

# Letter: wonderful time

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decorated my float and the police escort - they did a wonderful job of taking me around town and through the hospital parking lot.

My elf Natalie was telling me that the wind was colder than at the North Pole, she is sensitive to that sort of thing, so to all of you who participated by coming downtown or being on a float, well done! I hope you where bundled up nice and tight.

There was an amazing crowd at the tree lighting with a wonderful sing along of O Christmas tree, then we counted down and with the power of Christmas spirit the tree lit up in wonderful colours.

The reindeer had a wonderful time playing with the alpacas at Forest Cove Farm while waiting for me.

I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year, little ones remember get to bed early on Christmas eve and dream of all the great things you will do in the coming year.

**Santa**

(Dear editor: Santa left me this note before he flew off to the North Pole. Georges Martin)

## BLUE SKIES

# Premature Christmacation

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

At the time of this writing there's a Christmas carol playing on the radio and at the time of this writing the month on the calendar is November.

Which means that, at the time of this writing, Christmas is still 26 days, or nearly a full month away which means, in turn, that it's far too early to be playing Christmas carols at the time of this writing.

Worse still, I have it on good authority that the Town of Blind River held its Santa Claus parade on Saturday, November 12, which was the day after Remembrance Day and that, in my books, is not only way too early but also more than just a trifle disrespectful.

Now when I say I have it on good authority, I mean I garnered that information from a former newspaper colleague of mine who told me he had to take pictures of the Santa Claus parade in Blind River on that way too early calendar date of November 12.

And when I say he was a former colleague of mine what I mean by that is he was my editor at a paper in a small town far, not Blind River, far away, 11 or 12 lifetimes ago. And he and I we drank and we drank and we drank and we drank.

My mum used to tell me the story about how old Billy Coleman told a judge at his court case this one time that he drank enough to float a ship on the corks alone.

Well that's how much my editor and I used to drink, far, far away, 11 or 12 lifetimes ago.

I liked old Billy Coleman. He bought me a hat from the gas station in Swisha this one time when I was a little boy waiting for my parents to come out of the first hotel where they were drinking and drinking and drinking.

When they finally stopped drinking, I asked mum on the way home if old Billy Coleman was related to us and she shot me the most sobering look which I found ironic considering she wasn't.

Sober that is, but I am now at the time of this writing while listening to a Christmas carol on the radio way too early in the calendar year and at rare times of the year when my editor and I weren't drinking and drinking and drinking we also were sober for reasons which escape me now.

One of those times was when we had to take pictures of the Santa Claus parade in that small town, far, far away, but the nice thing about that, apart from us having to be sober, was the

Santa Claus parade took place just before Christmas, rather than one day after the one day of the year set aside to honour the sacrifices of Canada's military men and women.

And, for reasons which escape me now, my editor always assigned me to perch on the roof of the Royal Bank, to get aerial shots as it were, of the parade, while he took pictures from the safety of the ground.

Looking back, which is all I ever do, I'm unsure if he had me perch up there to test a) my fear of heights or b) whether I was sober or not, but I do know for sure that if you're looking today for somebody to take aerial shots of a Santa Claus parade from the roof of a bank, well, I'm your man.

But if you are indeed looking for me to do that today I will have to tell you no, in no uncertain terms, because it's far too early in the calendar year to be holding a Santa Claus parade.

Or to be playing Christmas carols on the radio or any other electronic medium for that matter.

Why people jump the gun to prematurely celebrate the birth of Jesus nearly a full calendar month ahead of his actual birthday is beyond me.

If people insist on putting the cart before the horse in such fashion then I say they should also celebrate the death of Jesus by boiling up eggs 26 days ahead of his actual deathday and see how things get to smelling by the time Easter finally rolls around.

Now me I was born five days before Jesus, on December 20 and, yes, thank you, I do look pretty good for being almost 2022 years old.

My skin still fits, as it were, but fact of the matter is I never got much in the way of birthday parties when I was growing up because the day of my birth fell so close to Christmas, and because of that I made damn sure Jesus wasn't invited to the few I had.

Looking back, for I must, I do remember one birthday when I was still in a high chair and what I remember it for is my one-eyed Uncle George encouraging me to blow out the candles on my cake.

