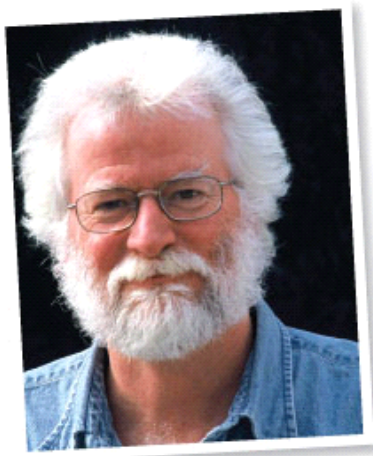


9/1/2019

Moons, Mulligans & Meetings

John Friel



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As I type, four noteworthy events are recent history.

The biggest is the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 lunar landing. Speaking for everyone who was alive then (yes, I'm authorized), I can attest that it doesn't seem possible that it was THAT long ago. But it was. We really are that old.

Next comes the British Open golf tournament, played in Ireland for the first time in decades. Numbers three and four are more at home in a hort publication: Cultivate'19 in Columbus and the Perennial Plant Association's National Symposium in Chicago. Let's start on the moon and work our way down.

Everyone within a decade or so either way from my age recalls where we were when man first set foot on the moon. It was a defining moment, one

that united a world at odds with itself.

The audacious act of landing earthlings on the moon and returning them safely home ranks to many as mankind's greatest achievement. That day, people around the globe felt a kinship that transcended geography and politics. George Will called it "a global sense of humanity's common destiny."

We gazed upon the moon with new eyes; it seemed that, yes, a space-suited Neil Armstrong, standing a quarter of a million miles away, represented us all when he said, "the Eagle has landed," then took "one giant leap for mankind." Half a century on, those simple words still reverberate with a power that stirred, and stirs, strong emotions.

Three missions later, astronaut Alan Shepherd snuck a club onboard and added three golf balls to our lunar legacy. Which makes a tenuous segue to our next event.

In the British Isles where it was born, golf is no mere sport. It's more like a religion and the Open is its defining moment. It is to golf what Easter is to Christianity. Winners occupy a special place in the hearts of the faithful every year, but the 148th edition was extraordinary. It was the first time since 1951 that the tournament was played anywhere but mainland England and an Irishman won it.

The Royal Portrush course is located in Northern Ireland, the six-County corner that considers itself part of England. Shane Lowry hails from Ireland, a.k.a. the Republic of Ireland, the nation that occupies all the rest of that tragic,

glorious island. To many, that meant he's from the wrong side of the divide. It didn't matter.

Alistair Tait wrote in Golfweek, "Lowry carried the hopes of an entire island ... and delivered." His dominant, ecstatic victory erased that infamous invisible line and, for a brief shining moment, united two bitterly divided nations. Both Irelands hung on his every shot, rejoicing as one when he hoisted the sacred claret jug. The Troubles were, briefly, forgotten.

Which brings us from the greens to the green industry.

Cultivate and the comparatively tiny PPA Symposium both bore out the words of nurseryman Alan Jones. "There aren't many industries that will share information about what you do and how you do it," Alan said. "Your major competitor can be one of your best friends."

Compared to the cosmic aura and international implications of the first two events, horticultural conferences may seem small potatoes. But which of these phenomena has the greatest impact on your, and my, everyday life?

Sports heroes come and go. No one on earth has seen fit to return to the moon. But lasting lessons are learned and real relationships forged when an industry comes together, when competitors stand together and recognize one another as colleagues. Eye-to-eye and hand-in-hand beats toe-to-toe and head-to-head every time. **GP**

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