

# Messenger EDITORIAL

## MESSENGER EDITORIAL

### How the Grinch stole hockey

And they'll skate, skate, skate, skate, skate. They'll shoot their Who-puck with their Who-hockey sticks. And the sight of that rink is making me sick...

Riverside South may not be the top of Mount Crumpit. But it may as well be. And Cindy Lou Who may not play hockey, but a group of girls in the neighbourhood who love the game do. But a complaint from a grinchy neighbour that a rink in their yard is an eye-sore may make all the Whos down in Whoville all cry 'Boo Hoo!'

For the past five years – since their oldest daughter was four – Cory and Lisa Cosgrove have erected a skating rink in the front yard of their Riverside South home. New this year, they decided to add wooden boards to make it a hockey rink.

"The girls are getting older and the boards serve two purposes," Cory Cosgrove said. "They allow me to build a frame in my yard to fill the water and essentially build a pool for the water to freeze. Secondly, it also allows (our kids) to play hockey."

Before the rink was even completed, Ottawa By-law came knocking on the Cosgrove family door — saying a complaint came in and that the boards would have to be removed by November 29. When warmer weather arrived, By-law phoned the family and gave them an extension, but on December 16 the boards came down.

Because the rink was sitting partly on city property, they family had no control.

Roger Chapman, Director of By-law & Regulatory Services said the concerns included damage to utility lines due to the stakes, and the possible impediment of sight lines by drivers.

The bottom line is if the complaint never came in, the boards would still be up.

In all fairness local politicians did what they could to save the rink. Mayor Jim Watson said the rink could stay — but thought it was in their backyard.

Cosgrove said the neighbour never had a problem with the skating rink, but didn't like the "ugly boards." He hopes to build something the neighbour is okay with, and says if no one is driving a complaint, "I think there may be another rink."

We all hope for a happy ending – with a sound that isn't sad. Why this sound could sound glad. Every Who down in Who-Ville, the tall and the small, could play hockey at the rink, with no boards at all.

You can't stop hockey from coming. Somehow or other, it came just the same.

And if the neighbour has no objections in the least, perhaps they will invite her in for dinner and let her carve the roast beast.

Charlie Senack and Jeff Morris

### The ghost of Christmas concerts past

When I was a kid, I had a hard time with perspective. I guess my most irritating trait as a child was that I thought I was a pretty big deal. And those of you who know me will probably laugh – or not – and note that I never really grew out of that.

Point taken.

But part of that came from the assumption that everything I was involved with was a much bigger deal than it was. I remember in my first year of minor hockey in Prescott, assuming that because my team was called the North Stars, that the Minnesota North Stars owned my rights. I was disillusioned when I found out that wasn't the case.

Clearly, the tyke house league wasn't quite as big of a deal as I thought it was.

And then there was the 1970 Christmas concert at Churchill Public School. We did this song where we were the animals in the manger during the birth of Christ. I was one of four kids in our class selected to do a solo. I was the sheep.

I thought I was a big deal, and to me, the event was a huge deal. All three of the school's classes were taking part, and the gym was going to be packed.

It was a couple of days before my seventh birthday, and I was still at the stage in my life when I couldn't decide if I was going to be a football player or a singing cowboy when I grew up. If I nailed my solo, I was destined to be a star. Maybe I would even get to sing on Hee Haw. Everyone watched Hee Haw on Saturday night before the hockey game. And besides, the Churchill Public School Christmas Concert in Riverview Heights – population 249 (we counted one night and painted the population on the sign) – was a pretty big deal.

Glen Campbell must have been crapping his pants, fully aware that this singing cowboy kid was going to replace him atop the country charts.

When the concert began, the stage lights were shining in our faces. I stared out into the audience but I just saw silhouettes of what seemed like hundreds of people.

We all sang the first verse, and I had solo number three. My stomach fluttered as the first two soloists delivered their verses. My moment was coming. My mouth got dry. I swallowed. I took a deep breath. Here it comes.

*"I, said the sheep with curly horn,  
"I gave Him my wool for His blanket warm;  
"He wore my coat on Christmas morn.  
"I, said the sheep with curly horn."*

And then, just like that, it was on to the next verse and the next nervous member of the

class. I relaxed, brushed my arm against my forehead to wipe off the sweat, and I coasted through the rest of the songs that we sang as a group. We sang 'Oh Come All Ye Faithful' and we sang 'Silent Night' and finished off with 'Away in a Manger.'

And then, the Churchill Christmas Concert of 1970 became nothing but a memory.

Over the years at Churchill, there were a few other Christmas plays and concerts, but that is the one that seems to stand out in my memory. They were usually the same. The class gets on stage, we all took our spots, and we would

#### FROM THE OTHER SIDE

by Jeff Morris



sing a few Christmas songs. Chances are that you may have gone through the same thing as a kid.

