

Point of View by Ralph Pohlman

Request For Phone Raises The Flag

Ocala, Fla. -- For those of you who don't spend a lot of time in the United States, I am here to tell you there have been some changes since 9/11.

First of all, much as I may like it or feel at home in the U.S., (after all, three of my kids were born there, as was my father), I am, in fact, a Canadian with a beard and, therefore, a possible hairy-footed, cigarette smuggling, mad-cow-disease and anthrax-carrying, Taliban-supporting, non-resident alien. That has never been so forcefully pointed out as it has been recently, meaning since 9/11.

The evidence is sometimes subtle, but I'll give you the gimlet-eyed response to my attempt to get a phone installed last year in Ocala, Fla. Despite having a phone the past three years, the rules have changed. We are in an area where everybody has Sprint. It seems that the various phone companies have carved up the state of Florida.

We are in Sprint territory, so I phoned Sprint and ordered a phone, expecting I'd get it tomorrow, like in the past. The guy on the other end of the line wanted my Social Security number.

I explained I was a Canadian and didn't have a Social Security number. Well, that bit of information brought a cool response. He now sounded like a CIA agent who suspected my real name might actually be Osama bin Whoever.

Without a Social Security number I was an unknown quantity, an outlander, and they weren't about to put a dangerous instrument like a telephone into my hands that easily. I'd have to apply and the process would take three weeks to a month. I'm not kidding.

But, I explained, I had

recently phoned for water and hydro and they had accepted my Canadian Social Insurance number, plus I have an account at the Bank of America. (I hoped that would sound impressive. It's a very tiny account, admittedly, but I didn't say that.)

He wasn't interested. They would mail me a form to fill out, which I was then to take someplace and have it notarized, then send it to their office in Kentucky, along with two pieces of photo ID and the name and phone number of a U.S. citizen who could vouch for me.

"Could it be couriered?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "you can courier the completed form to us if you wish, but we'll be mailing it to you." Once head office had "processed" the form and approved it, then I may get a phone. This was the only way, I was assured. A minimum of three weeks.

I phoned again the next day, but this time got a woman who sort of apolo-

gized for the inconvenience but said this was the new policy, which she had to follow. "However," she said, "you might try going to our office in Ocala, bringing your photo ID, and see how it goes."

So, I drove to Ocala, taking my passport and driver's license. It went very well, thank you very much, and I now have a phone. But be prepared to jump through a few hoops. I know, I'm a Canadian, but I'm not a member of the Iran-Iraq-North Korea "axis of evil" that President George Bush warned of in his state of the union address. Snubbed again, eh?

Maybe we could create a triumvirate by joining up with Sweden and Australia to form the "axis-of-nations-that-are-actually-just-nice-but-sometimes-secretly-have-nasty-thoughts-about-America." The fact is, Americans don't really think about Canada very often. As former prime minister Kim Campbell said in a

speech, "Americans view Canadians as 'unarmed Americans with a health plan.'"

There is not much chance of forgetting where I am these days, since the business to be in, in the U.S., is the flag business. I see more American flags than Mel Lastman has hair implants. They are everywhere (flags, not Mel's implants), and not just the usual places like flagpoles or houses, either. I see them on cars (sometimes three or four per car), construction sites, dumpsters, lampposts, mobile homes and an occasional forehead.

I'm told the Star Spangled Banner has become the most popular tattoo, often applied to very personal parts of the anatomy. I'll have to check on that. I expect soon to read that an exhibitionist has been arrested for stepping out of the bushes and waving his raised flag tattoo at a passerby.

But I'll bet he has a phone!

FAITH & LIFE

A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE

by Richard Reesor



My family and I are in Uganda doing a four-month voluntary service assignment with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). At a recent retreat, we met with the other MCC workers in Uganda. We shared experiences and talked about situations in other parts of the country. We learned that much of MCC's work in Uganda is involved with peace making in the regions of the country that are involved in conflict.

We heard many disturbing facts about the conflict in Uganda. The government of Uganda has been involved in a war with an internal rebel army for the past 17 years. We learned that one of the tactics of the rebels is to raid villages to steal food and supplies and to abduct children. Their prime targets are children aged 7 to 14. These children are taken into rebel camps. Once there, they are exposed to brutal violence and desensitized to killing. Children of this age do not have a well-developed sense of morality and can easily be influenced to become vicious fighters. We learned that more than 95% of the rebel army was developed this way. After a period of training, these child rebels are given automatic rifles and taken into combat with the Ugandan Army with tragic consequences.

This tragedy is not unique to Uganda. From reading I have done while living here I have learned that children are being used as fighters in other conflicts throughout Africa by both rebel armies and official government armies. I also learned that arms manufacturers have identified this emerging market for guns and have developed lighter, junior size automatic weapons more suitable for use by children. (The Shadow of the Sun, Ryszard Apuscinski.)

My discussions and readings have raised some questions for me. Clearly, such an unjust war has no defensible reason to continue. Therefore, I wonder who is benefitting from the perpetuation of this conflict? What companies are profiting from the sale of arms and ammunition to both armies? Which leaders, locally and internationally, are benefitting politically from this conflict? Will a violent response

by the military have any realistic chance of creating a lasting peace? These questions could be asked about any of the world's conflicts and specifically of the Canadian Government as it considers its involvement in the "War on Terrorism" and the war on Iraq.

