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From the Publisher

Publisher



My dear readers, in 2012 I finally get a chance to play with every theme and topic I love: religion, history, life, humanity, myths, earth, environment, and spirituality. Over the course of this year PinkPlayMags will present you with a view of the future through the lens of a lost civilization--the ancient Maya. We have been teasing you and promising you something this year that no magazine has done before, so we now invite you to join us on a journey that will come together over 4 issues, 4 parts all relating in theme that take the end of the world predictions and find in them hope for a better future.

You have all heard the legend: on December 21 of 2012 the world as we know it will come to an end, as the Maya Long Count Calendar predicts. What the date actually signifies is the end of the 13th *ba'ak'tun*, a cycle of 144,000 days or 394.3 solar years. In the Maya creation myth, a previous world ended and this one began at the end of the last 13th *ba'ak'tun*. Whether they believed that this civilization would collapse in fire and brimstone, or a new era would be born has been debated, with most experts agreeing that the Maya were not heralding an apocalypse.

The Maya divided their world into three spheres: the Earth, the Underworld, and the Heavens. These spheres were ruled by a pantheon of gods, who the Maya honoured with offerings of maize, corn bread, cacao drink, honey liquor and even cigars. At night the Maya looked into the sky and peered into a supernatural world where the seasonal movement of stars and planets was an unfolding narrative of the gods. From this they wrote the Long Count Calendar, which not only marked the passage of time, but

granted them the power to predict events hundreds of years into the future. Or so they say.

One can't help noticing many eerie similarities between the downfall of their ancient culture and the problems faced by our own. The most notable is a theory which suggests that the reason for the collapse of the Maya Empire was that 1% of the population held the power while 99% lived in poverty. Sound familiar? Of course, this is countered by numerous other theories ranging anywhere from epidemic plague to a two hundred year drought. Any environmental change on a large enough scale might be responsible for the devastation of a culture so invested in the cultivation of maize (corn), which not only brought them prosperity but played a central role in their spiritual life as well. The exhaustion of natural resources and over population may also be implicated.

In the 9th century the Maya empire had declined and its people had migrated north, leaving behind nothing but stone cities swallowed by jungle and an indecipherable written language that is as beautiful as it is complex. As you will have noted on the cover of this issue, PinkPlayMags has adopted the Maya hieroglyphics to send you, our readers, a hidden message. Each of this year's four issues will display one line of this message in hieroglyphics, which can be decoded by you using the gyph key found at www.pinkplaymags.com. Submit all four lines of the translated message and be entered into our grand prize draw!

So buckle up, here we go!

Antoine Elhashem

springplay!

Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer Community Seasonal from PinkPlayMags Free • Spring 2012

Publisher/Creative Director Antoine Elhashem

Editor-in-Chief Jeff Harrison

Art Director Vaughn Lal

Contributors

Writers Melissa Benner, T.T. Bloomquist, Scott Dagostino, Bryen Dunn, Karen Fulcher, Cheryl Gudz, Jeff Harrison, Shelley A. Harrison, Micki Lee, Anthony Seet, Jesse Trautmann, Jaime Woo

Photography Peter Demas, Carel Matkovic, Frank Nyitray

Fiction Illustration Wade Shaw



2012 Pt. 1: Green Earth

Concept & Direction Antoine Elhashem

Cover design Vaughn Lal

In this issue

- 12 Earth Day: Not Just a Day, a Movement – Karen Fulcher
- 19 Occupy the Earth – Scott Dagostino
- 25 Make Your Home a Healthy Green Haven – Cheryl Gudz
- 31 Travel: Green & Gay in the U.S. of A. – Bryen Dunn
- 47 Fiction: World of the Fifth Sun – Jeff Harrison

Regular features

- 36 Our Opinion – Melissa Benner & T.T. Bloomquist
- 39 Hot Artist: Randy Davis and Primp Studio – Anthony Seet
- 43 Hyper-Culture – Jaime Woo
- 53 Community Cornerstones – PinkPlayMags Team
- 57 Spring in the City – Jesse Trautmann
- 62 From the Heart – Shelley A. Harrison
- 64 Spring Horoscopes – Micki Lee
- 66 Looking Back: Steve Ireson

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President Antoine Elhashem
 Assistant to the Publisher Anne Hucklebridge
 General Manager Kim Dobie
 Brand Manager Tina Kelly
 Advertising Consultant Jayme Harper
 Counsels Jerry Herszkopf (Jerry Herszkopf Law Firm)

Mailing address

205-1691 Pickering Parkway, Pickering, ON L1V 5L9

To contact us

416.926.9588 Toronto 905.231.9722 G.T.A.

Websites

www.pinkplaymags.com

www.thepinkpagesdirectory.com

We love to hear from you. Please send comments, questions or any other matters to publisher@thepinkpagesdirectory.com

For advertising inquiries

advertising@thepinkpagesdirectory.com

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From the Editor

Editor



Spring is in the air—wonderfully early—and with spring comes change. I want to bid a final, fond farewell to Manny Machado and Ricky Boudreau. It was such a pleasure to have them on board and I wish them all the best for the future. With their departure comes new writers and new columns. I'm thrilled to welcome Jaime Woo, who will cover all things nerdy and geeky in "Hyper-Culture" and Jesse Trautmann, who becomes your new host for Toronto's "In the City." We also make space in "Community Cornerstones" to shine a light on the businesses and people that form the bricks and mortar of our diverse LGBTQ communities—can you believe we have three separate neighbourhoods now? And finally, I welcome Melissa Benner in taking over "Our Opinion" and showing T.T. Bloomquist the ropes.

Visiting the Maya exhibit at the ROM with Antoine really got me thinking. Here was a civilization that prospered for over 3,000 years; they endured economic and social collapse, war and conquest that drove them nearly to extinction, and yet their culture continues to thrive to this day.

Over the last five years I've found the world we live in to be increasingly devoid of soul as we rape our planet in our never ending frenzy to consume ever more. At first I wrote it all off as me growing up from my party boy life-style and gaining the slightly jaded view of a 40-year-old who's seen and done it all. It's been a great ride, but at what cost?

Now don't get me wrong—I love a good bit of nihilism! The fluffy special effects extravaganzas of the spate of recent natural disaster movies are great for an evening's entertainment. Increasingly of late I find myself asking, what would *really* happen if the tenuous balance of our life on this planet we take for granted was suddenly disrupted on a massive scale? It wouldn't be pretty, that's for sure. Suddenly these disaster movies didn't seem so farfetched.

Mother Nature is not very happy with us of late and she's begun to show her displeasure at our wanton destruction.

When the balance is upset, it often needs to snap back in the opposite direction before it can settle into some semblance of normality. Take an elastic band and stretch as far as you can, then let it go—hurts huh?

Yet, for every blind consumer stuffing the hole in their soul, there seems to be an ever-growing community of people concerned for the welfare of this hunk of rock and water we call home. Those of us increasingly in the know realize that Mother Earth doesn't need us to be happy, but we most certainly need her for our continued well-being. The earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and radical shifts in global climate patterns have woken us up to the fact that change is coming, change on a large scale. Everyone seems obsessed with the idea that because the Mayan Long Calendar comes to an end, it'll be the end of the world.

I agree. It will be the end of the world. It must be the end of the world—as *we know it*—because to continue along the path we've been on for the last 500 some odd years is to invite it. We've been living out of balance for so long, like teenagers on a never-ending party streak. It's fun while it lasts—trust me, I've been there and it was phenomenal! But what do you do after the party is over?

If you're smart, you plan a well thought out recovery. You discover your limits without going too far and you learn how to find that balance, that give and take that allows you to find harmony between the fun and the responsibility. If you destroy yourself or the place you've been enjoying, how is anyone else going to be able to join in the celebration?

The Earth has amazing regenerative powers—I think the big question is, do we? Can we shift our destructive habits and change for the better? I believe we can. In fact, if you read on, you'll see how we already are.

See you in the summer!

Jeff Harrison

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Earth Day

Not Just a Day, a Movement

By Karen Fulcher



*"Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it."*

- George Santayana

During the great depression everyone grew up with conservation. After the war though, people pursued their chance to be rich in the '50s economic boom. The future expanded before us without limits. Highways were celebrated with great fanfare. Cars were the symbol of the future. Consumption was the name of the game and what you owned related directly to how successful you were.

But then... Baseball games were being closed due to car exhaust pollution. DDT was being sprayed so freely insects were disappearing. Trees were being stripped and the paper mills were spilling acid into the air. Hiding under your desk was a reasonable response to a nuclear explosion. Smog was killing people. Industry was dumping waste into our water. There were no environmental laws.

This was progress.

At first only the scientists and radical environmentalists were making the connections. Scientist Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* sounded the alarm. She aimed a spotlight directly on the chemical industry and what we were using as pesticides. Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* followed this up to reinforce the peril we as humans were in because of the planet's inability to support us if we continued to consume and expand.

These controversial books and a trip into space in 1969 that returned with the first picture of the planet earth, helped people see the limits.

"This planet is threatened with destruction... we are in a crisis of survival," was the grim introduction to *A Question of Survival: Earth Day*, the CBS special with Walter Cronkite that aired about the events leading up to Earth Day 1970. Cronkite sat at his wooden desk, phones next to him with a water blue backdrop and the Earth Week logo behind him. The sounds of tick tick ticker-tape rhythm in the background as he reported the spectacle of Earth Week in America.

Senator Gaylord Nelson was the founder of the first Earth Day. He was well connected, but frustrated by the lack of political concern for the environment. For years prior to 1970, he gave speeches and found that people cared, but politicians didn't.

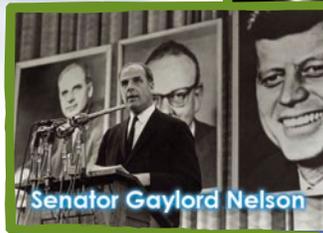
The Vietnam War protests, the Civil Rights Movement and the Stonewall Uprisings were well underway and Gaylord Nelson saw the connection between the teach-ins and protests as a channel for voicing concern over the state of the environment. He enlisted the help of Harvard student, Denis Hayes (later named "Hero of the Planet" in 1999 by *Time Magazine*) to organize the first Earth Day.

It was a grassroots movement with no funding except for the costs of printing and mailing the event newsletter, covered by the United Autoworkers. Once the momentum began to build, President Nixon proclaimed the '70s to be the environmental decade in response to the anticipated power of the Earth Day movement and the upcoming gathering.

Even though it appeared to be onside, the government was concerned and perhaps frightened. Earth Day offices were reportedly wire-tapped; Earth Day spokespersons were asked if they were revolutionaries; media defined Earth Day as an anti-establishment (anti-Nixon) movement and of being a communist plot.

Nonetheless, a few months later, 20 million mostly young, mostly white citizens gathered to bring attention to a crisis and Earth Day became the largest demonstration in U.S. history.

Before April 22, 1970, environmental concerns were squarely in the auspices of academia and if you wanted to be involved you had to give your life to the cause. Jed Goldberg, current president of Earth Day Canada recalls, "The



environmental movement was very aggressive before 1970s, not inclusive at all. They wanted everything or nothing. They really weren't set up for working with average people. They didn't want to work with average people. They wanted only the most committed people to be involved with them. That's why we were so encouraged about the first Earth Day."

High schools gave absentee-isms for that day and masses of students rode their bicycles to show the low impact alternative. They also spontaneously cleaned up the area they gathered in. Media reported that all-in-all the gatherings were cheerful.

With cans collected, youth crushed them against pavement calling attention to littering. Some wore gas masks to remind others of the air quality issues. People all over the States were doing small acts to show their interest and support for the environment.

Suddenly average people were talking about what they were noticing, from grime on their windows and increases in lung problems, to the plight of whales, destruction of natural space and grand-scale pollution—Earth Day became a populist movement.

Media coverage was extensive. NBC news anchor reported, "Government scientist, Dr. Jay Murray Mitchell said, 'Pollution and over-pollution unless checked could so warm the earth in 200 years as to create a greenhouse effect melting the arctic ice cap and flooding vast areas of the world.'"

After that first Earth Day, the American organizers set to getting politically active and as a result in the following few years, with Richard Nixon as the president, the Environmental Protection Agency was founded and the Clean Water Act established.

"These things happened because of the display of public outrage," Goldberg says. "Imagine if [the States] had had a progressive president?" For the first time ever, industry was required to look at the potential problems with growth. Except that the commitment to growth continues and despite the growth, people fail to be any happier.

