

## Yesterday's news



By Nate SmelleTHERE IS NOTHING like a stack of old newspapers or magazines to get my wheels turning. As soon as I catch a glimpse of such a pile, I immediately add going through it to my to-do list.

With our climate and the geopolitical landscape changing so rapidly these days, to some, spending time exploring yesterday's news may seem like time wasted. While it may be true that we need to keep our ears to the ground when it comes to absorbing the daily news, for me, taking time to understand yesterday's news is equally as important.

Looking back, my appreciation for yesterday's news started at the age of nine-years-old. When visiting my grandparents there was a room that served as a library/office/art gallery they called the den. I recall the space having a certain magic of its own. Where the walls weren't lined with books, there were oil paintings, sculptures, strange looking houseplants, and mysterious looking artifacts they collected from their travels.

Being the most accessible, the bottom shelves were where I would begin my exploration. On the bottom shelf in the corner beside my grandfather's reading chair, there was always a pile of newspapers and magazines from the past week or two. Once left to my own devices, this was where I could be found. Pair of scissors in hand, I would clip my way through the old papers, cutting out the most interesting articles and photographs, and then pasting them into a scrapbook.

Although I understood very little of what I was reading at the time, my grandparents attempt to keep me busy planted the seed that grew into my active appreciation of yesterday's news. To this day, I use the same cut and paste research method when working on a story.

Recently I came across a treasure chest of vintage records and Rolling Stone magazines from the 1970s and 1980s that I picked up at a yard sale a few years ago. I have still yet to dive into the magazines, however, on Sunday morning I decided to give a few of the albums a spin. After indulging in a little of Tom Waits' Swordfishtrombones, and Ween's Chocolate and Cheese, I began clipping my way through the pages of Saturday's edition of the Financial Post, while listening to "The Unfinished Symphony, Symphony #5" by Schubert. Soon after picking up the paper, I found myself immersed in a story by Post reporter, Meghan Potkins regarding the United Nations' mission in northern Alberta.

What is the UN doing way up in Canada's north?

Basically, the people of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation contacted the UN in an effort to protect their ancestral lands ? also home to Wood Buffalo National Park, the site of one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world,

and home to endangered whooping cranes, and the continent's largest wild bison population." ? from Suncor Energy Inc.'s plans to release 1.4 trillion litres of wastewater currently being stored in the tar sands tailing ponds into the Athabasca River.

The wastewater, or tailings as they are called by the industry, are a highly toxic slurry of sand, silt, clay, and water that are separated from the bitumen during the refining process. Although the leftover hydrocarbons, salts, organic compounds and metals that compose this mixture pose a potentially deadly threat to any living thing that comes in contact with them, according the Suncor's director of water and closure, Ron Guest, the company maintains that they've "done lots of testing to know that we can treat the water and get the chemistry into the acceptable range for aquatic organisms and the environment."

Now I am not one to doubt sound scientifically proven truths without good reason, but considering it has been known for more than a decade that every year on average, between 458 and 5,029 [CTV News] migratory birds die from simply landing on these man-made cesspools, I highly doubt any of Suncor's executives will be drinking, swimming, or even watering their lawns with this water.

Nevertheless, this column is about the value of in-print journalism and yesterday's news, not the fact that the people of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation are threatened with, as ACFN Chief Allan said "basically losing [their] ecological system.

Nor is it about how the Mikisew Cree First Nation "absolutely [does not] support the treatment and release of oil sands process water, including tailings," as MCFN director of government and industry relations, Melody Lepine noted in Potkins' article. As every vinyl collector knows, a wealth of music ? a significant part of our creative history ? was lost when the music industry shifted online. The same holds true when it comes to newspapers and magazines. Countless articles and photographs ? telling snapshots from our journey to the present ? have also disappeared forever, since the big shift from in-print to online journalism.

Thankfully, a great deal of these historical treasures are still out there, slowly deteriorating in the bottom of a box at a yard sale or thrift store; waiting for us to appreciate what they have to offer our future.