

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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Sorry, try again

Troy Media -- The entire Roll Up the Rim to Win campaign rests on the physicality of the cup. Almost 300 million cups are produced for the Tim Hortons campaign, which kicked off on Feb. 6 and ends in mid-April. But packaging is on everyone's mind these days.

Hardly a day goes by without a story on plastics, garbage or other unsustainable practices in food retailing.

In 1986, when Tim Hortons started the Roll Up the Rim campaign, cities were still a few years away from launching recycling programs. Today, food retailers and restaurant outlets are under watch. And Tim Hortons has been targeted as one of the largest generators of garbage that ends up on Canadian seashores, along with McDonald's, Pepsi, Coca-Cola and Nestle.

Gradually, however, companies are being held at least partially responsible for the garbage left in parking lots, stadiums, beaches and school yards. Times are changing.

But the Roll Up the Rim to Win campaign is not changing.

Digitizing the promotion is being proposed so customers can bring their reusable cups to Tim's in order to reduce waste. It's a noble objective.

For Tim Hortons though, such a shift would fundamentally change the campaign. There would no longer be conversations among friends or co-workers, with their cups of Tim's coffee, waiting to see if anyone has won a car, cash or simply another coffee.

The campaign strategy has worked and got many Canadians hooked. And sales at Tim Hortons during the mid-winter months magically soared over the years and customers kept coming back.

But it's 2019 and the argument that increased profit justifies the means carries less weight than it did in 1986. It's not just about increasing sales or getting customers on board. A promotional campaign is now, more than ever, about making people feel better.

Buying countless paper cups with plastic lids isn't acceptable anymore, especially for younger customers. The group under the age of 39 accounts for more than 40 per cent of the population. And demographic pressures are real. Not only does this group value the environment, their economic clout is increasing.

What's more, this group mostly sees the Internet, or apps, as viable, easy alternatives to any physical aspects of a marketing campaign. They believe that if the technology exists, why not use it?

Some less tech-savvy customers may feel disenfranchised by a shift to an online campaign, but Tim Hortons could risk losing more customers by sticking to past practices. Starbucks and other chains are making changes, so expectations are shifting rapidly.

Canada's love affair with Roll Up the Rim to Win needs to be modernized. It was nice while it lasted but Canadians expect restaurant chains to embrace the circular economy. That includes Tim Hortons.

Sylvain Charlebois is scientific director of the Canadian Agrifood Foresight Institute.

A place where friends become family

As adults, we often make friendships based on the friendships of our kids. Maybe you become friends with someone your child goes to school with, plays hockey or soccer with, studies music or dance with, or generally just hangs around with.

Dr. Emma Gofton has a group of friends based on her children, too. But her circle of friends is much different than the average parent.

Gofton's closest friends are part of a parent-support group at Roger Nielson House, adjacent to the CHEO campus. Gofton has two children, 14 and 16, who both have a rare degenerative neurological condition. Their condition has gradually weakened their ability to talk, breathe, eat and move. The parent-support group understands her, and she understands them. While the "normies" may be empathetic -- "normies is what they call normal people with no problems -- they don't really know what it's like to go through what they endure each and every day.

While Roger Neilson House is best known as a children's hospice, it is also a place for parents like Gofton to cope. The house offers a respite program for parents, and pain management help for children. Gofton shared her story and her thoughts on Roger Nielson House as a speaker at the 12th annual Maddy's Gala held in late February.

Gofton said she initially thought the children had cerebral palsy, and that they would live a long and healthy life with a disability. But that's not the case. There is no name for the condition her children suffer from.

She was told by social workers that, "The good news is that you get to be referred to pediatric palliative care. You get to be cared for by Roger Neilson House."

Gofton said that, in her world, prior to that moment, palliative care meant you had three to six months to live.

"I was devastated," she said. "I did not want this referral. I did not want to accept what it meant.

"But what I quickly learned was that Roger Neilson House isn't about learning how to die well. It's about learning how to live your life as best and well as you can for as long as you can."

Gofton's first trips to Roger Neilson House were for respite from the 24/7 care they were giving to their children. But as time went on, their needs changed. The children now go for pain and symptom management monthly. She said that through this period, the people at Roger Neilson House has become their second family.