Earth Day came to Canada in 1990. Goldberg explains, "Denis Hayes wanted the twentieth anniversary to be international. He facilitated the Canadian organizing group for Earth Day in Victoria BC."

He continues, "The first Earth Day here was enormously successful: It didn't hurt that it was nearly 20 degrees that day here in Toronto and that there was a parade. There might have been 30-40,000 people. It was very celebratory. It wasn't angry, it wasn't like an anti-war protest, it was like, we're all here and we care about the environment and this is our display of our passion."

"The reason [Earth Day Canada (EDC)] continued was because we had touched a nerve with average Canadians for the very first time. Nobody else had really accomplished that before."

Thinking about the future, "Earth Day" was trademarked in Canada to prevent "greenwashing" a rampant problem in the U.S. where any product, service, or company can claim to be green, natural and leverage Earth Day celebrations as an opportunity to make money. Forty years later, "green" claims are ubiquitous and have lost their meaning.

"I hate the word 'sustainability.'" Goldberg explains, "What does it mean? Keeping things as they are? Status quo? That's not what we want. We don't want to sustain what we have. We want to restore what we lost." As far as "environmentally friendly" goes, Goldberg feels that is too much of a marketing slogan. "Everything has an impact. Buying something could be environmentally preferable or better for the environment, but it's not friendly."

But working with companies who sell things and sometimes use these words isn't necessarily a bad thing. EDC actively seeks mutually beneficial relationships with businesses that are truly interested in being responsible

In those early days, environmental organizations used disturbing images. Goldberg explains that people sometimes shut down "as a result of the techniques that were used early on in the movement. The shock and guilt. Really upsetting images of wildlife, you know, the pool of oil, visual images of environmental degradation coupled with very strong messages that the world is coming to an end if we don't do something really fast. At first that worked: in the late '80s there was huge interest in the environment, but then there was an economic downturn. The priority of the environment slipped not so much in the minds of average people, but certainly in the media.

There were lots of other stories that took front place over the environment."

To address this green burnout EDC set to work on offering education resources, recognition, reward programs and public action campaigns to help all Canadians play a role in the environmental movement. In particular, businesses recognize that they must consider their reputations and use technology and innovations to be responsible because people speak with their money.

Within our capitalistic system, "People have a need for convenience, immediate gratification, comfort and luxury. What are the consequences of having it all? Why is that important?" asks Goldberg. "Any clear-headed person would appreciate the situation we are in with the environment right now and the only way we're going to get out of this mess, really comes down to a factor of numbers."

And now we have a whole generation of people who have known nothing but electronics and environmental problems. Josh Stevenson, Manager of EDC's EcoMentors program says, "I'm excited about the rise of youth involvement: young people taking leadership and taking charge. For them, it's just part of their reality—it's obvious."

Stevenson adds, "Yeah, there is anger. There's anger in every movement, there has to be. But [youth] are also hopeful. They see the changes first hand. They see this wave of change and get to see immediate shifts." And although Stevenson, a 31-year-old queer guy, says he's different from his mostly male, mostly queer friend, he has hope.

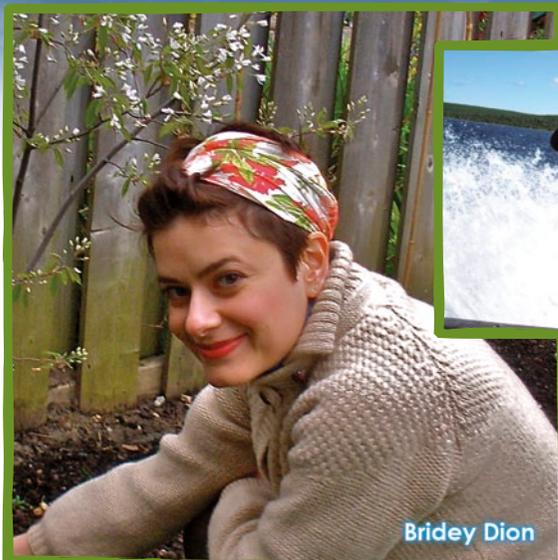
"Environmental action has become a part of everyday life. They've received the message that local organic food is good, that they should be conserving energy without even thinking about it or putting in too much effort."

Bridey Dion, a 32-year-old queer community worker, on the other hand, says her friends are all similar to her. "Pretty much all my friends are queer and I see ingrained, good ethical habits. Everyone in my community is committed to living a low-impact life."

Dion is most excited about urban farming, food security and how environmental and social issues are all interwoven, "Not Far from the Tree, Farm Start and The Stop are all exciting programs related to food security and access to affordable and free food."

Dion thinks the queer community could do a lot to set an example. "It would be nice to see The 519, Pride come together with environmental organizations. There's a gross amount of waste at Pride. They've done a big step forward hiring an environmental officer but I think there should be a whole team. I'd like to do a waste audit at Pride. Get down and dirty!"





Bridie Dion



Josh Stevenson

Craigslist and freecycle.org to obtain not only food but recover other discards that allow them to avoid buying anything new. They organize meet-ups to trade and share. They occupy abandoned housing or couch-surf and work less because they believe working enslaves people in a cycle of making money to buy more stuff. There is an active meet-up group in Toronto if you want to learn more about "urban foraging." (www.meetup.com/Food-Rescue-and-Urban-Foraging-in-Toronto/)

But Goldberg, Stevenson and Dion believe the necessity of policy change is a part of the solution.

"Nothing in the environmental movement can be a silver bullet. For us to be able to be successful in dealing with our challenge, it has to be attacked from 57 different angles. The government is obviously very important, but people are what make government change. If people were vocal about what's going on it could potentially force change. But as Canadians we tend to be very subtle and quiet, we write letters. We complain for a few months and then forget about it," Goldberg says.

We have become accustomed to living with the signs of our bumping up against the predicted disasters now—the tipping point. We are used to paying much more now for gas, and power. We are used to the soot on our windows. We are now seeing the economic effects of limits. We are watching ice islands break off the polar caps and are learning about concentrated plastic whirlpools in the ocean.

Dion agrees, "The world is crazy right now. I don't see how everyone can't see how we are on the edge of disaster. I worry about the future. I don't see a realistic way out of that unless there's a top down approach, a paradigm shift of people changing their habits on a large scale."

A few years ago there was a trend of people taking pictures of their middle finger raised in front of Hummers. This "conspicuous consumption" is becoming, in many ways, frowned upon. The "hipster" culture is taking their money to Value Village and used clothing shops because old is cooler than new.

An even more radical response to society's obsession with capitalistic consumption and expansion and all the ethical and environmental problems with sustaining that life is the "freegan" movement. The word is the compound of "free" and "vegan." The freegan movement is a total boycott of the economic system.

Freegans survive by dumpster diving or using websites like

There are technological tools that youth are creating to support this new state of awareness. Tradyo is a smart phone app that can help you connect with your neighbours who might have stuff you need. The counterbalance of "conspicuous consumption" is the "collaborative consumption" movement. Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers' book *What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* spells out why this is one solution to our destructive habits. Botsman illustrates the fact that we don't really need the drill (that sits unused for most of its lifecycle), we need the holes in the wall.

Borrowing or having community tools or "stuff," can achieve the end goal without having to accumulate bigger, better and more. Reducing the amount that we consume takes us out of the cycle of resource depletion, energy use, the need for space to store it all, and the need to recycle the stuff we have either grown out of or no longer need.

And more solutions are being discovered everyday. Einstein was right: "Necessity is the mother of all invention." We will change because we need to.

We owe action to our future generations. If we each do something, it adds up. Earth Day Canada is hosting 2012 campaigns and event listings on earthday.ca to help people practice new ways of being. Just imagine if all the six million Canadians who celebrate Earth Day made "change" a habit! And imagine if the same group decided to demand change from our government... imagine what we could achieve.

Happy Earth Day people!

Karen Fulcher has been freelance writing for PinkPlayMags for three years and this is the most exciting year yet!



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OCCUPY THE EARTH

By Scott Dagostino



THE 10% OF THE 99% – QUEERING THE OCCUPATION

If you've noticed people around our city wearing cheery yellow buttons that read, "OUR MAYOR EMBARRASSES ME," you've seen the handiwork of artist and enfant terrible Roy Mitchell, executive director of artist-run production facility Trinity Square Video and the host of his own weekly podcast, ROYNATION. Especially since the election of Rob Ford, a mayor who's managed the impressive feat of making Toronto miss the wise and steady hand of Mel Lastman, Mitchell has turned his impish humour and knack for trouble-making towards combating the powers-that-be.

“We need community. It’s a word we have to reclaim.”



“You just fall into things in life,” he shrugs. “You put your body where you think it’ll make the most impact.” A few months back, on November 13, that meant leading a large group of Occupy Toronto activists on a “Sissy Stroll” past many of Toronto’s gay and lesbian historical spots, in hopes of educating the protesters about LGBTQ issues and encouraging more queer people to join the Occupy movement.

“We had about 30 or 40 people walking,” says Mitchell. “It was great.” The stroll was organized by a working group called Occupy the Rainbow. As founder Jordan Bond Gorr explained on their Tumblr page, “Statistics have said that ten percent of Canadians are queer or trans identified. If that’s true, we are 9.9% of the 99 percentile that everyone’s been talking about.” But despite that excellent rallying cry, it’s unlikely that queer people made up ten percent of the campground at St. James Park that formed after the initial Occupy Bay Street rallies in October.

“I wish there were more gay men there so it’d be sexier for me,” Mitchell laughs. “There were some sexy guys there—I like that hippie look—but that wasn’t what it was about. The gay identity wasn’t an organizing point... Identity doesn’t work when you’re trying to form community. We need community. It’s a word we have to reclaim. They use it to sell condos now: ‘A community by the lake.’ Our shared interests are bigger than what we consume.”

Activist Kim Koyama agrees with Mitchell that, even now, “there’s more of a queer presence in Occupy than people realize, but most of the people are participating not as queers but as members of organizations that they’re a part of.” Professionally, Koyama works as a linguist but had been active in anti-racism initiatives for years. During the controversy that erupted when Pride Toronto banned Queers Against Israeli Apartheid from marching in the 2010 parade, Koyama argued in the group’s defense and through that, he says, “I started meeting all kinds of interesting people.” Up until then, he says, “my circle of queer friends were mainstream, privileged gay couples.”

For Mitchell, that’s what was exciting about the Occupy tent city that grew over a few weeks next to St. James Cathedral at Church and King. “I’ve never had an experience like that, where you go into a space and it’s so diverse,” he says. “You’d be talking to someone about the economy or the environment and people would come up and form a circle. You’d have ten people joining the conversation and the guy next to you could be a banker or he could be a homeless person. The diversity was incredible.”

While pundits cracked jokes about Woodstock and smelly hippies, Mitchell says he was inspired by how people of different classes, races,



Photo by Frank Nyitray



Protests of the Bathhouse Raids, Toronto, 1981

faiths, sexualities and abilities worked to coexist in difficult conditions and to rally for change.

“People were looking after each other,” Mitchell says. “There was always food around. No one was going hungry. I was avoiding the food because I felt it was there for the poor people and they’d tell me, ‘No, eat. The food is for everybody.’” At one point, he says, a group leader told the crowd, “Let’s do three deep breaths.” 150 people, all pausing and taking deep breaths and focusing is incredible. I know it’s hippie and it’s yoga and all that, but it really fucking works!”

The tent city, enthuses Mitchell, “was a place to mix and meet all of humanity right on your doorstep,” though he’s quick to add that it certainly wasn’t a utopia. Mixing with all of humanity can sometimes be exhausting.

“There was one guy who really got on my nerves,” the artist recalls. “He kept yelling and screaming and one person told me he was schizophrenic and if he gets nervous, he goes off his meds. But they made a space for him, right? In any other place, he’d be disruptive but here, we just talked around him until he calmed down and could join in again.”

“What I found exciting about the Occupy movement,” says Mitchell, “is that it was taking the ‘bottom feeders’ of our society and making them a part of it, as opposed to what we normally tend to do, which is trying to make

the top people acknowledge us so we can move up there... We talk about diversity in the gay community but I don’t know a lot of poor gays or homeless gays or gays with drug addictions. In the gay community, we don’t really want to acknowledge any of that.”

For all the success gay and lesbian people have won through the massive, thousands-strong protests of the bathhouse raids in 1981, or the ongoing AIDS activism through the ‘80s and ‘90s, there seemed to be much less enthusiasm for the Occupy movement in comparison. Odd, since the economic inequalities it protests are widespread and ever-growing. What kept queer people at home?

