

## 1. Pass the Salt

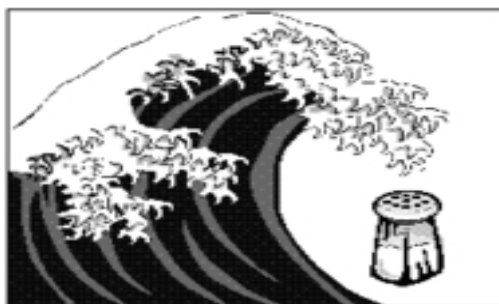
by Christine Broz

**A** <sup>1</sup>What comes from water but makes you thirsty? <sup>2</sup>Salt. <sup>3</sup>You may think those tiny crystals are no big deal. <sup>4</sup>However, salt has been one of the most valuable minerals in the history of man.

**B** <sup>5</sup>The human body needs salt to survive. <sup>6</sup>Salt helps send nerve signals to and from the brain. <sup>7</sup>Salt helps nutrients move around the body. <sup>8</sup>It helps muscles work properly, and it aids digestion.

**C** <sup>9</sup>In ancient times, you could not buy salt at the local store. <sup>10</sup>People found it near coastal areas where ocean water evaporated and left salt deposits on the ground or underground. <sup>11</sup>It was also found in the meat of animals and fish. <sup>12</sup>Many of the first cities began in areas where there was a natural supply of salt.

**D** <sup>13</sup>Salt allowed people to keep food longer. <sup>14</sup>It was used to preserve meat, fish, and vegetables so they could be stored and eaten later. <sup>15</sup>Storing food made it possible for large groups of people to survive. <sup>16</sup>The stored-up food kept them from starving during a poor harvest. <sup>17</sup>Some of the foods we eat today—such as sausage, cheese, olives, corned beef, and soy sauce—were invented long ago by using lots of salt.



**E** <sup>18</sup>Salt was so precious in some areas that it was used like money to trade goods and services. <sup>19</sup>Marco Polo, the explorer, noted the importance of the salt trade routes that crossed China. <sup>20</sup>In Tibet, he saw tiny pressed cakes of salt used as coins. <sup>21</sup>Greek slave traders traded salt for slaves. <sup>22</sup>African traders crossed the Sahara Desert to trade salt for gold. <sup>23</sup>Roman soldiers were even paid with salt. <sup>24</sup>This is where the word *salary* comes from.

**F** <sup>25</sup>At different times in history, people had to pay the government a tax on salt. <sup>26</sup>These salt taxes paid for wars and built empires. <sup>27</sup>As early as 2200 B.C., a Chinese emperor taxed salt. <sup>28</sup>The British empire was supported by a salt tax. <sup>29</sup>Napoleon brought back the salt tax after the French Revolution to pay for his European wars. <sup>30</sup>The Erie Canal in New York was paid for in part by a salt tax.

**G** <sup>31</sup>The value of salt is often taken for granted, just as the water we drink and the air we breathe. <sup>32</sup>But without salt, we could not live.