I asked mum many years later how Uncle George lost an eye and she told me his wife attacked him with the broken end of a beer bottle this one time when they'd been drinking and drinking and drinking. Things like that can happen when people celebrate Christmas prematurely.

With all the above written and done I'll end this now by subscribing to the old adage that if you can't beat them you may as well join them.

So Merry Christmas up in heaven, old Billy Coleman. Hat's off to you! If you see my folks tell them I say hello.

And keep an eye out for Uncle George too.

### IN 2021 CLIENTS WERE COUNSELLED FOR

MENTAL HEALTH	150
POVERTY	92
RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN	137
HOUSING	67
ADDICTION (ALCOHOL, DRUGS)	39
TRAUMA / STRESS	80
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	115
BASIC NEEDS ASSISTANCE	150
GRIEF / LOSS	37

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- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Breakdown</li> <li>• Family Violence</li> <li>• Violence Against Women</li> <li>• Trauma, Grief and Stress</li> <li>• Suicide Ideation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal / Emotional Difficulties</li> <li>• Past and Present Sexual Abuse</li> <li>• Youth-Support / Crisis Programs</li> <li>• Employee Assistance Programs</li> <li>• Addictions and Mental Health</li> </ul> |
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# The not-so-miracle of modern flight

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

Whenever Facebook informs me that one of my friends has a birthday I do the math in my head to figure out when they were conceived.

It's pretty simple math, really, rarely necessitating the need for me to count on fingers and toes.

Which is a good thing, for my fingers and toes are far too pretty and precious to be used for mundane tasks like addition and subtraction, and strangers generally don't like it when I stop them on the street asking if I can count on their fingers and toes instead of my own, especially in the wintertime when that necessitates them having to remove their mittens, boots and woollen socks.

No, the way it works is I figure if the average human pregnancy lasts nine months I simply jump forward three months to determine dates of conception.

So, if Facebook were to inform me on the date of this writing (July 16) that it's the 55th birthday of one of my friends, I'll post a message on that friend's Facebook page saying "Happy Birthday! Your mom and dad had sex with each other, performing acts in bed that would have made Caligula blush, 55 years ago on or about October 16!"

I used to have many friends on Facebook but their numbers are dwindling, not because my friends are dying in great numbers, but rather because nobody likes to be reminded of the fact their parents had it in them, back in the day, the ability to make orgies blush.

Now, in my own case, I was born in December, so, doing simple math, I calculate that my parents had sex with each other that year on or about my mom's birthday in March, leaving me to conclude that my dad was such a cheap bastard he eschewed buying her a birthday present for a romp in the hay instead, because hay was so cheap back in 1967 that people were practically giving the stuff away.

Calculating conceptions is easy, though, compared to trying to figure out airplane departures these days.

You may consider that a very random segue from all the parental sex I'd just been writing about, but the wife and I recently flew out west to see our granddaughter and the only turbulence we experienced came while trying to board our planes.

Okay, doing the math I've calculated that my wife's mom and dad had sex with each other on New Year's Eve, back in 1964, leaving me to conclude her dad was a cheap bastard and/or one or both of them were very drunk.

"How's the column about airlines coming along?" the wife just asked me.

"Don't rightly know, babe," I replied. "Everybody's parents are too busy having sex!"

Now I'm not a frequent flyer, but I do enjoy getting high from time to time, and I learned over the course of our trip that the itineraries the airlines send when you first book your tickets are much like stop signs in Quebec, in that they're suggestions more than anything set in stone.

I say that because our flight from Ottawa was, according to the itineraries the airlines sent to us when first we booked our tickets back in March, at a time of the year when people were grudgingly removing their winter footwear to assist in my mathematical calculations, scheduled to leave Ottawa at 6:45 am, arrive in Calgary at 8:54 am, in time for us to catch our connecting flight to Grande Prairie at 10:20 am, arriving there just before noon.

In a perfect world we would have made it to our final destination in Dawson Creek just an hour's straight drive down a very straight road after that.

But it was far from a perfect world that day. Maybe it was a perfect world for future generations of people whose moms and dads were having sex with each other that day, but not for the wife and I, for the airline we were with decided in the wee hours to start telling us to go have sex with ourselves instead.