“What I see among my friends,” says Koyoma, “are people who are centrist or even leftist but comfortable. They don’t identify with the struggles any more. There’s a complacency and a lack of understanding of the relevance or importance of these protests. It’s those people I’m trying to pull into community discussions and raise awareness.”

“People aren’t seeing the general trends across the world in terms of governments at all levels,” he warns. While critiques of Rob Ford and Stephen Harper are typical, Koyoma insists Dalton McGuinty doesn’t deserve a pass. “A lot of the people I talk to are Liberals and they don’t see that the Liberals are following a lot of the same arguments for austerity measures, which are attacking the lower-income classes and giving breaks to the richest 1%... The gay population is generally more affluent or aspiring to be more affluent,” Koyoma notes, “but there’s a lack of understanding of who that 1% is.”

A December 2010 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives listed the top one-percent as the “246,000 privileged few whose average income is \$405,000” and noted how this group “took almost a third (32%) of all growth in incomes in the fastest growing decade in this generation, 1997 to 2007....In 1948, the top marginal tax rate was 80% but by 2009 it had been cut almost in half, to 42.9%.” Not only are you not among the 1%, there’s the ever-increasing reality that you never will be.

In a widely mocked *Toronto Life* article this February, Jonathan Kay attempted to counter Occupy’s “We are the 99%” campaign by writing, “An income of \$196,000 places you in the country’s top one per cent of earners. But does it make you wealthy?” The piece featured interviews with upper-crust neighbours “just getting by,” having to limit their spending on wine, for instance, to four or five hundred dollars a month.

As appallingly out-of-touch as Kay’s ilk may be, sighs Koyoma, “That’s not who we’re going after. We’re going after the people who are getting ridiculous bonuses at the same time they’re victimizing workers.” He cites the horror story of the industrial corporation Caterpillar closing a plant in London, Ontario earlier this year as a prime example. The plant was given \$5 million in federal tax breaks in 2008 but locked out all 460 workers this January when they refused to accept pay cuts of 50%. As it closed the plant and put them all out of work permanently, Caterpillar’s parent company announced its annual profit, a record \$4.9 billion. When activists get criticized for using iPhones or drinking

Starbucks, Koyoma says, “it’s missing the whole point of what we’re fighting for.”

But a portion of the blame for public apathy towards their message must fall with the Occupiers themselves. Despite the diversity and symbolic power of the tent cities here in Toronto and around the world, Occupy’s messiness remained a tough sell to middle-class people, gay or straight. In a piece for the HIV news site *PositiveLite.com*, columnist Bob Leahy wrote about going down to the tent city to interview the Occupy the Rainbow contingent and being unable to find them. “In the end, I gave up,” he writes. “Just so many tents, and not enough people around who had a grasp of who actually was participating in Occupy Toronto and where they were housed.”

It’s not hard to see an obvious metaphor in that and Koyoma has been as frustrated as Leahy. “Right from the first Occupy meeting I attended,” he says, “I could see that part of the problem has been to be fair to everyone and to hear everyone. True organizing by consensus doesn’t work,” he says, “The conversation quickly deteriorates because there’s so many points of view coming into it. Some people go off on their own tangents.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” says Stefonkee Wolscht, a trans activist who insists that what Koyoma sees as “disorganization” can work, “as long as everyone’s willing to focus on what their strengths are. The problem starts when people want to be involved but don’t have the skills. They become very disruptive and counter-productive.” Wolscht happily admits that she initially joined the Occupy protests solely to bring more visibility for the transgendered community. “Trans issues don’t get much attention,” she says, “but once I was there, more trans people started coming.” Like Mitchell, Wolscht saw the tent city as “an experiment in community” and a protest that worked. “We had 24/7 media coverage, which we would never have had otherwise,” she says.

“I felt like we were just getting started and then the camp was closed,” sighs Koyoma. In the early hours of November 23rd, Toronto Police moved in and evicted the St. James Occupiers. They did so somewhat delicately—still smarting from the G20 debacle the





“The occupation is a movement, not a park”

summer before—but Koyoma says the movement has suffered. “Closing the camp didn’t change the need for it,” he says. “The economic arguments are still there, but it’s been quite dismaying to see how difficult it’s been to keep the momentum going.”

“The occupation is a movement, not a park,” says an upbeat Mitchell, “I was talking to a woman about [Occupy] and she said, ‘But what’s the point of it?’ and I said, ‘What’s the point of us talking?’” Mitchell says the most important thing the experience taught him was “generosity...I’m working with a group of about 30 artists now. I don’t want to talk about money, I want to talk about ideas and doing things.” The Occupy the Rainbow Facebook page may be dormant for now, but Mitchell has more pranks to come. “We stood outside *The Nutcracker* when Rob Ford was performing and we handed out flyers,” he says. “People were standing outside with their kids and talking to us.”

In February, Wolscht and an Occupy Toronto group hit Bank of Montreal with a flash mob, dozens of people dancing to “Moves Like Jagger” with some new lyrics smacking the bank for supporting Infinity Rubber against its striking workers. “Why are we griping about a union guy who’s working 40 hours a week and making \$60,000,” she asks, “while there’s a guy who’s collecting \$200,000 in share dividends who never shows up in a factory or contributes anything other than

some money in a tax write-off?”

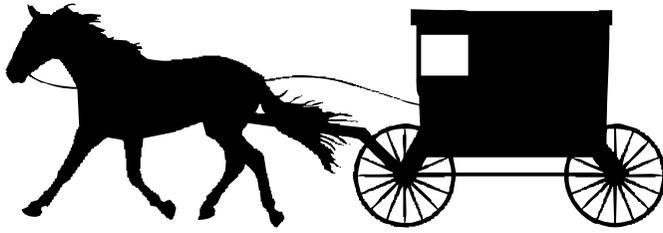
These are issues that should matter to us all, Wolscht insists. In an economy destabilized by Wall Street greed and fraud, she says, “people are afraid of losing their jobs or homes and cling to the belief that they have rights and protections. Those of us who’ve already lost jobs or homes have no problem standing up to the police.” After all, she says, that’s what queer people have always done. “Thirty years ago, people fought back so that gay men and lesbian women could keep their jobs and homes,” she says. “We all marched for the same rights.”

The Occupy movement is, she says, “evolving. What it’s going to be tomorrow, I’ve no idea.” For now, she teases, “it’s all leading up to May Day, when there’ll be events happening all over the world.”

Though it’s been harder for queer Occupiers to organize since the end of the tent city, says Koyoma, “The moment they announce something big, we’ll be there.”

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto writer who tries to constantly consider the balance between his want of creature comforts, the health of his fellow human beings and the planet we all share. It’s easier than he thought it would be.





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Make your home a healthy green haven

This Earth Day can be healthy for you and the planet by greening your cleaning routine and detoxing your home.

by Cheryl Gudcz

Do you love a clean and tidy home but loathe having to do the dirty work? Believe me, I was once that person. I used to think that cleaning my home properly was a total chore. I mean, I don't get excited about cleaning now, but I do see it a little differently.

The one thing that changed my outlook on housekeeping was the truth about the common pollutants in the home. When you work in the environmental education field you gain access to all kinds of information you sometimes wished weren't true. Case in point: indoor air is on average 2 to 5 times more polluted than outdoor air.

I know what you're thinking: Ugh is that true? How can that be? My home's not *that* dirty....

Trust me, it's not 'you', it's 'them.' There are culprits in your bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, utility room, basement and garage where we tend to store our harshest chemicals. On top of that, the loads of conventional products on the market we're supposed to use to clean up our mess are chock full of toxins that are harmful to our bodies and to the environment.

I can't even begin to name all the nasty chemicals, but rest assured, your common cleaners, degreasers, disinfectants, stain removers and air fresheners have all been linked to respiratory problems, liver trouble, hormone mimicking and reproductive issues, nerve damage—and that's just in human bodies!

Once these products enter the waste stream, they can mess with wildlife and ecosystems too. For example, phosphates in dish soap contribute to the overgrowth of algal blooms that

choke the natural equilibrium of our lakes and rivers. Surfactants (e.g. sulphates) used in degreasers, disinfectants, and general cleaners, break down into hormone-disrupting agents for wildlife.

But don't get down; there are natural, viable alternatives you can start using today! And natural cleaning products are much easier to come by these days than ever before. Better still, you don't have to purchase a whack of new green products—many solutions are already in your cupboards.

Remember, you have control over what comes into your home and you can quickly and easily minimize the hidden threats in your living space by greening your cleaning routine!

Let's start with two key rooms where you can make a big impact detoxing your home (and your body).

Kitchen

Nothing quite makes a home, a home, like the smell of baked goods or a roast in the oven. And who doesn't love a well-stocked fridge and pantry? No wonder kitchens are everybody's favorite gathering place at parties! Unfortunately, your kitchen is also a potentially hazardous place for toxic exposure, and I don't mean from potentially unwashed dish heaps in the sink.

The good news? Your kitchen is probably already stocked with many of the products you need to clean green, so why use anything else? I'm talking about white vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice, olive oil, essential oils and borax.

Make your own!

White vinegar and baking soda, mixed with aromatic essential oils or natural dish soap have hundreds of household cleaning applications. Mix them with water in a spray bottle, and you've got an all-purpose cleaner for countertops, backsplashes, and much more. If you prefer to buy ready-made products, stay away from anything that says "poison" or "corrosive" on the label. Instead, look for plant-based ingredients and organic on the label with third party certification. Finally, choose washable, reusable cloths over disposable tissue products.

Ok now the bad news. Cleaning green will only take you so far in the kitchen. There are other kitchen culprits that can make a home toxic.

Let's start with the food packaging and the most dangerous offenders. Have you heard of bisphenol-A? More commonly known as BPA, this chemical was banned from baby bottles in Canada and also found in reusable plastic water bottles (which you will now see advertised as BPA-free). Many people don't know, however, that tin cans have resin linings that contain BPA to protect the food contents from exposure to the tin can itself. One particularly bad combination is tomato products in tin cans. Because tomatoes are naturally acidic, they absorb more of the chemical than other foods. Not to worry though, you can find tomato-based products and sauces in glass jars, which are perfectly safe.

Cookware

Hey good looking, time to know what you've been cooking (with)! Did you know that non-stick pans (e.g. Teflon coated) are supposed to be used only at medium-low temperatures? If they are turned to high temps, they can emit harmful toxins in the air which have been linked to pet bird deaths—seriously! For safety and actual health benefits (not to mention affordability), stainless steel and cast iron cookware are your best choices. Plus if you're low in iron (as many Canadians are) you'll absorb a little through these pans which is actually good for you. Cast iron can be a little pricier, but is well worth the investment!



Garage sales are a chef's paradise when it comes to cheap cast iron cookware.

Same goes for bakeware. Those non-stick muffin and cake pans are just as bad as their stovetop equivalents. Choose ceramic-coated instead.

Microwaves

While they do emit tiny doses of radiation, we are assured by health officials that these levels are safe. You will however, want to be very careful about the kinds of dishes you put in a microwave to reheat or cook your food. Never nuke polycarbonate plastics or polystyrene foam (Styrofoam); choose glassware or ceramics instead. And take this snack suggestion to heart: ditch the microwave popcorn in favour of stovetop kinds. Microwave popcorn has been listed on many "foods not to eat" lists because the bags are lined with chemicals such as perfluorooctanoic acid (or PFOA) which has been associated with causing infertility in humans and cancer in animals.

Eat well

One of the best things we can do for a detox is to eat well with a diet rich in leafy greens, fresh vegetables, whole grains, lots of water and herbal or medicinal teas. Our bodies are constantly exposed to chemicals indoors and out, and by eating and drinking foods that are good for us, we can help flush them away. Speaking of flushing...

Bathroom

Okay folks, the double whammy of green cleaning potential lives here. Not only do bathrooms require extra care to keep clean, but they are also where we house dozens of personal care products and where we fuss over our looks in the mirror!

Let's start with that bathroom mirror. The way you clean it may actually "reflect" a lot more about you than you think. Sure many people would get out the glass cleaner but that's an unnecessary chemical product when all you need is a little vinegar and water solution. Just spritz and wipe for some mirror magic! Now go ahead and wink at yourself, you beautiful green hottie, you!

Nothing beats a royal (green) flush

Now for the not so pretty. I'm talking about toilet bowls. Somewhere a savvy product marketer hit the jackpot by making us think we must put the strongest possible chemicals in there (like bleach or those toxic blue pucks) to truly achieve clean. The truth is you don't need 'em! Simple vinegar and borax (or baking soda) are all you need to clean that bowl with your toilet bowl brush. Or you can buy a ready-made green cleaner from health stores with the angled head that hits those hard to reach places.

