

1. Pass the Salt

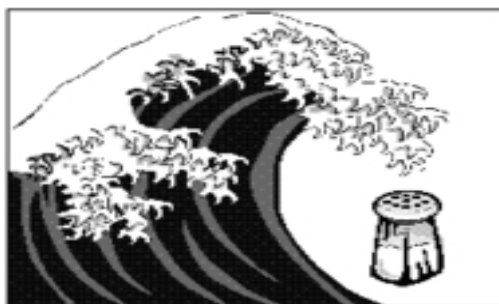
by Christine Broz

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

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

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

D ¹³Salt allowed people to keep food longer. ¹⁴It was used to preserve meat, fish, and vegetables so they could be stored and eaten later. ¹⁵Storing food made it possible for large groups of people to survive. ¹⁶The stored-up food kept them from starving during a poor harvest. ¹⁷Some 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 ¹⁸Salt was so precious in some areas that it was used like money to trade goods and services. ¹⁹Marco Polo, the explorer, noted the importance of the salt trade routes that crossed China. ²⁰In Tibet, he saw tiny pressed cakes of salt used as coins. ²¹Greek slave traders traded salt for slaves. ²²African traders crossed the Sahara Desert to trade salt for gold. ²³Roman soldiers were even paid with salt. ²⁴This is where the word *salary* comes from.

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

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