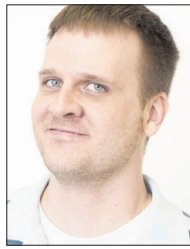


# Trading in a Nintendo controller for a table saw

**James Culic**  
Columnist



**T**he burly man with the hard hat and the thick beard asked if anyone had any construction experience.

No one else did, so I raised my hand.

“This one time, my father-in-law asked me to cut a piece of wood for him, so I used that saw that spins around in circles like this,” I said, waving my hands around in a loop like a dweeb.

Burly construction man laughed, then looked nervous.

“Alright then,” he said.

And with that, ‘Niagara This Week: Construction Team Alpha’ was ready to deploy, and build a house. Well, sorta.

The house is mostly built, but we helped. Well, sorta.

We did some odd jobs and stuff, but we didn’t mess anything up. Well, sorta.

We messed up a few things, but nothing

too severe, at least according to Craig Brown, the aforementioned man with the lush beard who is running the construction site for the latest Habitat for Humanity project in Niagara. So far, Habitat Niagara has built 52 of their Humanity homes in Niagara, and against their better judgement, they invited me and a couple of my newsroom compatriots out to their new project site in Fort Erie for a build day, alongside some fellow media folks from Cogeco.

My tools are an arcade stick and a keyboard; not so much a drill or a table saw. I build scale model tanks, airplanes, and anime robots; not decks or bathrooms. In my formative years, I was more occupied learning how to install Windows XP on a freshly partitioned 40GB hard drive – not so much with learning how to install actual windows on a house.

As a result, I’ve not spent much time hitting a hammer. Is it ‘hit a hammer’ or ‘swing a hammer’?

I suppose the hammer isn’t really being ‘hit’, so ‘swing’ is probably the correct verb here, I guess, unless you were hitting an actual hammer with a second hammer, then you could make a case for ‘hitting’ rather than ‘swinging’ but I digress.

Back to my sudden interest in swinging and hitting hammers; the latest Habitat home is being built for a delightful Spanish family who

now live in Fort Erie.

The Flores family had to flee their homeland of El Salvador a few years ago because gang violence came knocking on their door. Their lives were in danger, so the family of six came to Canada looking for a better life, and they found one here in Niagara.

And now, just a few days before Christmas – if everything stays on schedule – they will become the latest family to be given a Habitat home. Although, “given a home” isn’t quite right.

One of the biggest misconceptions about Habitat for Humanity is that they just “give” away free houses. They don’t.

Before the keys to any Habitat house are handed over, the family must complete 500 hours of sweat equity into community projects. Often times this means helping build the very home they will be moving into. Habitat is pretty strict about that policy also. You don’t put in 500 hours, you don’t get the keys. No exceptions.

Secondly, once the house is built, it’s appraised at market value and a mortgage is drawn up between Habitat and the family. The key difference is that mortgage payments are geared directly towards the family’s income level, and not dictated by some faceless fat cat banker in a swanky suit who punched a few

numbers into an algorithm which then spit out an unsustainable repayment schedule.

The phrase “a hand up, not a handout” is a bit of a cheesy cliché, but in the Habitat Niagara case, it’s pretty spot on. The Habitat home recipients aren’t getting something for nothing. They work hard for their home, and they repay its value, just like anyone else.

One of the other incredible things about Habitat homes, particularly the ones I’ve seen here in Niagara, is the way in which the local community supports the projects.

The wooden beams of the Flores’ future home are filled with hand drawn notes of well wishes and supportive messages. Many of those beams were installed at the hands of volunteers (with more expertise than myself) who took time out of their busy schedules to spend a day or two at the site and help build a happy home for a family looking for nothing but a nice place to raise their kids.

In Fort Erie, those kids just might wanna be a bit more careful than usual when using the railing at the stairs on the back deck. I helped build those, and my carpentry skills leave a lot to be desired.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week’s reporter in the southern tier. Yell at him on Twitter @jamesculic or send him angry emails to jculic@niagarathisweek.com*

## ■ Letters

### Open letter to ‘neighbour’

Someone decided he or she had nothing better to do than to repeatedly report us to the bylaw of the small town we live.