Getting the soap scum and black ring off your shower walls is another not-so-fun job. There are many green cleaners on the market that purport to do the trick, but there are just as many that don't work. Adria Vasil, author of the weekly *Ecoholic* column and books by the same name has tested many varieties and recommends using a product that is designed for showers and tubs and NOT an all-purpose cleaner. She recommends Nature Clean tub and tile cream cleanser or the EcoMist Tub and Tile (from Home Depot) and has found it can get rid of even the blackest of soap scum. Another favourite, found at most health food stores, is Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap—you can use it for almost all your cleaning needs and it comes in a variety of scents like lovely lilac and peppermint. Who doesn't want a bathroom smelling like that?.

Working up a sweat with all that cleaning?

Here's the deal: antiperspirants are made to prevent you from sweating right? But have you ever stopped to think about *what* stifles your sweat and whether that's a good idea in the *first* place?

Antiperspirants contain aluminum, which closes our pores to reduce the amount of sweat we produce. Now think about how

often you apply the stuff—once, maybe two or more times a day? How much aluminum is your skin absorbing? And what if you shave your armpits and apply antiperspirant directly after? Common sense tells me that could be risky business, although Health Canada says antiperspirants are safe. Nevertheless, international research continues to examine the links discovered between aluminum and Alzheimer's (aluminum is found in high concentrations in the brain tissue of people with Alzheimer's).

Now if you've decided never to use antiperspirants in favour of deodorants because they don't contain aluminum, then there are a host of other chemicals to contend with—many of which are hidden under the term "fragrance." Conventional deodorants mask odours and may contain carcinogenic chemicals (cancer causing agents), VOCs (volatile organic compounds), and triclosan, all substances you definitely want to avoid.

It's curtains for you, shower curtain!

When it comes to tubs and showers, accessories can also contribute to a toxic environment. You know that strong smell that emits from a brand-new plastic or vinyl shower curtain? That's the smell of vinyl off-gassing as they are loaded with VOCs. Conventional fabric curtains are no better as they are pre-treated with other harmful chemicals. You can look for a hemp curtain but your best bet is to invest in a glass shower door. Wowie! See-through showers at home? Now that's more than a green choice, that's an investment in sexy shower time!



Mildew: not exactly the hot mess you fantasize about in the shower

There are many all-purpose cleaners that do a great job on surfaces and accents, but don't really tackle stains or persistent dirt or mold. Save those cleaners for areas of the house that just need a good wipe! To tackle mildew (white or black fungal growth typically found in hot and humid places), get in the habit of hanging on to your old toothbrushes because they can be used as cleaning tools around the tub. Make a paste out of borax and water and get at those pesky stains between your tiles. Tea tree oil and grapefruit seed extract are great antifungal agents, so mix one of 'em with two cups water and spray (no need to wipe). Vinegar also can do the trick.

Furnish this

So there is just a *little* more home-work I'd like to leave you with. Furniture and essentials (like sofas and mattresses), upholstery, carpet and rugs contain flame retardants to help nix potential fires and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and those chemicals are also toxic. Don't even get me started on paint and fake wood (particle board!). Here are some easy wins for decorating green:

1. Add plants
2. De-clutter
3. Buy real wooden furniture from second hand stores.
4. Paint with low-VOCs
5. Buy organic cotton or bamboo sheets, towels, and curtains!

Go ahead and grin

You may feel like there is a new laundry list of things to try and do, but congratulate yourself on caring enough about your health (and the environment's) to read this far. If you need any additional motivation to green your cleaning routine, remember that most people find environmental awareness *and* a clean home *very* sexy.

Cheryl Gudz keeps her tiles impeccably clean and green so her showers are sexier.



Easy wins for cleaning

1. Remove pollutants from your home! Dispose properly of any products with a skull and crossbones and other scary warning symbols. Candles, incense sticks and air fresheners are culprits too!
2. Get informed and read labels. Ask clerks what products are, or do research when you get home. The internet is a great educator!
3. Dust often with a damp cloth and vacuum regularly.
4. Ventilate often, by opening a window or door to let in fresh air. When painting, varnishing or laying down upholstery, take extra care to properly ventilate. When cooking (especially frying), use the exhaust fan on your range/oven.
5. Choose low-emission paints, varnishes, glues, wood furniture and building products. Look for an independent certification label, like the EcoLogo program that sets standards for sustainable products, to help you select low-emission products.
6. Start shopping in eco-friendly health and body stores.
7. Strip down your routine to the bare essentials. Chances are you don't need so many individualized products, but a few household essentials like vinegar, baking soda and lemon juice to make your own cleaning solutions.
8. Use essential oils and a diffuser for a feel-good natural air freshener!

Helpful Resources

Give It Up for Earth Day – Toxic Cleaners

www.earthday.ca/giveitup

Take It Up for Earth Day – Detox your personal care routine

www.earthday.ca/takeitup

Grassroots Environmental Products

(two locations in Toronto) www.grassrootsstore.com

Ecologic books and NOW column

Adria Vasil www.ecologic.ca

Health Canada – Consumer Product Safety

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php



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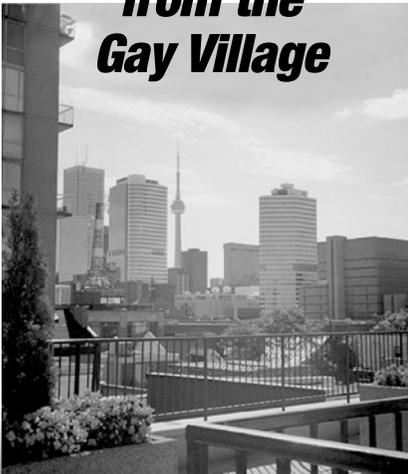
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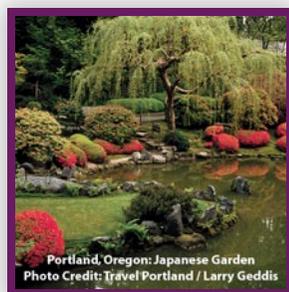
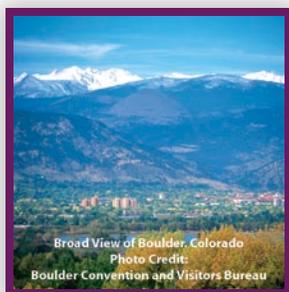
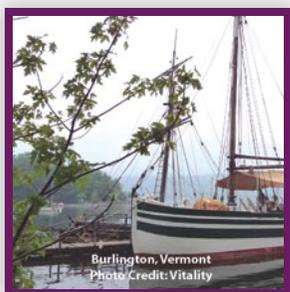
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Green & Gay in the U.S. of A

by Bryen Dunn



Many people have heard the saying “take only pictures, and leave only footprints,” but how is this best practiced when travelling? For some, doing the right thing is as simple as separating recyclables from trash, while others adhere more to the three R’s: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Travelling has always been a passion for the LGBTQ community, with more and more tourism boards and travel providers recognizing this with target marketing toward this demographic. With this much influence, perhaps this allows for an opportunity to educate and influence these decision makers, and working toward making every travel experience a greener one for the planet.



Burlington, Vermont. Photo Credit: Vitality

The “slow food” movement (www.slowmovement.com/slow_travel.php) and “buy local” programs have helped to increase awareness of the values of supporting local economies and eating fresher foods. Taking this one step forward, there’s also a growing concern for a slower paced travel experience (www.sustainabletrip.org). As much as we want to be friendly to the earth, the very essence of travelling is counter conducive to achieving any such green initiatives. That being said, there are necessities for travel, as well as times when it is done for a more leisurely reason.

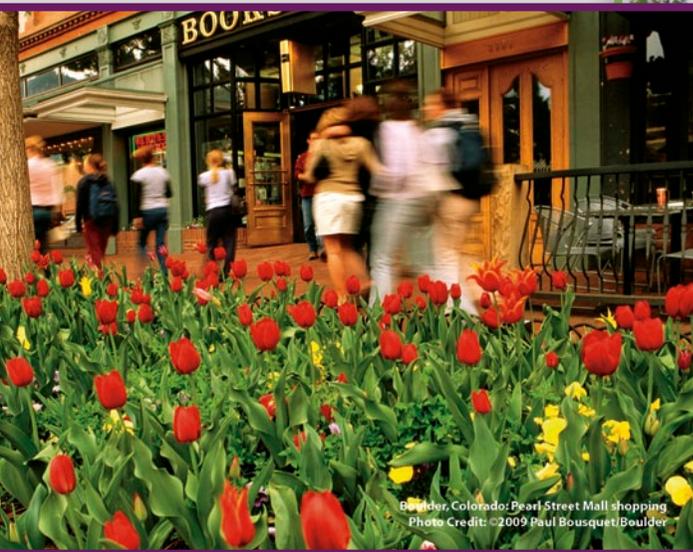
While cities and countries across the globe are implementing procedures and policies to reduce their carbon trace, one of the first areas to consider when planning your next getaway is whether you are able to improve on the impact of your mode of travel. It has been proven that all forms of motorized travel produces carbon dioxide, which negatively contributes to climate change. Many travel providers have introduced some form of carbon offsetting that helps mitigate this environmental footprint. There are various programs, such as Zero Foot Print (www.zerofootprint.net), that have been developed that will calculate the cost of all emissions created by your transportation method, and indicate an equivalent dollar value required to reflect corresponding offsets. This collected revenue is then typically used to fund renewable energy projects such as wind farms, biomass energy, or hydroelectric dams.

Once you’ve chosen your greenest method of transportation, the next decision is where to go and

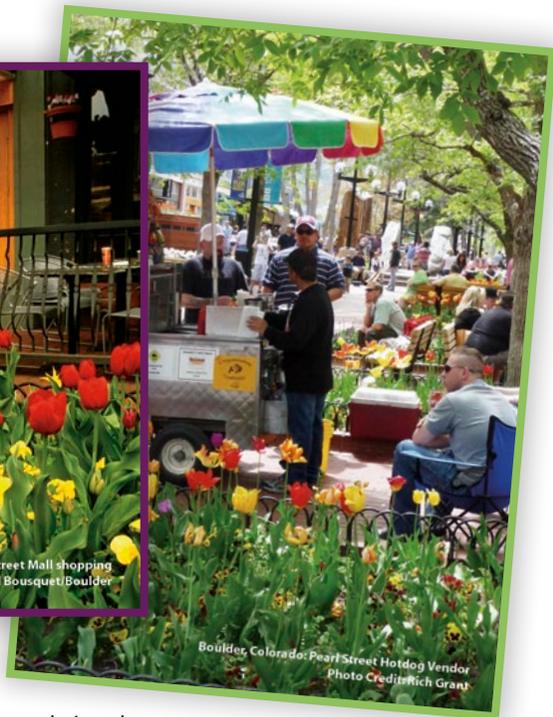
where to stay. Preference should be given first and foremost to a destination or property that is gay friendly and has shown significant advancements toward LGBTQ acceptance. While this may not always be possible, showing reciprocal support will help to enforce their decisions both in the past and in the future. The United States is often seen as a nation of excess and intolerance, but policies differ state by state both in terms of LGBTQ rights and green initiatives. Here’s a snapshot look at some of the pioneers and leaders in sustainability that should be on your travel radar if you want to remove some of that footprint guilt from your next adventure. I specifically chose locations close to the Canadian border in hopes that a visit using public transportation such as buses and trains might be a viable alternative to flying. Each of the three has received continuous high accolades as being one of the greenest destinations in the country.

Burlington, Vermont (www.vermontvacation.com) is a tiny city surrounded by large mountains, best known for its proximity to outdoor pursuits such as skiing in the winter, and hiking or cycling in the summer. The first thing noticeable is the complete lack of any billboards, which have been banned in the state for several decades. The state also made a concerted effort to attract alternative energy organizations to relocate there, and was one of the first states to develop recycling and community environmental clean-up days.