Booked out of our hotel room, we were, at 4 am, and waiting for a shuttle to take us to the airport when I happened to check my phone for mail, which is weird because I never check the mail for my phone, and there was a notice from the airline saying our departure time from Ottawa had changed from 6:45 am to 7:25 am.

That meant we would be unable to catch our connecting flight in Calgary, which the airline had rescheduled for departure to Grande Prairie to 5:15 pm instead as a result.

Well, maybe it was because of a mighty tailwind, or maybe it was because the stewardess' generous assets were acting like a giant sail, but miracle of miracles, we made it to Calgary with enough time to catch our originally scheduled connecting flight to Grande Prairie.

But when I presented our original boarding passes at the gate in Calgary, Official Little Twit in charge of such things said they were no longer valid and we would have to wait seven hours for our rescheduled flight to Grande Prairie.

"But, but de plane! De plane!" I cried, gesturing out the window to Tattoo that our originally scheduled plane had yet to be boarded and was still sitting there on the tarmac.

Reality, however, did not jibe with whatever Fan-

tasy Island Official Little Twit was living on and so the wife and I were forcibly resigned to spending the next seven hours of our lives in limbo at the Calgary airport.

"Well," I said to the wife as we watched our original connector take flight to Grande Prairie, "it's twenty after ten in the morning so it's way too early to start drinking."

So 10 minutes after that there we were, drinking.

And so I spent the next seven hours at the Calgary airport alternating between drinking and fuming about the fact I hadn't had a cigarette since four o'clock in the morning.

Belligerent and impaired I was, seven of the longest hours of my life later, when it finally came time to board our flight.

And then the pilot of that plane decided to take us on a guided tour of the entire runway system before taking off, causing me to exclaim to the wife and all our fellow passengers that "Oh, great, now the plane is driving us to Grande Prairie!"

The wife she doesn't like public displays of emotion, though she doesn't mind tearing a strip off me in private, and she was in tears by that point, elbowing me and telling me to shut the frig up lest they kick us off the plane.

Long story short, we finally. Finally made it to Grande Prairie and were greeted there by the stepdaughter I hadn't seen in 15 of the longest years of my life, her fiancé, who I had never met in person in all the years of my life and, yes, our granddaughter, who I finally. Finally met for the first time since she was born three years ago.

The painful flight immediately forgotten by that welcoming reception committee, I proceeded to spend the next two weeks in Dawson Creek learning many things about both my granddaughter and Play-Doh, reconnecting with my stepdaughter and connecting with her fiancé.

At the end of two weeks I had to return home here for work but the wife decided to stay on in Dawson Creek for another two weeks, ostensibly to help her daughter out when her fiancé drove back to Fort Mac for a two-week stint, but more likely because she didn't want to fly with me ever again.

My flight back home actually went smooth as silk. There were no changes in departure times and the airline even put me in first class on the flight from Calgary to Ottawa.

It was a different stewardess than the one we had on the way out but while serving me a frittata she still graciously allowed me to comment on her ample assets.

"Big old jet airliner," I sighed to the stewardess, "please don't let me get too carried away!"

Like moms and dads do all the time.



# Municipalities call for return of assessment cycle

Ontario municipalities are calling on the provincial government to update local property assessments following a COVID freeze.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) joined with “industry partners” recently to call on Premier Doug Ford to return to the regular four-year assessment cycle.

Property assessments across the province have been frozen at 2016 levels since 2017.

The regular four-year update to 2020 values that should have taken place in 2021 was cancelled during the pandemic.

The province has not announced when the next assessment cycle update will take place, or what year it will be based on.

“For both municipalities and businesses, a well-functioning and up-to-date assessment system supports strong communities and makes Ontario an attractive place to invest,” AMO says in its latest update.

In a letter to Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy earlier this year, AMO president Colin Best urged the province to “clarify its intentions.”

“A well-functioning, up-to-date assessment system is the foundation of the municipal tax system that supports strong, vibrant, and growing communities,” Best said.

“Ontario’s property tax system works well and provides municipalities with a stable and predictable source of revenue. Just as important, it provides stability and predictability for property taxpayers.”

Best said AMO recognizes “how important it was to pause reassessment during the height of the pandemic.”

