

# POSSIBILITIES

*unleash your imagination*

—SPRING 2022

## FINDING CALM IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY

The photo on this page is a 3' by 3' canvas on the wall of my office opposite my desk. I can look up from my computer and see it. Lately I have been doing that a lot. These are the oldest four of our five grandchildren. The photo was taken before the youngest, Norah, was born. I wouldn't expect it to have the same effect on you, but for me, this photo is pure joy.

I recently watched "1971 – The Year Music Changed Everything" on Apple TV. I will give it mixed reviews. Over the course of eight hour-long episodes, I think there might have been an hour of stuff that I would label as highly entertaining and interesting. The rest, I could have lived without seeing. I was 14 years old in 1971 and popular music was then and has always been a passion of mine, so I thought I would like it more. But the show tended to focus on the negative and I tend to look for the positive. Still, it left me with one enduring thought – how is it that I have absolutely no memory of some of the crazy things that were going on in the world in 1971? The answer is simple. I wasn't paying attention to those things in 1971. Why? Obviously, I was 14. But there's another reason that is more concerning. I didn't have to pay attention.

That was an option then. It's not an option in 2022.

I'm not a luddite looking to put us back 50 years. But I think we are all aware of a serious side effect of our technology driven interconnected world. Anxiety.

This may be the golden age of anxiety.

I have always considered myself to be in the stress reduction business. Look at any list citing the causes of stress and you will find financial issues at the top. But as I talk to people recently, I notice that most often the things causing stress aren't money related. You know the list. Covid, convoys, polarized societies perhaps including ours, climate change, war, and in general the rise of hate. Basically, things

we can't control.

I look up at the photo of my grandchildren and am reminded that they know nothing of these things.



It is a rite of passage in our society to be welcomed into the world of worry. I don't know when I first started to worry, but it wasn't at age 14. I know that's not true for everyone and I don't need to be reminded that there are many young children in the world today who have plenty of "out of their hands" things to worry about. But at age 14 I had no idea about that either. Admittedly, I wasn't bullied at school, I was in good stead with my teachers and my family, and I had a great group of friends. Life for me was pretty good. It didn't matter that a pointless war was claiming innocent lives in Vietnam causing the youth of America to lose their minds - and sometimes their lives - in protest. Or that civil rights problems in the U.S. raged on. Or that a drug-crazed rock and roll generation threatened to upend the establishment. I didn't care about that. I was focused on how to impress the girl I liked, score goals in the hockey rink (which was one of the ways) and make enough money to buy records.

Those four young lives in this photo, plus Norah, plus all those children near and dear

to you, will go through the exact same stages. And when they get to this place in their lives, when the world appears to be closing in on them and they ask "what kind of world will this be for my children and grandchildren" I hope they will answer in the positive. That is in fact one of the most important lessons we are teaching them right now.

There has always been evil in this world. There will always be evil in this world. But evil exists only in comparison to what is good. And it isn't hard to see the good in this world today. It's in the voices of millions who are crying out against the war. It's in the hearts of millions who are reaching out to help. It's behind the much-debated efforts of many of the world's societies to obey sometimes bizarre rules trying to save lives. It's in the efforts of scientists who have banded together in unprecedented fashion in search of a weapon to fight a new villain. It's in the eyes of everyone who sheds a tear of happiness for a new life born, a milestone reached, or a sense of pride that overwhelms. It's literally everywhere.

I would never advocate ignoring the many problems of the world around us. We are all citizens of Earth and we share a bond that is undeniable even if that is painful to accept. But like ripples on a pond when a stone is tossed into the middle, the world we see reflects what is in our hearts. The world looks differently when our heart is filled with love. The far distant ripple is brighter when it is pushed out from a place of hope.

I look up at my grandchildren and without fail my fear or anxiety is turned to love and hope. It doesn't stop a bomb from falling or another person from dying, but it stops me from thinking that hate and fear have erased love and hope. Love and hope have not been replaced, and the life within my immediate reach is proof.

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Some of our current favourite reads... Please send all your recs!

GREAT MINDS, GREAT Thoughts

“ Nothing is permanent in this wicked world- not even our troubles. ”  
Charlie Chaplin

“ Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain. ”  
Vivian Greene

“ There is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian. A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate. ”  
Pierre Trudeau

“ If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree. ”  
Michael Crichton

“ So often in life, things that you regard as an impediment turn out to be great, good fortune. ”  
Ruth Bader Ginsburg

We're all taught some basic Canadian history in school. From my memory of history class in the early 90's, this entailed the likes of Samuel de Champlain, Étienne Brûlé, the War of 1812, and some more recent events like our important role in the world wars, or even the October Crisis. Sadly, there was an inadequate and inaccurate account of indigenous history.