On a recent visit there, I was surprised at the support the locals gave to not only food, but also wood products, toiletries, micro-breweries, and wine



Boulder, Colorado: Pearl Street Mall shopping
Photo Credit: ©2009 Paul Bousquet/Boulder



Boulder, Colorado: Pearl Street Hotdog Vendor
Photo Credit: Rich Grant

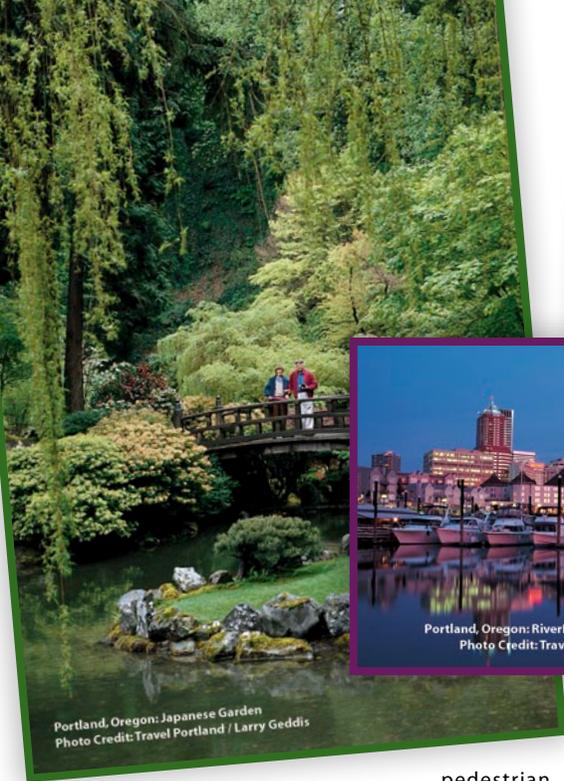
producers. It was fairly common to find locally grown items on every menu, from smaller independent restaurants to the larger resort properties. As well, I ran into an unusually large number of vegetarians and vegans, which I attribute to complementing the healthy outdoor lifestyle. On top of all this, Vermont was the first state to introduce both civil unions and same-sex marriage statutes, and the capital of Burlington is home to a vibrant LGBTQ scene (burlington.gaycities.com). It's definitely a spot to check out if you're into the Sporty Spice type of guy or gal.

While Burlington is quite small in size, there is a noticeable population that exceeds the national average. With it being a university town, most everywhere is gay-friendly, and although there are no gay bars per se, there are many queer events such as the annual Gay Ski Week in Stowe and the Drag Ball in Burlington. In terms of accommodations, I'd recommend the gay friendly Marriott Courtyard overlooking Lake Champlain, and a short walk to the Burlington Town Center and the Church Street Marketplace (www.churchstmarketplace.com). The rooms are spacious and the facilities include an indoor pool and hot tub, fitness facility, local art, hand-crafted cherry wood decor, and pure Vermont air suffusion.

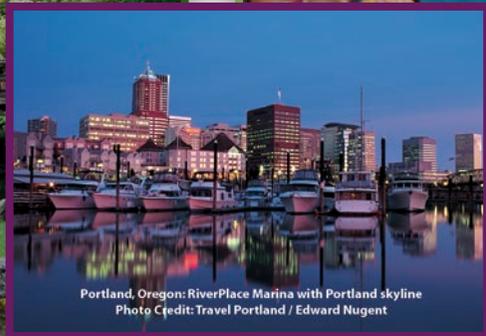
Boulder, Colorado (www.bouldercoloradousa.com) is the home to the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics (www.leavenotrace.ca and www.lnt.org), an educational, nonprofit organization dedicated to the responsible enjoyment and active stewardship of the outdoors by all people worldwide. Programs are

designed to assist outdoor enthusiasts with their decisions about how to reduce their impact when participating in non-motorized activities. It makes sense to be located here, as the city itself has received praise for their sustainability initiatives that far surpass the minimum requirements dictated by the government. More than 90 per cent of residents recycle, water meters are not allowed above a certain elevation, and new building developments must include a solar panel allowing enough sunlight to produce renewable energy. The city has a college vibe to it where everyone is either young or at least young at heart. In terms of its gay index, while Boulder is most certainly welcoming, it is not a pink haven by all means. People flock here for the great outdoors, but if you're seeking nightlife pursuits then that can be found an hour southeast in the capital of Denver.

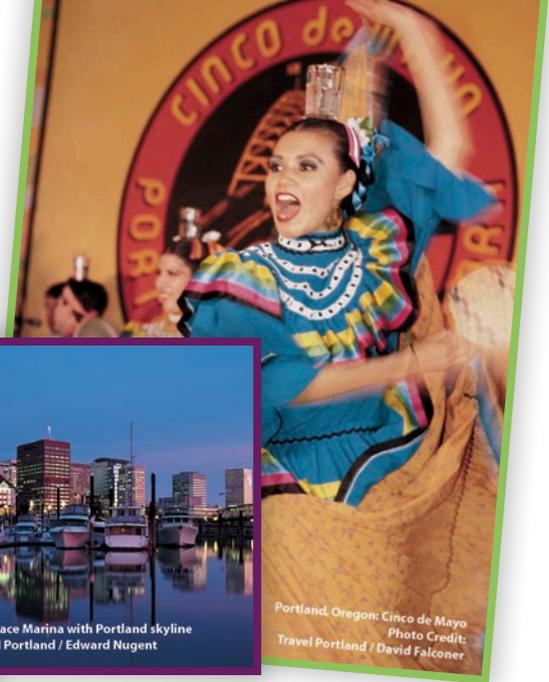
For those preferring a more subdued holiday, Out Boulder (www.outboulder.org) offers a variety of community social events. In 1994 several LGBTQ community organizations collaborated on a series of events to celebrate Boulder Pride, and today they offer such regular activities as workshops, film nights, art openings, dances, happy hours and potlucks. For a truly exquisite experience book at room at the historic Victorian era Boulderado (www.boulderado.com), a downtown luxury hotel built in 1909. Q's Restaurant offers superb locally sourced dining selections, while the Corner Bar mixes up some great martinis. The property is also ideally situated a block from the Pearl Street



Portland, Oregon: Japanese Garden
Photo Credit: Travel Portland / Larry Geddis



Portland, Oregon: RiverPlace Marina with Portland skyline
Photo Credit: Travel Portland / Edward Nugent



Portland, Oregon: Cinco de Mayo
Photo Credit: Travel Portland / David Falconer

pedestrian mall offering a variety of dining and shopping options. Many rooms offer great views of the Rocky Mountain foothills, and the décor is reflective of the surrounding natural beauty and the elegance of days of yore.

Portland, Oregon (www.travelportland.com) has continuously ranked as one of the top cycling cities in North America. It has a fairly flat landscape and year round temperate climate, making it a commuter's paradise. More than three decades ago the city tore down shoreline expressway to make room for a waterfront park. It now has a solid-waste program that recycles more than half of the city's trash, and more than 50 green certified public buildings, including one with a 200 foot plant covered exterior. Portland is known for its somewhat quirky appeal, attracting both hippies and hipsters. Although there is no specific gay district, the laid back west coast attitude makes almost everywhere homo-friendly (www.portland.gaycities.com). The city plays host to Pride Northwest (www.pridenw.org) and the Portland Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and lays claim to fame as having the World's Oldest Teenage Drag Queen Pageant, Rosebud & Thorn, established in 1975 (www.myspace.com/rosebudandthorn).

For lodging, I'd highly recommend the bohemian chain of Ace Hotels (www.acehotel.com/portland) that began in this city and has since expanded to other gay hotspots such as New York, Seattle, and Palm Springs. Located near the Pearl District, it is convenient to many

cultural activities and trendy dining alternatives. The property has an organic, authentic, and unique design that incorporates many eco-friendly, sustainable, and green elements such as vintage furniture, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints and recycled materials throughout. As well, one of the best happy hours in the city can be found onsite at Clyde Common (www.clydecommon.com), and late night fun with bands and DJ's happen next door at the Cleaners. Best of all, free bike rentals are available for cruising around the city checking out the sights.

One of the defining elements of slow travel is the opportunity to become part of local life and to connect to a place and its people. Pack your hiking boots, rent a kayak, ride a bike, or just take a leisurely stroll knowing you are contributing to the health of yourself and the Earth. Here's to your next gaycation being a green one as well the usual pink. Safe travels!

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities. He's willing to take on any assignments of interest, attend parties with free booze, listen to rants, and travel the world in search of the great unknown. He's eager to discover the new, remember the past, and look into the future.



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Our Opinion and we



Consumer
Are We Doomed or C

Melissa Benner: I have a confession to make. I buy four litres of Organic Meadow skim milk weekly. But that's not the confession. I wash out all those little one litre bags, hang them up to dry, and then reuse them. Yes, very Great Aunt Gertrude of me. But that's not really it either.

This is the thing...*(whispers through cupped hands)*...I drink Coke Zero.

What's the big deal? Well, as my milkbag zeal reveals, I'm generally pretty green. Yet I have this one big addiction I can't kick. My eco-friends are aghast. I hide the empties in the bottom of my recycling bin. And, although I know Coca-Cola is evil, I continue to sizzle away my stomach lining and tooth enamel.

Unfortunately, many people are way less green than me. An average family of four uses 1,000 plastic bags per year, views success as a two-car garage, throws out nearly \$600 in food annually, and goes into debt to buy the latest gadget. We are all addicts. And, to paraphrase leading environmental scientists, because of this: "We're fucked."

T.T. Bloomquist: So glad to hear you say we're fucked (no lie)! It gets peoples' attention and makes them question their actions. We do seem addicted to consumption, don't we? The first step in breaking an addiction, whether it's to gadgets or Coke Zero, is being aware of it. Sure, down the road you may befriend a cosmetic dentist to restore your enamel, but the good

news is those aluminum Coke cans are recyclable.

Statistics show the tonnage of household recycling is increasing every year; and as recycling industry grows, more items are recyclable. Those gadgets are being stripped and redistributed every day. People are getting the message. Granted, aluminum and silicon aren't exactly Green, but pale green is better than no green. Pastel is a positive step towards an emerald earth.

MB: Interesting that you mention silicon, as this brings to mind an exciting new innovation: eco-friendly sex toys. Organic lube and vegan-approved butt plugs? Hello, sailor!

Green-hued goods are a lucrative market these days. From toilet cleaner to t-shirts, there's something for everyone. A few of these items may be better for our earth, but, most often they provide us with an excuse to splurge: "Oh, I don't really *need* a new pair of boots, but these are locally made!"

"Well, yes, I could walk...but my smart car is way more gas-efficient than my neighbour's S.U.V."

'Reduce', and 'Reuse', are the less popular R sisters, because they imply cutting back. This is a painful thing to do. Instead, we hide our addictions through feel-good strategies like recycling...and environmentally friendly orgasms.

... have one!

by Melissa Benner and T.T. Bloomquist

ism:
an We Change?



TTB: Talk about the power of persuasion: you almost made me feel gloomy for a second there. And I am receiving the same forecast you are. The population is increasing, resources are decreasing, unemployment rates are up and the Euro Zone is spinning in a circle as though it were restaging the last hours of the Bismarck. But that doesn't mean there's no sun on this side of the street, because as *meine freundin* Angela Merkel keeps telling people: austerity is our friend!

One of the best ways to abstain from addictive behaviour is to remove oneself from triggers. In this case, something like a disposable income could trigger that nasty consumption habit. No money? No problem. We're forced to reduce and reuse. Sure, there will be growing pains and lots of grumbling, but tough times like these can engender healthy habits that last beyond those times. I believe Aunt Gertrude would agree.

MB: Well, T.T., austerity springing from these circumstances would indeed be ideal. Cause there's nothing like wearing the same socks for a week because you can't afford new ones!

But Aunt Gertrude and Angela have got nothing on Ronald McDonald and Steve Jobs. Who wants frugal when they can have their happy meal, and tweet it too?

Many people imagined that the economic crisis would shock our consumption to a stop. But human nature is

resilient. So too are markets. Even more so, our buying patterns (as I crack open a soda).

TTB: Human nature does seem to be that terrible shadow flapping around in the smog, I agree. A few years ago, though, German researchers brought forward a study to show that altruism is hardwired in humans and other primates. We are also social animals. We follow each other following trends. While I will never be one to predict what pop music will be popular—Rebecca Black? Really?!—I can see the sun getting brighter for our environment. Green is trending.

Green isn't just for hippies anymore. The movement has sprouted roots in the media, in government and the corporate sector. Sure, some accuse others of posturing in regards to Green, but regardless of intentions, it's good for all of us. And there's also a little brain reward when we know we're helping others, so we'll do it more often.

So don't feel too bad about that cola. We all need an indulgence every so often, and baby steps are still steps moving towards a stride.

Melissa Benner is a writer, educator, and community organizer living in Toronto. She first learned to recycle at age eighteen, and has never looked back.