“We made sure our members understood it too.”

But he said AMO is now expressing strong support for “a timely return to the assessment cycle.”

“We will continue to work closely with MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation) and with the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the public, media, and municipal councils understand the benefits and the importance of moving forward with the reassessment at this time, and the value to municipalities and taxpayers of a modern, up-to-date, and reliable assessment system,” he said.

Many homeowners may be in for a shock when new property assessment notices are issued, especially in areas like Renfrew County, as property values have roughly doubled since the last update.

But on its website, MPAC says an increase in your property assessment does not mean your property taxes will go up.

“Your property assessment and the property taxes you pay are not the same thing,” it says.

# One ring to rule him all

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

Pictures posted on social media last week showed a person here in town being confronted by a bear while out jogging here in town.

The person, that is, not the bear.

Bears don’t jog. They amble.

Mind you, all the bears I’ve spoken with tell me they would like to jog, but Nike doesn’t manufacture sportswear big enough to fit them. Not even the headbands.

Bears, as a result, are cranky and, just as sure as they s%\*t in the woods (while pining for indoor plumbing and toilets), they are bound to confront people when they see them jogging here in town wearing athletic attire that fits.

Apart from the fact I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day and the wife says I run like a girl, the main reason I don’t jog is so as to not piss off the bears.

It’s much better for my health to sit inside the house with the curtains drawn and drink beer and smoke dope than it is to go outside jogging and get eaten by a bear.

Yeah, I’ll grant you that, given the quantity of dope smoked, I do run the risk of hallucinating that a bear is sitting down with me in the living room, drinking my beer and smoking my dope and using my toilet, but experience has taught me that said bear is just a figment of my imagination and, given enough time, beer and dope, will eventually transform itself into just a fig, which I can then eat, because smoking dope not only makes a boy healthy, wealthy and wise, but also very friggin’ hungry.

Said bear just left my house in a puff of smoke, like it was stepping back into a dream, jogging my memory as to how I first met the wife.

Because just as sure as bears don’t jog but amble, pigs don’t walk but waddle.

That’s what I told the wife when she was 14 and I was 11.

The wife was a pretty 14 and I was a nerdy 11.

The wife’s mom was up from out west visiting my parents on the Wylie Bronson Road and it was a rare occasion indeed back then that pretty 14-year old girls visited nerdy 11-year old boy me on the Wylie Bronson Road and so I took it upon myself to make a positive impression by reading to her from my impressive collection of encyclopedias.

I remember her eyes rolling in a way that I took for true love and then she was gone in a puff of smoke.

Twenty-eight years later she stepped back into my dream and told me I actually had made an impression on her all those years ago, for she had never forgotten the memory of a nerdy 11-year old boy reading to her from an encyclopedia that pigs don’t walk, but waddle.

So, yeah, while it’s good to know I leave a lasting impression on people, rather than just in snowbanks on Saturday nights, fact of the matter is that, with our 16th wedding anniversary looming in a few short weeks, I’ve done gone and lost my wedding ring.

Normally use of the word “looming” wouldn’t be the best way to describe an approaching wedding anniversary.

Dark clouds loom.

So do bears if you’re stupid enough to tick them off by flaunting jogging attire in front of them.

No, wedding anniversaries are things to be celebrated, not feared.

I fear, though, that I may never find my wedding ring again, for it slipped off my ring somewhere between CNL and Rolphton, and that’s the equivalent of finding a blade of hay in a stack of needles.

Still, needle and the damage done and all, I’d appreciate it very much if all you bears out there would keep an eye out for it while you’re trying to avoid joggers.

I know you don’t have good eyesight, but you do possess a keen sense of smell and the ring smells like my ring finger.

First bear that finds it will be treated to an afternoon of drinking beer and smoking dope in my living room, with the curtains drawn of course, for I know you’re shy creatures.

I’ll even let you take a dump in my toilet, it means that much to me.

(Note: “Blue Skies” is a personal column by the author and may not reflect the philosophies or opinions of the NRT or its directors. It may or may not be read as an endorsement of drinking beer, smoking dope, jogging attire, or reading from encyclopedias.)



## SUDOKU SOLUTION

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## CROSSWORD

• FROM PAGE 15

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