

*This note was attached to a Christmas gift to Palliser managers in 2002. The gift was a set of maple trays produced in our own factory and speaks to the symbolism inherent in our wood products.*

## **SYMBOLS OF WOOD**

## **Christmas 2002**

My 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated in November. It seemed appropriate to celebrate the actual day in Angkor Wat, the brooding stone remains of the mysterious Khmer Kingdom. We were told that the palaces and homes were built of wood and have all been reclaimed by the jungle – leaving behind the massive stone temples. Wood is a pervasive natural substance that has served humanity well – but does not easily pass the test of time.

We have many symbols made of wood. The Christmas event and the story of Jesus begin and end with powerful symbols. Jesus was placed in what was presumably a wooden manger at birth and experienced a painful death on a wooden cross. Wood is part of every culture and home and we take it for granted. Wood is also very much at the center of our industry and business.

Wood is natural, warm, comfortable. Wood can represent tradition and strength but can also be modern. I chose wood as the medium of the Christmas gift that Leona and I select each year for our colleagues and friends. We chose maple as a material that represents Canada and a set of serving plates to represent home, stability and safety. We also decided to create the gift inside our own factories.

Wood is a perfect metaphor for both our company and world. We build on our traditions and values but find our external environment increasingly unstable. Many of our institutions, values and assumptions that seemed to be of stone turned out to be vulnerable to the termites of greed, violence and intolerance. The world has become more integrated but less safe. Places and ideas that our ancestors had never heard about now transfer their feuds and anger into our own lives.

Those with the power to shape events seem unable to use their strength for the benefit of all. Those who harbor anger or resentment can now affect our security out of proportion to their numbers or cause. Along the way the victims are often those with neither the power nor the anger. We started this birthday trip in Angkor Wat and ended in beautiful Bali. Beautiful to the eyes and the senses but filled with kind but bewildered people who have seen their livelihood destroyed and cannot understand why. Hotels are empty and the shops are full of wonderful crafts but no customers. (written immediately after the Bali bombing)

We also visited Jepara in Java – probably the greatest center of wood carving in the world. They depend substantially on the regular arrival of foreign buyers to select product. The foreign buyers are afraid and shipments are down as much as 70%.

Wood is warm and beautiful and serves us well. Wood is also vulnerable like the people in many parts of the world. North Americans have the choice to simply stay home for a while but are otherwise little affected. A little war may even be good for the economy. Others watch bewildered as the policies and actions of others remove them from the global economy they have been encouraged to enter.

We hope this gift of wood will represent friendship and the safety of home. May it also be a reminder of our collective vulnerability this Christmas.

Sincerely,

Art and Leona DeFehr 2002