T.T. Bloomquist acquired his melancholic optimism in the snow plains of Manitoba. He lives in Toronto where he writes, among other things.

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HOT ARTIST: RANDY DAVIS & PRIMP STUDIO

by Anthony Seet

When I approached Primp Studio, in the heart of conservative Little Portugal, I was totally unprepared for the vast amount of work that Randy Davis has poured into the small space. On the first floor sits a one-chair hair salon like no other! In this cozy place, Davis has used a discarded Farrah Fawcett head, with trademark wispy, flowing, feathered hair, then crowned the beheaded Miss Fawcett with a transparent acrylic toilet seat, embedded with brightly coloured daisies. It was evident that she was a part of a large and ever growing memorial sculpture that has evolved to surround the front window of the studio/salon space. In this mixed media sculpture that pays homage to the death of popular culture, Davis has managed to play with notions of gay politics, iconography, popular culture, consumerism and consumption. All the while giving a wink and a cheeky nod to the politics of health (by means of her toilet seat crown), with the hilarious irony of poor Farrah's battle with what Davis described as her "ass cancer."

I entered the foyer whose walls are painstakingly adorned with unconnected pieces of coral and sky blue jigsaw puzzle pieces. The space immediately invokes a quiet intimacy between Davis and his clients, who of course must take turns in the singular chair. Here on the first floor of his magnificent space is the 'bread and butter' that sustains the business aspect of his artistic endeavours. Yet it is SO much more than just a hair salon! Davis has evolved an unwanted, water damaged, space into what he calls "an opportunity for experimentation, using pattern on pattern." His work creates a unique energy that surges through his studio captivating the childlike imagination and whimsy in all of us, combined with the tongue-in-cheek mischief of the politically conscientious grown-up.

My attention was quickly drawn away from Farrah and my eyes began darting in all directions throughout the carefully crafted space: from the collection of stylized, racially provocative African American dolls located under the stairs, "Where else?" asks Davis mischievously; to the multi-coloured collage wall; the bold textiles; and the antique wallpaper of Cowboys & Indians, minus the cowboys. Every object, choice of fabric, and scrap of paper has a story, each with a colourful history.

Davis shared the genesis of many of his sculptural pieces in his own quiet way. With a raised eyebrow, he tried to explain the beginnings of his thought process. As with many artists endowed with the spirit and energy to create, he stumbled on his words and turned to gesticulate toward various random objects. He was far more comfortable expressing himself through the various projects he was going to transform/transfigure into something completely unrelated to its previous incarnation. Davis was able to infuse his own drive and passion into the pieces he has given new life, new function, and a new story.

Randy Davis' work in sculptural and industrial design can be dubbed 'upcycling,' a reworking of re-cycling, where artists utilize materials that would otherwise end up in landfills as a piece of the enormous monument to human civilization. Instead, scrap pieces of wooden dowels now elevate something else entirely to make a rustic coffee table; otherwise questionable and culturally tasteless objects (which some may consider offensive) are collected with vigor and placed with great care in prominent places of honour.

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, first settling in Vancouver, Davis came to Canada 16 years ago having met his life partner—a Canadian boy—while in Orlando. For the past eight years, Davis has called Toronto home. Here he manages to find all the materials he needs to sustain

both his business and his passion to "just keep creating." He fashions sculptural works from everyday-found objects and is completely self-taught. Dropping out of school at the age of 16, Davis' passionate gaze has allowed him to see the intrinsic value in objects others so readily throw away. "Nothing is meant to last forever. Nothing is so precious that it needs to be guarded and kept from the world," Davis states so matter-of-factly.

Discarded materials rescued from alleyways and broken down items lovingly donated by friends and patrons, now find a new beginning in Davis' studio. He has boldly picked up our busted cast-offs, and unwanted rubbish in an attempt to keep semi-salvageable stuff out of dumpsters and landfills, giving them new purpose—using them to tell a new tale. Invoking innovative discussion and begging his audience to ask themselves important questions about the politics of sex and gender, religion and faith, race and identity, all the while never really taking himself too seriously and always with a smile and a wink.

Randy Davis' Primp Studio is a must see stop on any fabulous Toronto gallery hop. In four short years, Davis has transformed an otherwise mundane two-story storefront into an ever-evolving work of art. Book a hair appointment, or just pop in and meet the stylist/artist/designer. You won't regret the experience! To those of you who think that real 'art' is pretentious, esoteric and grounded only in elusive theory and totally incomprehensible to the average person, a trip to see Randy Davis at Primp Studio will change your mind. But fair warning, some of Davis' design ideas are intended to shock, force that double-take, and make you ask complex questions, and like Davis says, "if I can't freak people out, then why bother?"

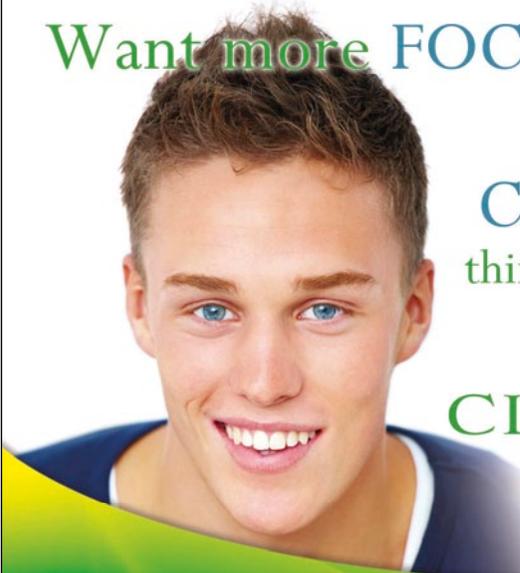
Primp Studio is located at 2 Lakeview Ave, Toronto, www.facebook.com/pages/Primp/16111690683 or call (647) 238-3430.

Anthony Seet, born in Singapore, practiced as a provincially licensed Funeral Director for over eight years, before pursuing a degree in Cultural Anthropology where his experience and education in mortuary science was combined with a new Ethnographic perspective. He now focuses upon the joys of life, laughter and the living moment.

Photographer: Peter Demas



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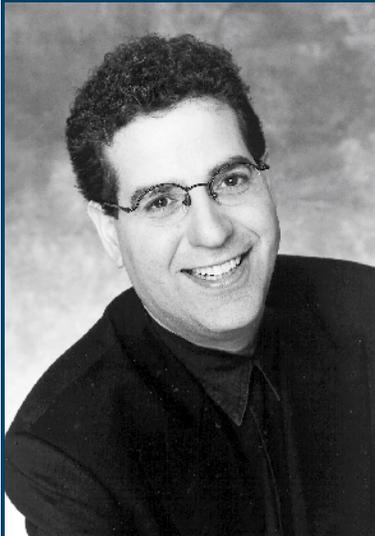
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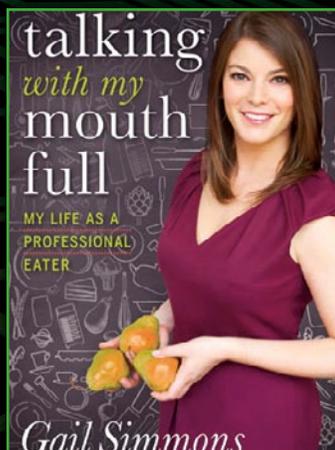
I find it difficult to throw things away. Receipts, clothes that don't fit anymore, anything with potentially the tiniest of nostalgic value in the future: it all gets piled away *just in case*. I guess I'm a natural collector. The state of my place hasn't reached Hoarders-esque levels—I'm messy not dirty—but I wish I could part with things easier.

Slowly I've worked to pull back, although the one exception I allow for is my book collection. I have bookshelves lined with works by fiction authors like Barbara Gowdy, Michael Cunningham, and Alice Munro. I love business and economics books, which I draw a lot of life philosophy from, and they're juxtaposed with my graphic novels, like Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Robert Kirkman's *Walking Dead*, and Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim* series. I wonder if such a collection is environmentally-friendly, but as a writer the idea of owning a small library is too lovely to resist.

One compromise is an electronic library, and owning a Kindle (starting from \$109 on Amazon) has been great for my reading habits. Whereas before, books sat on my bedside table waiting for that perfect moment to read (oh, poor *Suite Française*), now they're portable and always on me with the e-reader.

My latest purchase was Toronto-native Gail Simmons's memoir *Talking With My Mouth Full*, (\$19 hardcover and \$4 Kindle version on Amazon) where the *Top Chef* judge discusses memorable meals she's eaten to explore the meaningful moments from her life. Simmons has a non-nonsense approach to life and food and shares my philosophy that not every meal we eat has to be fancy, but should still be cooked correctly. To me, treating food with respect is part of a green attitude: we should eat with purpose.

As someone who truly loves food, when I see all the chemicals in fast food, I stop finding it appetizing, especially when this city has so many great places for fresh fried chicken or burgers or french fries. My general rule is





if the food that you're eating doesn't excite you, don't eat it. I still eat guilt-inducing foods like potato chips and bacon (exciting, crispy, salty, fatty goodness!), but in moderation to keep it exciting. Of course there's also the joy of cooking and Simmons includes some favourite recipes such as for zucchini bread and blackberry soufflé.

.....

One of my favourite scenes from a sci-fi film is in *Minority Report*, the Steven Spielberg adaptation of the Philip K Dick story, when the protagonist jumps inside a car that drives on its own and scales down tall buildings using magnetic rails. I loved how sophisticated the film made driving, unlike the hectic, stressful mess it is now.

While we're not there yet, I was reading about autonomous cars in an old issue of *Wired* and was amazed by how much development has happened in a decade. (Not surprisingly Google is a major player.) Imagine how much safer our roads will be when we don't have people texting, eating, or applying makeup when they're supposed to be driving. There would be environmental benefits too, as autonomous cars would lessen the stop-and-go behaviour that burns a lot of fuel.

One interesting part of creating the cars includes teaching the computers within about how real

humans drive. It's a trend I'm seeing with devices that learn from being used, in order to become smarter and more efficient. My friend Adam Schwabe, creator of the transit app Rocket Radar (\$2 from the Apple App Store), once explained why the app had no settings options. Instead, the app has an algorithm that learns from how you use it and predicts what you'll need. To have settings, he said, was lazy programming.

This got me thinking about how settings can be inefficient. On the surface, it would appear that giving us settings to choose from would allow for the best choices to be made, but modern living puts so much on our plates, something like adjusting a thermostat down when we leave the house can slip our minds.

Enter the Nest thermostat, which like Rocket Radar, learns from our behaviour and within a week can begin automatically fine-tuning the temperature of your house to be most efficient. Developed by the inventors of the iPod, the device could help make something as ordinary as climate control into something cool. At \$250, the thermostat is a pricey gadget, but the real reward isn't cost savings, but in using less resources. Having a nifty piece of technology in the house doesn't hurt either!

I'm not as green as I could be, but I try to keep a green frame of mind. It actually shouldn't be that hard for nerds and geeks to be green, since the label itself refers to a passionate enjoyment of something. If we enjoy what we have in a meaningful way so that we don't need more than we use, I think that's a pretty good start.



At a time when things are so disposable or prone to become obsolete, how do we balance experiencing what's new while being respectful of the planet? Maybe the solution is ensuring we discover the full value of the things we love.



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WORLD OF THE FIFTH SUN



Part one of four
a short story
by Jeff Harrison
Illustration by Wade Shaw

Zack rolled over again, tossed the covers off his sweat slicked skin, reached out a questing hand into the dark until he found his goal and punched the small smooth button on his iPhone. The glossy screen winked awake, bright numbers telling him it'd only been fifteen minutes since he'd last rolled away from performing this very action.

He blew out a long frustrated sigh. 3:15am. It was hours until dawn and yet his mind was buzzing with a thousand voices, not the least of which was acrid self-recrimination for a missed deadline and the imagined voice of his editor, silky with begrudged allowance at his being late with his feature yet again. An allowance she'd entertain for a price.

Once, he'd taken great pride in never having missed an assignment, no matter how challenging, but that all fell apart over a year ago when the shit hit the fan and things had continued along that vein of abysmal luck since. Life had gone to hell and had continued to spin out of his control. That's when the dreams had started and the insomnia had begun to eat away at his sanity. Crazy apocalyptic dreams, total end-of-the-world, exploding disaster after disaster sweeping the planet, the city towers of civilization collapsing like dominoes.

