you for the rest of your life. It has been said many times that if you can plant you can do anything!

I offer these observations because over the past decade I have seen planting break people, taking their last penny and crushing their spirit. I have seen grown men and women break down in the middle of the block and weep. It's usually the same story: no matter how badly they need the money they just can't plant another tree! Many cannot bear the thought of returning home emotionally beaten, with no money in their pockets. And no prospects of a job. It's especially bad if someone at home warned them that they would fail. The idea of coming home to an "I told you so" is more than they can face.

How many jobs could push a young rookie to jump off a small cliff, intentionally breaking his leg so he could go home? I can clearly remember the day a planting friend put his arm between two trees and begged me to swing my shovel and break his arm.

So if you've never planted before and are considering it as a summer job, do some serious soul searching before you make your final decision. Talk to as many planters as you can and ask them for their honest opinions, not fanciful reminiscing. Read up on the subject. Last year I put my ten years of planting experience down on paper in a book called *To Plant or Not To Plant*, as a guide for beginning and experienced planters. Try to imagine the absolute worst thing that could happen on the block and then double it, asking yourself how you would deal with it. Bugs and a grizzly bear? Crotch rot and a wet tent? And remember that your first year will be what I call your investment year. You will have to fork out a lot of money to purchase your equipment, but keep in mind that you won't make as much money as the experienced planters.

### Getting a Job

If you've decided that you want to give planting a shot start looking for a treeplanting company today. Most companies have their crews together by March. Check around at school, especially at the student employment offices for posters and notices. Ask people who have planted before for recommendations and company names.

Picking a company will be the most important decision in your planting

career. If you make the right choice you'll be able to make your money year after year, and not have to worry about being paid. If you make the wrong choice you could find yourself ripped off, losing instead of making money. Beware the unscrupulous operators who prey on rookies and their naiveté!

Most companies allow their forepersons to do their own hiring. Your best bet is to find someone in the St. John's area, and try to meet with them. Use the time to ask them about themselves and their company. The amount of money you can make is directly related to how well they do their job, so feel them out. Ask a lot of questions. How long a season do they normally have? How many trees are they planting this season? Do they have a filter or bonus system? How often do they pay their planters? What is their planter-to-foreperson ratio? (the lower the better). If you are a vegetarian, or have special dietary needs, will the company accommodate your needs in camp?

A very important point is the turnover rate. It's a bad sign if the company has a low percentage of returning planters. However you'll find that bad companies are the exception, not the rule. Most companies with really bad reputations get weeded out one way or the other.

The best prevention for treeplanting woes is to prepare yourself beforehand. Know what you're getting into. Ask questions, read, and learn as much as possible before you decide to head out onto the block. And then, before you know it, it will be

### Season's End

Your bags are light. You feel only a few trees left in your grab bag. Someone yells from beside you that they have a few bundles left. You yell back that you can take one of them. Planters are congregating around the last available land as you pound the last bundle in the ground. You reach for it and there it is, your last tree. Wow—has the season gone by this quickly? How many of these things have you put in the ground?

It seems like only last week when you stumbled around the block, a naive rookie but this is it, your last rookie tree. You wave off the temptation to plant the tree upside down because this tree has meaning. It needs a plaque or something. As you place it in the ground your emotions are flip-flopping. You're slightly saddened because, in some small way, you have enjoyed the planting and the camaraderie of the friends you have met. Then you think of home. You smile and pound your foot beside the tree, forever finishing the season. You've worked hard that day but your body still feels fresh as you step out towards the van with a knowing smile on your face.

You did it. If you have any planting related questions, or would like a list of planting companies, please visit my website at <http://www.netshop.net/~litter/home.htm>. The site includes the most comprehensive list of treeplanting companies in Canada plus other treeplanting links.

Byron Goetz is the author of *To Plant or Not to Plant - A Treeplanter's Guide available at the UNB Bookstore. He lives in Fort St. James, B.C. and works full time as a Forest Officer for the Ministry of Forests.*