I had forever felt as though Canada's history was second rate compared to the celebrity of Roman, Han, British, Ottoman, and Mongol empires. There aren't a lot of Hollywood blockbusters about Canadian History after all. But, as our roots grow deeper north of Toronto, I find myself more interested in local history. Living in Holland Landing (often confused by Torontonians with the nearby Holland Marsh) it's easy to spot many historical buildings. In fact, our last neighbor's house was built in 1852 and the church at the end of that street was from 1843. By Canadian standards, that's pretty darn old. So, I started to wonder, why was this small town a place to be way back then? How did it get started?

As it turns out, Holland Landing was crucial to the formation of Yonge Street, and in turn the expansion of Toronto.

During the early settlement years of Toronto, there was still a great deal of trade with indigenous communities throughout what was then Upper Canada. Before the Seven Years' War (perhaps the first true world war, which ended in 1763) much of central and eastern Canada was known as New France and likely had a population under 100,000. When Simcoe arrived on the scene as the first Lieutenant

Governor of Upper Canada, there was an ancient indigenous route still in use called Toronto Carrying Place. It ran from the mouth of the Humber River, north to a portage connecting to the West Holland River (Bradford/King area). From there, explorers and merchants could reach Lake Ouentironk "Beautiful water" also named Lac Toronto and now Lake Simcoe. This ultimately connects to the rest of the world through Georgian Bay, the great lakes, and the St. Lawrence. It's thought that Toronto Carrying Place was instrumental in the formation of the city as a major settlement.

The route to West Holland River passed through the Holland Marsh, which later became a boon to the mattress-stuffing business due to its abundance of wetland reeds. Simcoe recognized the importance of this connection but wanted something easier to navigate than the marsh and learned through the indigenous traders that a path to East Holland River would fit the bill. Thus came the conception of what was once considered the longest street in the world - Yonge Street. A militantly straight road connecting Toronto to the East Holland River in Holland Landing. Certain groups were granted plots of land along the road but to manage the costs associated the project, they were required to clear their own plots, maintain the road themselves, and even have some sort of structure built within a fairly short period of time. The creation of Yonge Street helped with the expansion of Toronto, and the formation of Markham, Richmond Hill, Aurora, Newmarket,



and other neighboring communities.

The original path of Yonge Street (now called Old Yonge St.) still passes through Holland Landing while the Yonge Street most people now know ironically veers off towards the very Holland Marsh that Simcoe was looking to avoid, before it continues north of Bradford. Today Holland Landing remains well connected to Toronto with the East Gwillimbury Go Station, the 404, and even our own tiny airport.

With the East Holland River nearly in my back yard, and the ice now fully melted, I can think of nothing more Canadian than launching the canoe and allowing my imagination to wander. How many different types of people and watercrafts have travelled along here? What was it like before European colonization? I think it's time to take another trip to the local virtual library. I need to go back further. Thankfully modern history books are doing a much better job of telling the indigenous story - an ancient, fascinating, and tragic history of great importance. If you have any recommendations, please pass them along!

P.S. Forgive me if you're a history buff who has picked up some errors. It's not my day job.

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INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp. of melted butter or margarine
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 3/4 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2- 3/4 cup of chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325 ° and prepare a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Beat butter and sugar together in a large mixing bowl. Add eggs, vanilla and continue to beat. In a separate bowl, whisk flour, salt, and baking powder. Combine both mixtures with a wooden spoon. Add the chocolate chips and mix to evenly disperse. Work with your hands to form a smooth dough. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour.



On a light floured surface, divide the dough into 2 equal parts and form equal size logs, about 2 inches in diameter. Slightly flatten the tops of the logs with your hands. Place on the baking sheet and bake for 30 minutes or until lightly coloured on the bottom. Remove from oven and let cool slightly then cut on a diagonal into 3/4 inch wide slices. Place slices cut side down on the baking sheet and bake for 16 minutes, turning them over halfway. Remove from oven and let cool on a baking rack. Finito!

# THE TRUE PRICE OF REHABILITATION

For most of the Fall of 2021, I had been plagued by a stiff neck. It had gotten to the point that I had to twist my body to check for cars when crossing the street. Given the increasing pain and lack of mobility, did I consult healthcare professionals? Of course not. Instead, I relied on my own diagnosis: if I could still play tennis, I was fine. Nothing that a fistful of Tylenol and Advil couldn't cure. Until it couldn't. By mid-December, the pain now intolerable, I was forced to put away my tennis racquets and seek help.