And now here he lay, wide awake, eyeballing the slow passing of time with contempt, synapses screaming with stress even though his body felt bone weary with exhaustion—fall-out from ruined sleeping habits.

drip

Great. Now that his ears had zoomed in on the leaky faucet in the bathroom sink, there would be no return to sleep now that he was conscious of

this water torture. A dozen or so more drips and his annoyance finally boiled over, forcing him from the once comfort of his bed to pad out to the living room.

He wandered through the semi-dark apartment to gaze out the bank of windows that made up one wall of his small living space, gazing down on the city below that never slept, the night sky a glowing iridescent and flickering neon. He used to love the buzz of the urban sprawl, but now...

Now the city sickened him. It seemed like a rabid animal, cornered by irrational panic. These feelings were definitely echoed in his current piece of writing—a sensationalized hack piece on the end of the world writ large with half factual interpretations meant to foment panic rather than an intelligent discussion. However, rent was due and end of the world or no, the bills still had to be paid.

Zack turned away from his view and headed toward the bathroom, might as well take a leak so his bladder wouldn't wake him up again once he fell asleep. If he fell asleep. The sleeping pills he'd been popping—increasingly of late—seemed to do little for his insomnia. Instead, they filled his head with the bizarre dreams that kept him tossing and turning until the wee hours. When he finally did drift off from exhaustion, it was only to be woken what felt minutes later by his alarm screaming at him to get his ass out of bed and into work before he was late... again. As usual. As always, this past year.

Flushing the toilette, Zack leaned over the sink and splashed cold water in his face. He exerted his strength as he shut off the tap in the hope of strangling that rogue drip. Looking up, he squinted in the gloom at his barely perceptible reflection. The mirror seemed to ripple like the surface of a stagnant

pond. Flicking on the light, he stared hard at himself once his eyes had adjusted to the bright glare. The movement must have been a trick of the dim lighting. He looked tired, deep dark circles under his eyes—too bad he didn't feel it.

"You keep on going like this, you are going to be no good to anyone, my friend."

Zack took a startled step back from the face suddenly staring back at him. It wasn't his. A man with a narrow visage, high cheekbones, shocking crop of orange-red hair and thousand watt smile leered at him from the glass. Zack whirled to confront the stranger.

"How the hell did you—?!" No one was there. "What the fuck..."

Turning back in the hopes of facing his sleep deprived self again, Zack was afforded no such luck. The scruffy faced man, in a loud green tartan suit was still there. A second quick glance over his shoulder assured himself he had lost his mind—this guy was in the mirror only.

"*Heh*—wish it was that straight forward my friend. But no, you have not lost your mind. You have run yourself sufficiently enough into the ground that your defences are a mess and making it very easy for me to contact you. Thank the gods for small mercies."

Zack closed his eyes and took a deep breath in, held it and let it out slowly. He repeated this twice more before opening his eyes. The vulpine Ginger was still there.

"Name's Joaquim. And I'm here to give you a warning. The ladies are here and you are going to be forced to make a decision. Your choice will affect the future of the entire world, so make sure you know all your options before you decide, because this is the last chance and there will be no going back."

I've got to be dreaming, Zack thought, his mind reeling for an explanation.

"In a way, yes you are correct about that."

I've lost my damn mind. It was the only conclusion

I've lost my damn mind. It was the only conclusion that made sense.

that made sense.

"Lost yes, but you can retrieve it with my help," Joaquim continued, answering Zack's stray thoughts. "If you are going to win this war then we need to get you ready for the coming conflict. First, these need to go." A hand reached out—OUT—of the mirror and snatched the bottle of sleeping pills from where

Zack had left them on the vanity and dumped the entire contents into the toilette. "You are doing no one any good, except perhaps *Her*, by numbing yourself out taking these dirty little reality killers."

"Hey! I need those!" Zack lunged out a hand to try and grab a few of the falling light blue pills.

"The hell you do. You're just burning out possibilities with them and giving *Her* an unfair advantage."

"Who the hell are you talking about?!"

"Ah see, this is where I'm really going to piss you off." The red-headed stranger flashed him that smile again. "I'm here to even the board because *She* is not playing fair, nor by the rules. However, I can't tell you who *She* is, because I'm not allowed to break the rules. However, because *She* has overstepped her bounds, I am allowed this visit. So lucky you! I can guide you, but I cannot answer any of your questions directly."

"You gotta be kidding me...I'm torturing myself in my own dreams—this is just masochistic."

A rumble groaned through the building, heaving the floor beneath Zack's feet and almost tossing him into the bathtub. There was an ear deafening crunching sound followed by a thunderous crash from just outside the bathroom. Dust swirled into the small tiled room on a chill breeze, even as the aftershocks still trembled through the floor. A new wan twilight filtered in and Zack could see the night sky reflected in the mirror behind his non-corporal guest. The brittle hollow *chink* of falling tiles smashing in the tub drew his attention to the fact that the night sky was no illusion—the bathroom wall behind him was gone...so was his bedroom.

And the apartments around him. The entire building above him had peeled away in what he now realized was an earthquake.

He stared out past the ragged debris of his miraculously intact perch and into the chaos of a city in ruin. The downtown—his once impressive view was now no more than jagged concrete fingers clawing at the sky. The massive CN tower had fallen, crushing everything beneath it as it collapsed through the heart of the city pulverizing everything in its path. The trees in the park across the street sent black smoke up into the hazy night obscuring the broken moon. The scene was exactly as it had been in his nightmares.

“Not a pretty sight, is it?”

Zack dragged his eyes, watering from all the dust, back toward the mirror and the strange man reflected therein.

“We don’t have much time.” The mirror cracked, emphasizing his point.

“I *am* dreaming...” Zack mumbled.

Joaquim’s arms lunged out of the flat reflective surface and gripped Zack’s shoulders, hard. “*This* time you are, but what you are seeing is the future, unless you do something about it.”

Zack opened his mouth, but no words came.

“Yes, *you*, Zack.” Another crack sliced smoothly through the glass, shearing off one of Joaquim’s arms, which fell into the porcelain sink and shattered into so many bright emerald bits. “Gods be damned—listen carefully! I’m only going to say this once.”

Zack couldn’t have interrupted him if he’d wanted to.

“When your path divides, two women will be waiting. You must choose to travel in the company of only one, but be wise in your choice because only one will lead you down the path that does not end. It will be a tough decision as they will both have charms Heaven sent just for you. Only one road leads to a future though, because the future that I am showing you now is no future at all, just an ending,

The massive CN tower had fallen, crushing everything beneath it...

an ending of all that was and all that will ever be.” Joaquim’s other arm fell to pieces in the sink. He seemed to be falling away before Zack’s eyes, back into the dark depths of the splintering mirror.

“What does that even mean?” Zack asked, afraid he was missing some important part to the nonsensical riddle spooled out before him.

“Do not forget...one path...”

And just like that the red haired man in the loud plaid suit vanished like a swirl of dark water being sucked down a filthy drain. Then the mirror exploded as a giant spotted cat burst forth, a sparkling jade serpent clutched in its teeth. Zack screamed and threw up his arms to protect his face. He gasped for breath, flailing hands to keep claws away from his flesh only to find himself back in bed tangled in his sheets.

“Fuck...I’ve got to stop taking those pills! They are seriously screwing with my head.”

Weak sunlight filtered through the window of his bedroom. Window, walls, apartment, downtown view complete with CN tower—all back to normal.

“It *was* just a nightmare.” He breathed a long sigh of relief. He slid from the mess of his bed and wandered to the bathroom. Flicking on the light he gave the mirror above the sink a long hard stare, then started to chuckle. No crazy ginger-haired man in a vivid plaid suit talking crazy-talk to him. Zack continued to laugh at himself and his insane dream the entire time he showered, letting the steaming water pound some sense back into him.

Turning off the faucets he felt as close to his old self as he’d been in months. Ripping back the shower curtain he reached for a towel and stopped dead, his eyes locked to the mirror once again. Three distinct words were scrawled across it in the moisture fogging the glass.

Do not forget!

Jeff Harrison is Editor-in-Chief of PinkPlayMags



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Community Cornerstones



Ever since it was featured on the North American version of the television show *Queer as Folk*, Woody's (465–467 Church Street) has become a worldwide icon and tourist destination. To those of us native to Toronto though, it has been a mainstay at the heart of our village, whether for a night out for drinks with the guys, to catch a spectacular drag show, the ever popular Best Chest Contest, or to champion AIDS and other important causes.



Owner Alex Korn had already established Chaps on Isabella Street, a hugely successful gay bar, restaurant and dance club complex, and he decided he wanted to open another business on Church Street proper. He wanted a neighbourhood bar, something that could give back to the community. And so Woody's, home of the distinctive rhino, was established in June 1989. "Right from the start, he wanted the bar to raise funds for charity," recalls Dean Odorico, the general manager of Woody's. "We opened the doors with a fundraiser for the Aids Committee of Toronto."

Places like Woody's became vital for survival during the AIDS epidemic, fostering that much-needed feeling of family to weather the storm. "The gay community has been through a lot of changes and growth, in the 23 years we have been in existence. We lost a lot of people to the AIDS crisis, and a lot of fundraising at the time was done at the grassroots level in the bars. We are very proud of the fact that we raised and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars for the cause."

Supporting each other has always been the foundation the bar was built on and Odorico is proud of the milestones achieved. "We sponsor gay softball, hockey, bowling, football, volleyball, tennis, pool, aquatic, and other teams and leagues," says Odorico, "hosting

food and toy drives and fundraisers, often in conjunction with the various sports teams and leather

groups. Community groups are very important for the fabric of our lives. Community means caring, comfort, safety and power, that's why we support PFLAG, The 519 Community Centre, and other cultural, and neighbourhood organizations."

Looking back over the last two-and-a-half decades of business, there have been a lot of triumphs along the way. "Like watching Toronto Pride grow from a tiny celebration to what it is today," reflects Odorico, "or seeing the advances that have been made in fighting the AIDS virus, so it is no longer the death sentence that it once was. Seeing Church Street become the safe and vibrant centre of the gay community in Toronto and watching other gay centres form in other areas of the city and flourish. Same sex marriage being passed into law and seeing same sex couples holding hands at the Eaton Centre, and no one bothered with it happening." Toronto has indeed come a long way.

As the debate continues without end over the relevance of our LGBTQ village in an increasingly Po-Mo world, it's meaningful to be reminded of one of the places where it all started. "In our own small way," says Odorico, "Woody's helped play a part in accomplishing these important things."

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SPRING IN THE CITY

by Jesse Trautmann



Spring is in the air, the sun is shining, the trees are budding, and the city has the aura of rebirth and rejuvenation. Spring is a fresh start and this column is getting one as well. Hi everyone, I'm Jesse Trautmann and I'm the new guy writing the "In the City" column for PinkPlayMags. I am excited about this year's theme being the Mayan prediction that 2012 will be the end of the world!

I begin my journey with you this spring in a sort of rebirth of this column and throughout the year I'll be incorporating the apocalyptic theme. This issue I decided to highlight Toronto's PATH, which is a maze of stylized tunnels ripe for exploration deep below our city streets. If the Mayans are correct and 2012 is the end, I guess I won't be writing this column for long! I hope they're wrong.

CONCERTS

Of Monsters and Men with Lay Low

April 12

7:00 p.m.

\$16 available via www.ticketweb.com

Phoenix Concert Theatre, 410 Sherbourne St.

416 323-1251

www.phoenixconcerttheatre.com

If you're diggin' the song "Little Talks" check out this band live. By the way these guys are cute! Apparently this show originally was scheduled to take place at the Mod Club but has been moved to the Phoenix Concert Theatre due to popular demand.

Tip: All tickets purchased for the Mod Club show will be honoured at the Phoenix.

Ani Difranco

April 21

7:00 p.m.

\$80 to \$135 available via www.ticketmaster.ca

Winter Garden Theatre, 189 Yonge Street

416-314-2901

Ani Difranco is coming to Canada with her new tour for the long-awaited new album, *Which Side Are You On?* Apparently she was trying to write happier songs for this album but, true to form, they got political. She touches on the effects of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, New Orleans, and even criticizes Obama for his political inaction.

Tip: A children's chorus and a New Orleans brass band comprised of at-risk youth add vocals to the tracks.

North by Northeast Music Festival (NXNE)

June 11 to 17

City Wide

Varied: check out the chart on their website here:

nxne.com/tickets

NXNE hosts 625 bands in 5 days spanning every genre in 50 venues across Toronto, making it Canada's number one showcase for music and music related films.