But what about the kids of today?

With the exception of the odd Catholic school class, the Christmas concert seems to be a right of passage that has faded away. We have sacrificed one of the most treasured rituals of Canadian generations past out of our fear of offending religious minorities.

Of course, my mind is drifting back to the 1970 Christmas concert. Santa made an appearance, and we all got a chance to visit with him in the reception after the big show.

"It's not the real Santa," one kid said to me just before it was my turn. "You can see the elastic for his beard."

We had a huddle to try to figure out who Santa was that night, and we never did figure it out.

The Grade 5 kids went last. They were the oldest kids in the school. One of them provided another one of those never-gonna-forget-this moments when he hopped up on Santa's knee.

"And what would you like for Christmas this year, young man?"

"Ummm, Hot Wheels... and a carton of smokes. Macdonald Menthol. That's the kind me and my dad smoke."

That one caught Santa off guard, and the poor guy didn't know what to say. And that kid was a really big deal in the school.

Okay, so maybe some customs and traditions are best left behind in 1970.

Churchill Public School was torn down years ago. Where it stood is now just an empty field along Merwin Lane. But every time I drive by there, the memories come flooding back.

Glen Campbell was probably relieved I tried to become a football player instead of a singing cowboy.

I hope this column triggers memories of your Christmas concerts past. Even if your concert wasn't as big of a deal as the one at Churchill was ;)

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### There's no quick fix

There is no easy fix to the problem with Ontario's waiting list for autism services. There simply isn't enough money to solve the problem, and there are not enough specialists and resources.

And overhauling the existing system, which was clearly broken, was a no-win situation no matter how you look at it.

Our former MPP, Lisa MacLeod, has always held the issue of autism close to her heart. Now, as the Progressive Conservative Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, MacLeod made her first attempt while with a governing party to tackle the flawed system of how service is provided and the never-ending waiting lists for autism treatments and services.

The overhaul announced by MacLeod last week include giving funding for treatment directly to families instead of regional service providers, dependent on age, with up to \$140,000 for a child in treatment from the ages of two to 18. Families will receive up to \$20,000 a year until their child turns six. From that time until they are 18 it would be \$5,000 a year.

The reaction was predictable. There were protests in front of her constituency office on Fallowfield Road in Barrhaven. The previous Liberal government faced similar protests three years ago when they announced that funding for intensive therapy for children over four years of age would be cut off. The Liberals backed down from their plan, but the Ford government does not seem like one to cave into the demands and protests of any special interest group, including parents of autistic children.

Ontario Autism Coalition President Laura Kirby-McIntosh pointed out that intensive therapy can cost between \$60-80k per year. Families, she said, will go through their funding quickly. She said they will fight the latest changes from the province.

Complicating the optics is the fact that Bruce McIntosh resigned Wednesday from his post as a Progressive Conservative staffer in response to the new autism plan. McIntosh is Kirby-McIntosh's husband, and is also the former President of the coalition. He was working MacLeod's parliamentary assistant, Amy Fee, who is the parent of two children with autism spectrum disorder.

It's a difficult situation for MacLeod. She had been told that under the old Liberal program, there were two-year wait times with no hope and no end in sight. She added that early intervention is when autism support makes the greatest difference.

The government is also doubling the funding for five diagnostic hubs to \$5.5 million a year for the next two years to address the diagnosis waiting list of 2,400 children, who currently wait on average for 31 weeks. The new program has the same annual budget of \$321 million as the Liberal program.

Clearly, it's not enough, but it's a first step. But there is no easy fix for this situation which continues to grow as the number of children diagnosed in the autism spectrum grows.

### Objects in mirror are closer than they appear

You always pass the deer crossing and moose crossing signs. I never really paid attention to them.

I do now.

Last month, I had my first ever encounter with a moose on a highway while driving through Algonquin Park. The story was either terrifying, hilarious or embarrassing. Or it was all three. It was hilariembarrifying.

It was frigid, with a wind chill of minus-30. I was driving right into the bright light of one of the biggest full moons I had ever seen, noticing the incredible sky full of stars.

And then I thought, 'I really have to pee.'

It kind of wrecked the moment.

I thought I might be able to hold it for about 45 minutes until I hit the gas station at Barry's Bay. But who was I kidding? I had pumped back about six Diet Cokes that day. I had no chance in Hell of making it to the next hint of civilization.

I hadn't passed a car or truck in almost an hour. No one was within miles of me. I flicked on the blinker and pulled over.

I got out of the vehicle and looked up at the sky to take in the stars and the giant full moon again. That 15 seconds of looking around in the minus-30 weather altered the molecular composition of the zipper on my fly. In other words, my zipper was cold. Really cold. Like, dayammmn.