"Early in this process I joined the parent support group because no one understands the world that I was in," Gofton said. "You can't talk to your typical friends -- 'the normies' -- and through parent support I was able to share those

scary thoughts that you don't even want to utter out loud to yourself. You're afraid of them being real, but you can share that in that community. It's safe."

The support group, for Gofton, is a safe place. She can talk about what she is going through, share ideas, share suggestions on how to cope with what they are facing, and offer support to others going through similar challenges.

But while Roger Nielson House is a special place for the parents, it is an even better place for the children.

"They get to go to a place where they are not different," she said. "Everyone has a wheelchair. Lots of people have

a feeding tube. Lots of people need to be on a breathing machine. And it's a place where you can be with your best friends. You can't have sleepovers at your own house. There aren't enough nurses there. But you can go to Roger's House and sleep in the same room as your best friend and be safe."

Gofton paused for a moment to fight back some tears.

"And my son does that with his best friend," she said. "And kids want to play, and there is this amazing group of people who are experts in play. And they help our kids smell, touch, feel, laugh, sing, dance, destroy -- whatever a child wants to do."

Gofton smiled as she talked about her son's birthday party at Roger Neilson House. It was a party she called his best ever.

But beyond the sleepovers and the birthday parties, there is a chilling reality.

Gofton and her family have had to watch some of the children pass away. It's hard for them. These are people who have become more than friends.

"We watched the staff of Roger Neilson House come together and support those families, those children and our community, and it is a thing of beauty," she said.

To Gofton and her children, the other families and the staff at Roger Neilson House have become her extended family.

"That's what these people are to us," she said, again fighting back tears. "The nurses, the doctors, the counselors, the social workers, all the volunteers -- they are our second family.

"And to watch them rally around my people -- my family, my kids -- and support us through that transition, makes me know that when I have to walk through that door and my kids have to walk through that door, they'll be there with us too."

We never want to be the ones who need Roger Neilson House, and we hope no one we know ever needs it.

But thank God it's there.



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The tornado of kindness

I remember the day I realized I had to come back home.

I had been in Dallas, then Denver and then Seattle. I lived through multiple tornado warnings, a flash flood, the Columbine tragedy and an earthquake. The silver lining was that nothing like that ever happened here.

Until Friday.

I got home just as the power went out. A couple of kilometres north of us, the tornado hit Greenbank Road in the Arlington Woods area. The Merivale power station looked like, as Councillor Jan Harder described, “a bomb went off in it.”

When the power went out last weekend, there was no phone or internet service, there was no TV, there was no electricity. Many places that were open could not accept debit or credit card payments, and many cash machines were either shut down or out of gas. Most of the area gas stations that were able to open ran out of fuel.

On my street, I was experienced something unusually wonderful.

Neighbours were out talking. Kids grabbed hockey sticks and had a massive game of street hockey in front of our house. It was the first time I had seen this since moving here in 2010.

“It’s incredible,” one neighbour said to me. “Every kid is off their device and off their screen. They can’t play Fortnite. They actually have to do things that kids are supposed to do. I’m in no hurry to get power back. Or maybe we can get power, but Wifi can stay off.”

Comments like that were made throughout the community.

For us, it’s back to life as usual. Our fridge and freezer got a bit of an enema from the entire process, but we hadn’t done a good purge in a couple of years so it’s all good. We have power and internet and TV, and even Wifi. The kids Usain Bolted to their X-Boxes to get their Fort Nite fixes.

For others in the area, though, it’s not all back to normal. Some of the families who received their assistance cheques had just purchased food, which they had to throw out. This will put pressure on the Barrhaven Food Cupboard. In Arlington Woods and Dunrobin, things aren’t even close to back to normal. Homes were destroyed, and lives have been turned upside down.

But as bad as things are, I am fully confident that things will get back to normal for everyone. This storm brought out the best in the people, and the people will make sure families in need are looked after.

That’s what we do.

JM

There will never be another Joe MacDonald

It’s always sad when a friend dies.

You wonder ‘why him?’ or ‘why her?’ Why is fate so cold and cruel and heartless?