The Mennonite Church teaches that as people of God, we are called to respond to violence in a non-violent way. As a Mennonite, I believe that Jesus' teaching to respond to violence with passive resistance continues to be relevant to our world today. As I said above, I recently spent time with MCC personnel who are working in the midst of this Ugandan conflict. These are brave people. They wear no armour. Their only weapon is the force of their words and deeds. These people are not like military commanders sitting behind a desk issuing commands. Rather, they are working on the ground in the communities where the war is being fought. They are providing relief to displaced people. They are grieving with people who have lost friends and family. They are working at initiating talks between the Ugandan military and the rebel commanders to develop trust needed for eventual peace talks. Which style of conflict resolution do you favour?

Feedback? We'd love to hear your comments. Please contact us at:

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Keeping Canada clean strategy

For the third year in a row, Vacmaster was named Dealer of the Year for its sales of Beam products, and made the Beam Top 20 Club. It is the first Canadian dealer to be named a member of the Beam Million Dollar Club. The dealership owes its success to a strong emphasis on high quality customer service, said Joe Bond.

Although Vacmaster is located on Bullock Drive in Markham, many of its customers come from the Whitchurch-Stouffville area, said Mr. Bond. "I would like to thank people in Stouffville for all their support, because they are a big part of the reason for our success."

March Break heritage program

Children are invited to attend a three-part workshop at Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum March 12 to 14 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Participants will explore a variety of heritage activities and crafts and will make their own origami wreath and beaded flower to take home. They will also have an opportunity to hone their cooking skills in the Brown House kitchen. The cost is \$25 and includes all materials and a light snack each day. Museum members receive a 20 percent discount.

For information and registration, call the museum's toll-free line at 1-888-290-0337.

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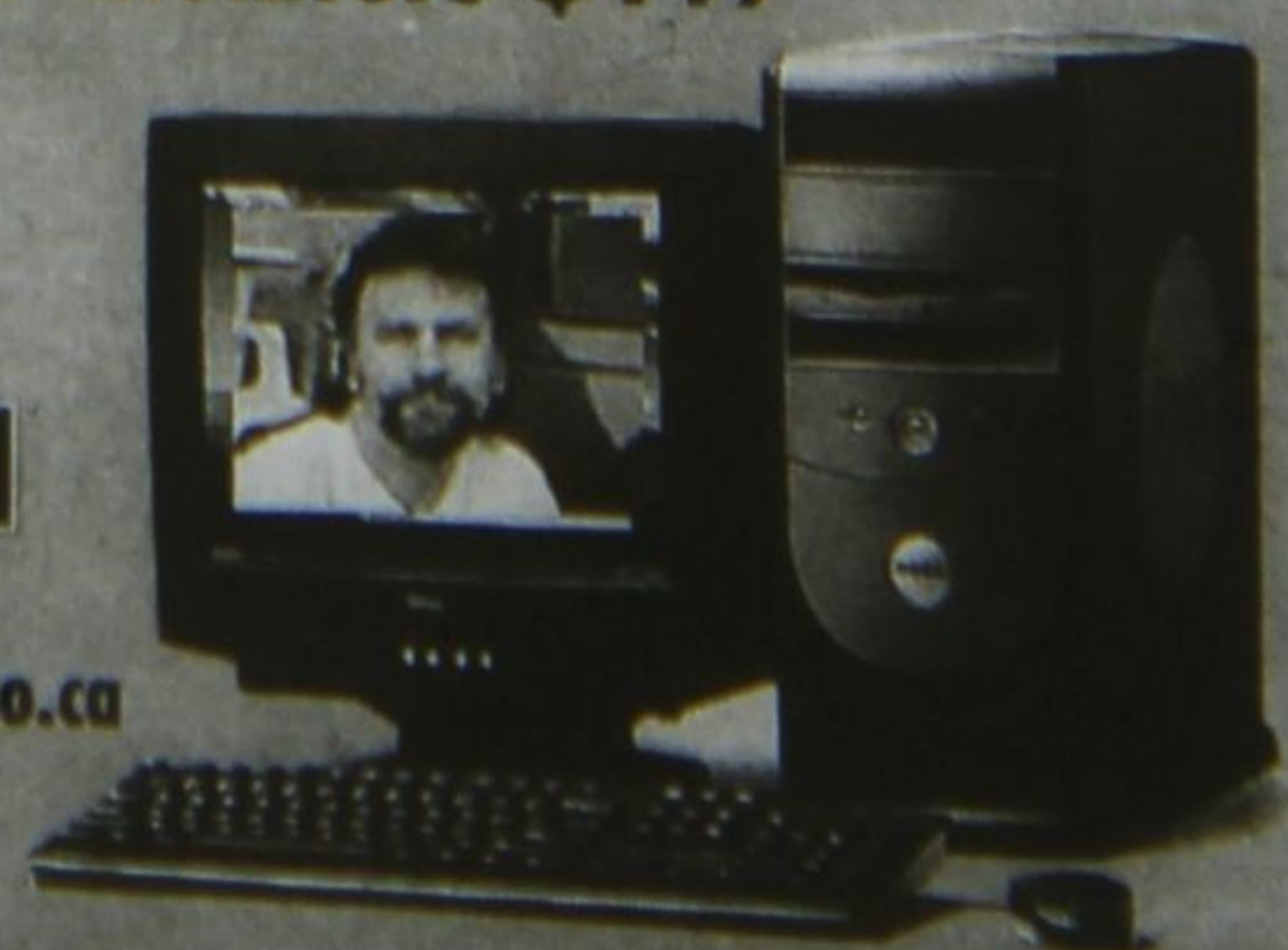
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