We were reported because we have some overgrown weeds on the back of our country property. I will clarify that we do cut our grass

weekly, my husband trims the yard and I do try to make our flowerbeds as weed-free as possible. But at the back of our property are some tall weeds growing, much like most people in the country from what I can tell. My husband and I both grew up in this small town, and I know for certain both of us had weeds growing on our properties as kids. However, weeds aside, we

had great memories growing up here. We had awesome neighbours who helped each other out when they needed it. The type of neighbours you could ask to borrow some eggs if you ran out while you were in the middle of baking cookies or the types of neighbours who would take the young neighbour girl under their wing to teach her how to paint from a young age.

We have three young boys that keep us busy. Most days I am lucky if I have the chance to shower. My husband heads to work at 5 a.m. and returns around 5 p.m. We do our best to have dinner together as a family, and then we might have an hour together as a family before our kids go to bed.

**Continued on Page 12**

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# Easter egg equality breeding a generation of lazy kids

**James Culic**  
Columnist



**E**aster is probably the strangest and least understood holiday on the calendar.

Not the Jesus resurrection religious aspect, that part is pretty clear, but everything else about the holiday is a baffling assortment of various myths and traditions. Even the word Easter itself is a mystery, and historians aren't quite sure where it comes from. Most translations of the Bible don't even contain the word Easter at all. Nearest anyone can tell, the word comes from a pagan figure called Eostre who was celebrated as the goddess of spring by northern European Saxons a few centuries ago, though, most historians agree that's a guess at best.

The whole Easter bunny/chocolate egg thing has an even more confusing origin story, which once again, nobody is even 100 per cent sure about.

The most credible theory on the Easter bunny timeline begins with German immigrants who landed in America in the 1700s. They believed in a mythical creature called Oschter Haws, and children were encouraged to build nests around their homes on Easter weekend so that this magical bunny could go around laying chocolate eggs in them. Over the years, Oschter Haws became Easter Bunny and egg nests became baskets, and there you go, a tradition is born.

In my reporting travels, I've covered dozens of different Easter egg hunts, where I've seen all manner of Machiavellian antics go down.

I've witnessed parents push past children and scoop up dozens of eggs for their own kids, I've seen little boys rip eggs from the clutches of smaller boys, I've seen kids bust an ankle right out the starting gate of the hunt and scream like an NFL running back who blew out his ACL and was forced to watch from the sidelines as all his chocolate

dreams were snapped up by more able bodied Easter athletes.

The bottom line is that public Easter egg hunts are a vicious, cutthroat affair where the ruthless pursuit of chocolatey goodness teaches kids that there are no rules in candy warfare.

Or at least, that's how it's *supposed* to work.

While covering my third and final egg hunt of the weekend down in southern Niagara on the weekend, I witnessed this noble tradition get twisted and perverted into something else entirely.

Down in Port Colborne this year, they ran some kinda hippie feelgoodery socialist egg hunt chicanery where kids were doled out chocolate eggs in equal measure.

Here's how this scheme went down: instead of gathering chocolate eggs, the kids searched for plastic eggs, then exchanged them at the end of the hunt for chocolate versions, however, the candy treats were dished out in equal quantities, regardless of how many plastic eggs the child managed to pick up.

That means the hard-working hunter who

gathered 50 eggs received the same chocolate compensation as the lazy little dude who only bothered to grab three eggs. This display of egg entitlement is sending the absolute wrong message to children.

By forcing kids into a system with redistribution of chocolate wealth, we're essentially teaching our kids that it doesn't matter how hard you work, the government will simply take from the rich and give to the poor.

So who is to blame for this egg hunt abomination? Obviously, it's Justin Trudeau's fault. His camp counsellor attitude, his focus on equality and social justice; it's bleeding its way into the fabric of society and distorting our once great tradition of forcing kids to throw elbows and uppercuts for sixty cents worth of oblong chocolate.

If we're going to make this country great again like our neighbours to the south, we need a new leader, and we need to untether the reins of free market chocolate capitalism and let Easter egg freedom fly.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week's reporter in the southern tier. Yell at him on Twitter @jamesculic or send him angry emails to jculic@niagarathisweek.com*

## ● Letters

### Proving the non-existent not possible

*Re. Prove God doesn't exist, Letter, April 6:*

This letter had an old standby for devout religious believers: 'prove there isn't a god...' As the retired founder and president of Niagara Secular Humanists, I have heard that expression only too often.