Although I'd had a long history with neck/back issues, this time it was different. Over-the-counter medication provided no relief. Sitting in a chair or in the car was impossible, so I spent entire days either upright or lying on the sofa with the heating pad cranked up to scalding. With the holidays ending and work about to resume, I needed a plan to manage the pain and rehabilitate myself. I began with a desperate call to my brother, the doctor (the poor guy spends much of his time off listening to health complaints from family members). He referred me to a colleague who had experience with pain management. After taking stock of my symptoms and history, she prescribed drugs to help gradually ease the nerve pain. But she stressed that what I really needed was an MRI to determine what was going on with my wonky neck.

As many who have tried to get an MRI in Ontario already know, it can take several weeks, and more likely months, to secure an appointment. Adding to the wait was the backlog of requests due to the limited availability of diagnostic testing during the pandemic. I was forced to get in line, with no immediate hope of climbing out of the hole that was getting deeper by the day.

Unrelenting pain is cruel, debilitating, exhausting, inescapable, soul-crushing. Pain forces you inward; every day, hour, minute consumed by thoughts of escaping. The drug dosage was increased over successive weeks, which offered some relief. But the ladder I needed to free me from my hole was still nowhere to be found.

Then, several weeks after the MRI request was made, a found a toehold: the hospital called about an opening due to a cancellation. The

caller explained that it was for tonight...at 2:30am. The hospital was working around the clock to try to clear the backlog; she asked if that time worked for me, and before she could complete her sentence I blurted out "Hell, yes!!"

The MRI confirmed that I was suffering from "advanced multilevel spondylosis resulting in severe bilateral neuroforaminal stenosis C3-C4 and C6-C7, left C4-C5". My doctor interpreted this diagnosis more succinctly: "You have a crap neck". This may have been stating the obvious, but it did allow us to move forward with a rehabilitation plan. Help was on the way.

We quickly assembled my Dream Team, which included a pain specialist, physiotherapist, massage therapist and yoga instructor:

- The pain specialist determined that I was a good candidate for weekly nerve block injections, anesthetizing specific nerves that were sending shooting pain into my left shoulder and arm. Over time, the injections have helped to ease the pain and to allow the muscles in the area to relax long enough for the physical therapists to work on the underlying issues. Although the injections have never lasted the full week (usually by day five or six the anesthetic wears off), I am grateful for the relief and practically run to my next appointment for the next round of needles (my wife says I'm a human pin cushion; she's right, and I don't mind one bit).

- My physiotherapist is the "quarterback": she assembles the information from the doctors and therapists and has built a rehabilitation plan for me. Over the past three months, we have met each week to execute the plan, and to re-assess and adjust the course of treatment as required.

- My massage therapist has been in regular contact with the physiotherapist and has applied the weekly assessment of my progress and challenges into her treatment. The therapy is intense, focused, and painful...and I welcome it. I've learned the hard lesson that, in rehab, the



only way out is through, and my ladder is hopefully waiting for me at the other end.

- While the drugs, nerve blocks, physiotherapy and massage therapy have so far been focused on alleviating the specific symptoms causing my pain, yoga applies a "whole body" approach. Aida has been my yoga instructor for the past fifteen years, when I've been smart enough to take advantage of her services. I have tended to move towards the benefits of yoga when my body has broken down, and away from it once it has helped to heal me. (It seems I have applied this counter-intuitive logic to physiotherapy and massage as well: "it worked so well that I stopped doing it"). In mid-February, I spoke to Aida about my condition and whether a return to her virtual yoga classes in March would aid in my recovery. Before I could finish my sentence she blurted out "Hell, yes!" and I've been attending twice weekly ever since. Yoga reminds us of the interconnectivity of our whole body, and that healing must involve a commitment to overall health, not just to the injured parts. I am grateful to Aida for this reminder.

I am currently still knee-deep in my rehabilitation, but I am more optimistic than ever that we are getting closer to my goal of being pain-free. In my nearly 62 years, I have been injured many times, sometimes seriously. Each time, I have successfully rehabilitated myself, with the help of professionals who have placed me on the path to recovery. And each time I have neglected

to remain on the path they had painstakingly created for me after I have healed. It has taken me the better part of a lifetime to realize that what has been fixed must then be maintained. The true price of good health is front-end loaded. My willful neglect to pay that price has resulted in the substantially steeper cost of repairing it, yet again.

Seems so simple. I hope I can get it right this time. I'm getting too old to climb ladders.

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