For guys, peeing at the side of the road gives us the feeling of ultimate relief fused with that sort of rugged manliness vibe. It didn't matter that it was minus-30. I was one with wilderness. You know how Snoopy used to pretend he was the great World War I flying ace? I was the great coureur de bois in the middle of the baron tundra, having a pee before setting my traps to get furs for my next trip to Hudson's Bay.

About halfway through my chilling yet fulfilling pee and my daydream, I heard something. I looked around. A few hundred metres behind me, standing in the middle of the road, I saw the silhouette of a moose in the bright moonlight.

'Wow, that's cool,' I thought to myself. 'The moose must be my spirit animal. Why else would it appear while I, the great coureur de bois, was peeing?'

I kept peeing and looked over my shoulder again. The moose was moving. He was trotting. I kept peeing, he kept trotting.

Then it hit me. It's 30-below, I'm peeing, and there is a moose running toward me. I got kind of scared. Okay, I got a lot scared. I was terrified.

For a guy my age – you know, well onto the back nine of life – hitting the emergency break in mid-pee is not easy. As it got closer, I realized

how much bigger it was and how much faster it was going.

I stopped peeing and jumped in the van I was driving. I didn't put it back in or zip up. I was too scared to notice how my you-know-what felt against my minus-30 zipper.

I hit the gas peddle but I skidded on black ice. I saw the moose coming in mirror, right above the fine print that says, "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

At that point, it all flashed before me.

'OMG,' I thought. 'What if it rams into the back of the van? The air-

bags will go off, and the minus-30 zipper is going to Lorena Bobbitt me. Then I will bleed out and die holding my thingy in my hand and nobody is going to drive by for days. By then I will be just a skeleton sitting in a soccer mom van, holding something in my hand. The moose will be long gone and no one will know how I died. Maybe the media will think that I was trying to do some sort of Bruce Jenner self-surgery. I don't want to be remembered that way.'

I finally got some traction and scratched off. The moose, about 10 metres behind me, faded away in the moonlight as I looked at my rearview mirror. I got to Barry's Bay, finished peeing, and switched from Diet Coke to Red Bull.

Two days later, I shared the story with some colleagues at a breakfast meeting.

"Was the moose male or female?"

"I don't know."

"Did it have antlers?"

"It had nubs, but I don't think they have antlers this time of the year."

Another smart ass piped in.

"Maybe it was mating season, and it was a female moose who saw you. Maybe it was turned on."

"Stop!" I pleaded.

They laughed. At me, not with me.

I had only been terrified while peeing one other time. It was along Route 66 near the Arizona-New Mexico border. My two sons and I were peeing against an abandoned rail car when we saw the huge skin of a rattlesnake that had been shed on the ground near us. This wasn't just a big snake. It was like the basilisk from the second Harry Potter book. It was the fastest pee ever.

So whether you are in the 100-degree Fahrenheit heat of the Arizona desert or the minus-30 Celsius deep freeze in Algonquin Park, nature sometimes calls.

And if you see a box of Depends in the back seat of my car before a road trip, don't judge.



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### A middle ground is needed on cell phone ban from schools

For all the criticism that the Ontario Progressive Conservative Government is facing, their ban on the use of cell phones in public schools is something desperately needed.

The announcement was made by Ontario Education Minister Lisa Thompson last week.

"Ontario's students need to be able to focus on their learning – not their cellphones," she wrote. "By banning cellphone use that distracts from learning, we are helping students to focus on acquiring the foundational skills they need like reading, writing and math."

We all got along in classes for hundreds of years without the use of cell phones. A generation ago, any distractions like that were unheard of in the classroom. You were there to learn. You sat through a class and paid attention. You didn't have the right to have ear phones on listening to music or podcasts, nor could you take pictures or videos of your friends in class and post them on Instagram.

Some will argue that this is the new playing field that millennials live in.

Bull crap.

When it comes right down to it, texting and social media and even playing Fortnite on phones is something that is done by students today because they are bored. Maybe that is a broad statement that sounds harsh, but is it in any way incorrect or inaccurate? It has always been that way, though previous generations had to be more creative in how they dealt with boredom.

Obviously, there has to be a middle ground. There are lockdowns in schools, and students need their phones in situations like that. There are also safety issues such as when or which parent will be picking up a child from school. So maybe banning the phones is not the right verbiage, but perhaps a rule that a phone just be powered off unless it is being used specifically for a class lesson would make sense. Using a phone to record a lecture or class is something that many students take advantage of. Some students also use the calculators on their phones in math class – we're not sure when students stopped having to do math by hand and actually learn it.