We have a simple answer for it: "we cannot prove the non-existence of anything that does not actually exist!"

To us (non-believers), all religions and gods were established when humanity had no scientific knowledge or very little of it, and often false science without proof.

A lot of it was based on hearsay without any modern communication – hundreds and

thousands of years ago. Religious belief to us is, therefore, invented by people who could not know any better and it is not scientific fact or "truth."

We often believe in something simply because we don't know any better until someone can prove it to be a scientific fact or not – even today. Scientists often have to update or rewrite previous findings and usually do, but

we have come a very, very long way during the past 100 to 200 years alone, thanks to thousands of international scientists – astronomers, medical research, paleontologists, and many, many more, who often spend a lifetime to find the right answers.

In the end, science always wins over religious belief.

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# Properly prepare yourself and your pet for the 2024 eclipse

**James Culic**  
Columnist



**M**ove over, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, there's a new pasty, bespeckled white guy joining the billionaire club: me.

So, you probably saw that solar eclipse this week, right? Then you might have also heard about the hottest selling product for the last few weeks, the solar eclipse sunglasses. Manufacturers couldn't keep up with demand and the glasses were flying off the proverbial shelf. People were even reselling their solar eclipse glasses on eBay for big bucks because the supply and demand were so out of whack.

But did you know that your pet needs solar eclipse glasses also? According to some popular social media posts going around Facebook and Twitter, there is a very real threat of your mangy little mutt dog or your adorable little kitty going blind because of the solar eclipse.

Is there any science or facts behind this shocking claim? Of course not. Does that matter? Obviously not.

If people are silly enough to believe that, they're probably gullible enough to spend \$19.99 on my Pet Protector Eclipse Shades (patent pending). I'm gonna be rich.

Of course, in reality, dogs and cats and other animals aren't going to go blind during the eclipse. No animal is dumb enough to stare at the sun long enough to

do damage to their eyes. Solar eclipses have been happening for millions of years, and animals have been around all that time, not giving a damn about it. You don't see herds of cows wandering around after the eclipse because they all went blind. Birds don't drop from the sky in droves because their little retinas exploded during the eclipse.

You don't have to believe me, though. According to statement from NASA, there is absolutely no chance of your pet going blind during an eclipse because Rex or Fluffy was so enraptured by the glory of the cosmos that it stared directly at the sun. According to NASA, the solar eclipse is exactly the same as any other day from your dog's point of view. But hey, what would NASA know about the solar system.

When I posted my thoughts about these shenanigans on Twitter earlier this week, someone responded by telling me I was wrong, and directed me to some crummy pseudo-science blog post about how the solar eclipse is going to make your cat's eyeballs explode.

Look, if you'd rather get your news from RealCoolScience.com or from the Backstreet Boys' official Facebook fan page, then hey, by all means, go ahead and be misinformed. But don't show me some dude's internet ramblings as proof of your cockamamie conspiracies.

My wife often tells me that I "ruin people's fun with facts," like when I wrote about how the so-called "super moon" isn't a real thing. To me, the truth is always more interesting than the fiction.

Like how the sun is absolutely no more dangerous during an eclipse than it is at any other time. It's no more powerful or damaging to look at the sun during an



**I made sure to outfit my cat with some solar eclipse glasses so that we could watch the wonders of the cosmos without his little kitty eyeballs bursting into flames.**

eclipse than during a bright sunny day. The problem is that during an eclipse, people tend to stare at the sun for much longer than they should.

But given the hysterical reaction to this week's eclipse, you'd think the sun was raining down fire and acid during the eclipse. Alongside people sheltering their pets indoors, public pools across Niagara were closed for hours during the eclipse, and Niagara EMS sent out safety tips. What was the hot safety tip? Don't stare at the sun too long. Wicked, thanks for that one.

The next eclipse is in 2024 and my

advice for when that rolls around is to take a good long look at it, because pretty soon, there won't be any more of them. The moon is actually drifting away from the Earth at a rate of about four centimetres per year, which means our planet will experience its last solar eclipse in about 600 million years. So enjoy that next one, and oh, don't forget to buy my special glasses for your dog.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week's reporter in the southern tier. Yell at him on Twitter @jamesculic or send him angry emails to [jculic@niagarathisweek.com](mailto:jculic@niagarathisweek.com)*

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