Next week, it will be 25 years since Sudbury Police Constable Joe MacDonald was killed on duty.

Joe was a teammate of mine with the Carleton Ravens football team in the 1980s. He was a great offensive tackle and a great friend. He wasn’t just my friend. He was everyone’s friend. He was the life of the locker room. He was the guy you could count on no matter what. He defined what a “character guy” was. When we won our league championship in 1985, we slugged it out on the ground. We did it behind Joe.

Joe had a smile and a playful nickname for everyone. He always had a joke or a funny comment that kept us all in stitches. At Oliver’s on Saturday nights, everyone wanted to sit with Joe and “Sweet Pea”. That was Nancy. No guy I knew at that age loved a girl like Joe loved his Sweet Pea.

If someone went to take their helmet off after practice and their sweaty hair was glued to their helmet with toothpaste, Joe had been to your locker earlier that day. If you were sweating while running sprints and all you could smell was perfume, Joe had been to your locker. If you were in horrible discomfort because someone had put heat balm in your jockstrap... Joe.

But on the night of October 6, 1993, things went horribly, horribly wrong.

“Everyone loved Joe,” said Rolly Campbell, now an Ottawa police officer who ran a Sudbury Police community buddy program with Joe.

A call came in that night that two males in a brown Cutlass were heading into Sudbury for a drug deal and one was armed. They did not broadcast the info over the scanner, as many of the criminals had police scanners. Joe came on duty on the midnight shift, and did not know about the car.

At about 2 a.m., Joe, who was riding alone, was to meet two other police cars at Tim’s for a coffee. The other officers needed to go to the ATM to get cash, so Joe, with a few minutes to kill, decided to do a quick tour.

“That’s the kind of cop he was,” said Rolly.

Joe pulled over a couple of shady looking characters in a brown cutlass and as he approached the car, he had no idea what he was walking into.

Joe was walking back to his car when suddenly, a fight broke out. There were no side-walks, and Joe went down in the steep, slippery ditch and broke his leg. According to Rolly,

one of the men, Clinton Suzack, pulled out a gun and began to pistol whip Joe. Fighting for his life, Joe pulled out his .38 and took a shot at Suzack, injuring him. Joe’s .38 was empty, but Suzack had a semi-automatic that was not empty. Peter Pennett, according to Rolly, shot Joe in the back of the head.

Pennett loaded Suzack into the Cutlass and they fled. They were caught by Constables Dennis Tarnopolsky and Geordie Fisher. Fisher, a martial arts expert, ran down Pennett through a wooded area and stream. Pennett tried to disarm him, but Fisher won the battle and

hailed him in.

“It bothers me,” said Rolly. “These two guys ended up at a Club Fed somewhere on the west coast. They play golf, they have barbecues, they even have homemade alcohol.”

As it is the 25th anniversary of Joe’s death, the 25-year life sentences without parole for these two men is also approaching.

“Bob Rae was Premier then and police officers had .38s while the criminals had semi-automatics,” Rolly said. “Yet, Bob Rae’s body guards had semi-automatics.”

Nancy, who had married Joe and had two small children with him, lobbied intensely to arm Ontario’s police officers with better weapons. Because of her, Ontario’s cops have better guns. But the price to pay for the upgrade is sickening.

“I still think about him,” said Rolly. “He was such a special guy. It was such a tragic loss for his family and friends, and it was such a tragic loss for the community. Joe was the ultimate policeman. If the police was made up of all Joe MacDonalds, crime would be next to nothing.”

My memories of Joe still make me laugh out loud. I’ll never forget Joe telling us the story of how he worked at Ponderosa steak house in Sudbury, and how his math teacher came in to order steak. He and his friend literally played soccer with the steak on the floor before putting it on the grill. We listened in awe, as we all fantasized doing something like that to a teacher we had had run-ins with.

I still remember watching the news on TV when I found out about Joe’s death. I was stunned. We all were. Joe was a gentle giant in Sudbury, involved in the community, loved by everyone. In Sudbury, the Joe Mac Youth Football Program is named after him.

Sometimes I smile when I wonder if they have football in Heaven.

Jesus, if Joe’s on your team, you better doublecheck your helmet and jockstrap before you put them on.



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