Every year, students go through EQAO testing. We would love to see the results of today's students against those of students 10, 25 or even 50 years ago. Our bet is that today's students would not come close to the results of students from years gone by. They have remarkable skills in other areas, but the basics have fallen by the wayside.

And maybe it's good for kids to learn to cope with being bored from time to time. It will prepare them for the future.

Especially if they work for the federal government.

### My lifelong battle with an eating disorder

Hello.

My name is Jeff and I have an eating disorder.

(This is the part where all of you reading, in unison, say, "Hello Jeff.")

Okay, by eating disorder, I don't mean it's like an Olson Twin kind of thing or even a My 600-Pound Life kind of thing. It's much simpler.

When I eat food, I keep missing my mouth.

The Diva can pretty much use my shirt as my agenda at the end of the day. She will examine it and say something like, "Oh, this looks like dried salsa from about 8 a.m. and the angle of the spill looks like you were driving so you probably had a breakfast burrito from the McDon-

ald's Drive-Thru. And it's going to be really hard to get the mustard out of this shirt because it looks like it landed on you at about 1:15 p.m., just around the time you filled up with gas at the McEwen Station in Kemptonville so I am guessing you had a jumbo hot dog off the grill for lunch. And there are two distinct Diet Coke markings from different times on your shirt. Am I going to have to tell your doctor at the headache clinic that you are drinking that much Diet Coke? Oh, and look, there's some Nutella that you smeared on yourself from when you added it to your protein and spinach shake. And as far as that stain, I probably should have thought it through a bit more before I made lasagna. At least Raven (our Yorkie) was able to get most of what you spilled off your shirt.'

So you can imagine the conversation we had at the Champion factory outlet store last week.

"This hoodie is amazing and it's only \$14," I exclaimed to anyone within ear shot. It was a nice XXL hoodie with sleeves long enough for my 38" orangutan arms.

But this hoodie was amazing. The Diva, however, didn't look too impressed.

"That's nice Pumpkin," she said with what I detected might be sarcasm. "There is only one problem."

"What's that?" I asked.

"It's white. It's completely white."

Yup. It was sarcasm.

"What do you think is going to happen to that hoodie the first time you shovel food in your big gate?"

Oh, yeah. Right. I hadn't thought about it. I was too busy thinking of how cool I would look with my Champion hoodie and my black, low cut Converse shoes and my Hollister skinny jeans. I was going to look like I stepped right out of a Drake video.

I turned to Steven for some reassurance.

"This is a great hoodie, right?"

"It's sick," he replied.

I knew that meant good. I tried to speak

his language.

"I'm going to look so deezed."

He stared at me.

"Um, deezed doesn't mean that," he said. "Deezed means, like, muscular or jacked. It doesn't mean cool."

If only they had a Rosetta Stone CD set to learn Millennial-speak."

"I'm still going to look deezed in this," I said.

"Yeah, I guess," he said, as he put his bud back in his ear and turned his attention back to the auto-tuned rap driveline with computerized drums and no instruments thumping out of

## FROM THE OTHER SIDE

by Jeff Morris



his device.

Clearly, he was on Team Diva for this one. "Seriously," she interjected. "That is going to show every single thing you put in your mouth when you wear that. Remember that nice hoodie I got you for Christmas that was covered in Frank's hot sauce within an hour of you putting it on?"

Oh yeah.

But I didn't care. This was an amazing hoodie and it was \$14.

She shook her head at the checkout.

Once in the car, we decided to make a game of it. What would Jeff spill on his new hoodie first? It would be a multiple choice. A would be ketchup. B would be peanut butter or a similar spread. Almond butter and Nutella were acceptable for B. For C, we went with Diet Coke or another staining beverage. D was pizza. I have a horrible track record in that department. E was egg yolk from an over easy egg that would slide off my fork onto my, um, deezed chest. And F was 'other'. Everybody made their guesses.

When we stopped for dinner on the way home – it was a big, sloppy, roadhouse burger – I was put to the test. But I called an audible. I walked into the restroom, took off my new white hoodie, and just wore the Adidas t-shirt that I was wearing underneath it.

Adam, meanwhile, accidentally stuck his arm in a lake of ketchup on his plate. His brand new white Hollister jacket and the white shirt he was wearing both got it. He was crushed. I felt bad for him, but I couldn't help but feel relieved that someone other than me had, well, Jeffed their clothes at dinner.

The last stop on the way home was Walmart. The Diva got a Tide stick to get the stain out of Adam's shirt and jacket. She looked over at me, and grabbed a handful of them.

"We are going to keep these handy," she said, giving me that look.

I looked around Walmart and I faced the truth.

I don't need a Tide stick for when I eat.

I need a shower curtain.

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