

Random thoughts on the month of July (29, 06, 13)

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The Roman Senate named July in honour of their general, Julius Caesar, it being the month of his birth. Later on when Julie's ego opposed the senate, his political adversaries stabbed him to death.

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is my favourite tragedy with *Macbeth* a very close second. I know that *Macbeth* has that great witch's scene with the three weird sisters: "Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble." But *Julius Caesar* has the soothsayer: "Caesar, beware the ides of March!"

I suppose both are about reckless ambition, a common political theme, but with *Julius Caesar*, it's more complicated with additional great characters such as Brutus and Cassius.

Miriam and I have attended the Stratford Shakespearian Festival for forty years. Miriam actually began as a kid with the first tent production in 1953 and the inaugural performance of Tyrone Guthrie's *Richard III* with Alec Guinness in the title role.

Whenever we travel to Stratford to see the white swans on the Avon River, picnic and watch a play in one of the four theatres, we always remark afterwards that we are easily the youngest people in the audience. Now, not so much as seniors appear to be the prime component for each season, except for those performances intended for school children.

We have watched amazing performances over the years. We saw *King Lear* played by William Hutt, Christopher Plummer, Peter Ustinov and Brian Bedford. Then there was *Lady Macbeth* by Maggie Smith, an incredible show which we will never forget, as well as a multitude of wonderful plays, my favourite being Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with Stephen Ouimette and Tom McCamus. We saw it performed at the Tom Patterson theatre; it seemed that we were on stage, so close were we to the actors.

In early July, when the hot sultry weather of summer starts, we refer to it as "dog days." I'm not sure why dogs were picked to represent these slower times. An opossum might be better to indicate lack of vitality or perhaps any of the Blue Jay pitchers. Summer school also starts in July for those who need to bolster their grades, but really, who wants to take classes in the summer?

July involves a lot of fireworks exploding high up in the sky. On July 1, we celebrate Canada Day (formerly Dominion Day), and our friends south of the border celebrate Independence Day on July 4. I have mixed views on fireworks. I understand that people like a good show and that the fireworks are available for all, but it seems like a waste of money for a few minutes of sparkles in the sky along with the distinctive sonic "booms."

Speaking of fireworks, politicians talk about getting "more bang for our buck," and maybe that's where we might save a lot of cash, getting back to our first topic, the senate. Do we need a senate in Canada? If you ask most seniors, they will have a hard time trying to remember anything startling that the senate has contributed that might be cause for fireworks celebrations.

Lately, some appointed senators seem to have difficulty remembering where they actually live. It seems that Mike Duffy's major role might be to make speeches (and money) for them that brought him to the dance. This quid pro quo format is handy for whoever is in power, but not so much for us, the electorate.

Another item that needs change is the first-past-the-post electoral system. There is nothing more undemocratic than to hand a majority to someone who can't muster 40% of the vote. It's ridiculous banana republic politics, indeed, and that's why fewer and fewer of us vote.

Why do the Conservatives run attack ads? (often during dull Blue Jay games) They are so simplistic, how can they be effective? Well, they are because they target less than 40% of the population. People who can critically think are not invited to the party. We see that politics no longer works in the USA. Let's remove it from the dog days of summer here in Canada.