Anyone who is anyone in the industry shows face for this event, from musicians to agents, record label executives, and thousands and thousands of music lovers. It's probably a good idea to look into and purchase the multi-day pass to get into tons of shows. Festival alumni include: Devo, De La Soul, The Raveonettes, Social Scene, Stars, Feist, Peaches, Ron Sexsmith, The Homosexuals, Billy Talent, Bran Van 3000, and thousands more.

Tip: Buy your tickets by April 13 and get the early bird discount, which saves you about one hundred bucks.

FOOD and DRINK

Jodhpore Club

33 Baldwin St.

416-598-2502

\$10-15 range

This is my favourite Indian place located smack in trendy Baldwin Village. The decor is ornate and classy and the casual atmosphere makes it a great place to eat with a group of friends, but cap it at four people so it doesn't get too cramped.

Tip: Order the naan bread and be sure to get the tamarind sauce it comes with. It's delicious! I also recommend the lamb vindaloo.

Papaya

545 Yonge St

416-944-9731

www.papayarestaurant.ca

\$10

Hidden just around the corner from Wellesley station, Papaya is a great Thai food restaurant. I always love to get the green curry beef. The place looks a little dodgy from the outside, but it's shi-shi on the inside, yet casual and reasonably priced. If you can get there for lunch, do so! They offer a four-course meal for under 10 bucks!

Tip: Papaya is right beside the liquor store (you all know the one!) so pop in and grab take-out the next time you're on a booze run.

Cheesewerks

56 Bathurst St. (near King)

416-243-3327

www.cheesewerks.com

\$10

What a great idea! We all love grilled cheese, so you definitely should try out the interesting selection of gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches, which are made to order. They also serve house-made soups, desserts, and even drinks!

Tip: Cheesewerks uses all local ingredients!

FAMILY & GENERAL FUN

The PATH

www.torontopath.com/view/Home.aspx

When people think about Toronto they don't really think of our underground city. The PATH is a labyrinth of cool places to shop





including some small boutiques. Even when there's spring rain you can stroll around and browse in comfort and explore the city beneath the city. I guarantee you'll get lost and have to find your way out. Along your path (pun intended) there are multiple food courts to grab lunch or some of the city's best restaurants like Far Niente and Marche. Also, there are a few good art galleries like Galerie Christin and ManorHill Fine Art.
Tip: Be sure to print off a map from the website before you go.

Stars on Ice 2012 Tour

May 4
 7:30 p.m.
 \$25 to \$165 available via ticketmaster.ca
 Air Canada Centre, 40 Bay Street
www.theaircanadacentre.com

Just as it's getting warm outside why not head back into the cold! The world's top figure skating tour, Stars on Ice, has brought together a superstar ensemble of Olympic, World and National Champions for the 2012 season.

Tip: If you're not sure that this is your kinda thing just Google some of the stars like Jeff Buttle or Joannie Rochette and I'm sure it'll change your mind.

Beach BBQ & Brews Festival

Friday, June 15 – 3pm to 11pm
 Saturday, June 16 – Noon to 11 pm
 Sunday, June 17 – Noon to 8pm.
 FREE
 Woodbine Park (NE corner of Lake Shore Blvd E and Coxwell Ave) www.beachbbqandbrews.com

On Father's Day Weekend over 12,000 patrons will enjoy the Beach BBQ & Brews Festival. If you're into summer and love to barbecue (who doesn't!?) then this is the event for you. Have a great day down at the Beaches and enjoy live music, a children's area (complete with rides!), grilling demonstrations and competitions, and of course, the Beer Garden.
Tip: Free ribs for the Ribfest...need I say more?

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

America's Next Top Model Live

May 4: 12:00 to 9:00 p.m.
 May 5: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
 May 6: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

\$18 online, \$20 at the door
Metro Toronto Convention Centre, 255 Front Street West (at Lower Simcoe Street)
www.antmlivetoronto.com

America's Next Top Model Live is an insider's look into the alluring world of fashion and modeling. Get immersed in the ANTM lifestyle and have a chance to unleash the top model within! The show's main celeb features are Danny Fernandes, Designer and Stylist Joey Bevan, and Isis King from ANTM All Stars.

Tip: Visitors will be treated to free makeovers! However, there is no confirmation Tyra will be there.

Luminato Toronto Festival of Arts and Creativity

June 8 to 17
 City Wide
 FREE
www.luminato.com

For ten days each year Toronto streets, museums, galleries, and theatre venues are transformed into creative contemporary art exhibits and places of artistic expression. Both local and international artists turn Toronto's downtown into an urban art extravaganza.

Tip: If you're dating online like me, then you'll know that people are dying for a non-movie date. Luminato is free and hosts "accidental encounters with art." Festival-goers are invited to participate, explore, and celebrate their own creative spirit. Perfect for a spontaneous first date!

Jesse Trautmann is a Ryerson Journalism grad and a freelance writer in Toronto. Jesse dishes on queer dating mayhem and shenanigans in his column, "Date Night FAIL" for mygaytoronto.com and he also pens the hilarious blog, "I Shaved My Ass for This?" at www.ishavedassforthis.blogspot.com

Photos by Karel Matkovic





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From the Heart



One of the aspects of my healing practice is Plant Spirit Medicine. Viewing clients' troubles and imbalances, be they physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual, through the lens of Classical Chinese 5 Element Medicine, I call upon the spirits of plants to help nourish the spirit and bring people back into harmony. Plant spirits? Really? Yes, really. Not capsules, or tinctures, nothing taken orally from a bottle, just the living sentient spirit of a plant. It is a shamanic way of touching the soul with nature beings who understand perfectly how to live in balance with the ground on which they stand.

To begin my request for the healing help of the plants, I venture outside to see which of my foliage friends are getting my attention. That is their way of indicating they are ready to offer. I will find myself noticing a plant for the first time, or feeling drawn to it. We work only with local plants, since they are the ones that know how to live here, where we are. Banana trees don't know how to live in balance in Canada, and Trilliums don't thrive in Mexico.

I take along a small offering of tobacco to thank the plant. This is the traditional gift among First Nations peoples in North America. If I were in Britain, I would bring some oats or barley. That is what the plants like and recognize over there as a suitable exchange, according to the ancient indigenous traditions in that land. The offering brings balance. I am about to receive something, so to keep balance, I need to give something. I sit down with the plant, introduce myself just like it were a person, offer my tobacco in thanks, and then open myself to its communication. I quiet my mind, and open my heart, my senses, my subtle listening. Once, the moment I arrived before a tall willowherb growing in a ditch and made my offering, a hummingbird appeared but a few feet in front of me for a meal at the pink funnel shaped flower. Amazing!

This plant offers sweetness to those who are shy about sharing their beauty with others.

Once I have drawn the plant, taking note of all of its unique expressions, its neighbors, its choice of location, and soil, and sit to listen to any communication in the form of words, impressions, or little dramas that unfold inside my own emotions or mind, or around me, I go back inside and turn on a CD of shamanic drum music. The specific rhythm of the beat helps me to journey to the dreamworld, while awake, to make contact with the spirit of the plant. This part is fun!

Information often unfolds like a whacky movie, with the spirit perhaps appearing in the form of a character who takes me on a story trip to act out in symbolic language the medicine it has to offer. Like the dreams we dream at night, sometimes it takes practice to interpret and understand the messages. Is it real, or am I making it up? That is the question that always arises when the doubting mind interferes. This way of gathering knowledge through direct communion is as old as the indigenous traditions worldwide that learned directly from all that was around them. Book knowledge is second hand. Dream journey knowledge is first hand.

What the plant has to share with me is personal, based on our new friendship. Not all plant spirit medicine practitioners receive the same medicine from the same plant. Some do, as plants have their particular talents and aptitudes, as we do.

Working with a client this week, I realized just how profound the relational aspect of the medicine is. The client, I'll call her Moe, was intrigued by the process and so decided to ask the plants I was treating her with to contact her in her dreams:

"Inspired by yesterday's Plant Spirit Medicine talk, I was

Healed by the Green Earth

by Shelley A. Harrison

doing some yin and restorative yoga in the evening and said to my plant spirit(s) that I would love to meet them tonight in dream land. I had the most awesome dreams last night. I went to two different parties and there were two or three long time friends in my dream (no one I knew in real life). I can't remember the details now, but I remember that we talked a lot and I had a lot of fun and was very happy."

After each weekly treatment, she continued to thank her plants, and talk to them. She came back raving about how amazing things were, that feelings of insecurity were dissipating, and her energy and mood were high. I noticed, through her Chinese pulses, (which we measure to track the progress of treatments), that she was staying in balance very well, more so than usual when I first begin to treat someone. My PSM teacher, Eliot Cowan would say, "open yourself to the medicine, and it will open itself to you." I had not even told Moe the name of the plants I was using to treat her (in order to keep that pesky mind out of the way), yet she was still receiving the benefits of her gratitude and receptivity, which were greatly enhancing the medicine transferred through my hands in the treatments. A plant is a sentient being, and its spirit has a life, as much as a deceased relative can still have relationship and influence with us, even more so if we stay open to communication and connection, which many people report happens in dream encounters. It responds to appreciation and an open heart.

When we fly over our earth and look down, we see predominantly green. Much of the Earth is still covered in our generous green friends who provide us with food, shelter, clothing—the very oxygen we breathe—though we have become disconnected from this reality in our production processes. We are connected to all sentient beings, and they are well aware of our presence. What a

marvelous, miraculous creation we live in, when we allow ourselves to be open to it.

Every time we tense up with stress, we unplug from the Earth. We pull our energy up and hold it as tension somewhere in our body, or as a general tension throughout our body. One of the simplest ways to remedy this is to just slow down. Come down out of your head. Notice your surroundings. Feel your feet on the ground, in your shoes. Be present. Be aware of the field of life around you. It is harder to do this in the city. There are fewer nature beings around us to hear the wind blow through. We are mostly surrounded by rather lifeless buildings, and many people moving around in a state of disconnect. Spending time in nature is an important practice to help us slow down and rebalance.

There are several Plant Spirit Medicine practitioners in Toronto. If you would like to receive the plants' help with a physical illness, or other areas of distress, visit www.plantspiritmedicine.org or you can read the book *Plant Spirit Medicine* by Eliot Cowan.

Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa. She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com or visit her at www.doveheart.ca



Spring Horoscopes

by Micki Lee



Aries (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

April: You may discover a true friend with similar feelings.

May: Don't judge a book by its cover.

June: Don't get involved in their state of mind. Be yourself.

Taurus (Apr 20 – May 20)

April: Don't let others talk you into things that you really don't want to do.

May: Take a few risks and you could double your money.

June: You may be questioned and made to look foolish if you haven't done your research.

Gemini (May 21 – Jun 20)

April: Once you climb off your emotional roller coaster, things will become easier.

May: Get into self-improvement projects.

June: You may begin to feel the need for a change.

Cancer (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

April: Doors open for you, and there is a new road that is well worth exploring.

May: Don't break promises that you make to children, or difficulties will surely erupt.

June: Others recognize that you are making an effort and will do the same.

Leo (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

April: You have to make your mind up about personal issues.

May: Concentrate on your financial investments.

June: Your reputation may be affected if you get involved in secret love affairs.

Virgo (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

April: You can truly make things happen this month.

May: Work out a budget that will help stabilize your financial situation.

June: Be cautious how you handle both your business and your emotional partnerships.

Libra (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

April: You have the key to open a door to something new and exciting.

May: Opportunities to meet new individuals may develop through educational pursuits.

June: Don't retaliate verbally or tempers will escalate.

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

April: Start doing research now and it will serve you well.

May: Secrets come out from hiding and ghosts spring from closets this month.

June: Focus on getting ahead your own way.

Sagittarius (Nov 23 – Dec 21)

April: Don't let your space be invaded. Learn to put your foot down.

May: A family gathering or reunion could cause some strain.

June: Don't be afraid to make a U-turn.

Capricorn (Dec 24 – Jan 19)

April: Your financial situation will suffer if you try to expand your interests too quickly.

May: Your stubborn nature may cause you to lose a friend that you care about.

June: Try hard to keep your calm, or the silent treatment will be sure to follow.

Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

April: An acquaintance whom you look up to may have a decisive influence on your career.

May: Don't be too eager to let others in on your personal secrets.

June: You find you are constantly frustrated in close friendships.

Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

April: Be prepared to show your work, you will get support

May: There are considerable savings to be made on domestic bills if you pay closer attention.

June: Take care of all those chores that have been building up.

Micki Lee is a business woman from Oshawa who uses the stars as a guide for her daily life.

If you wait too long to plant your tree, where will you hang your hammock?



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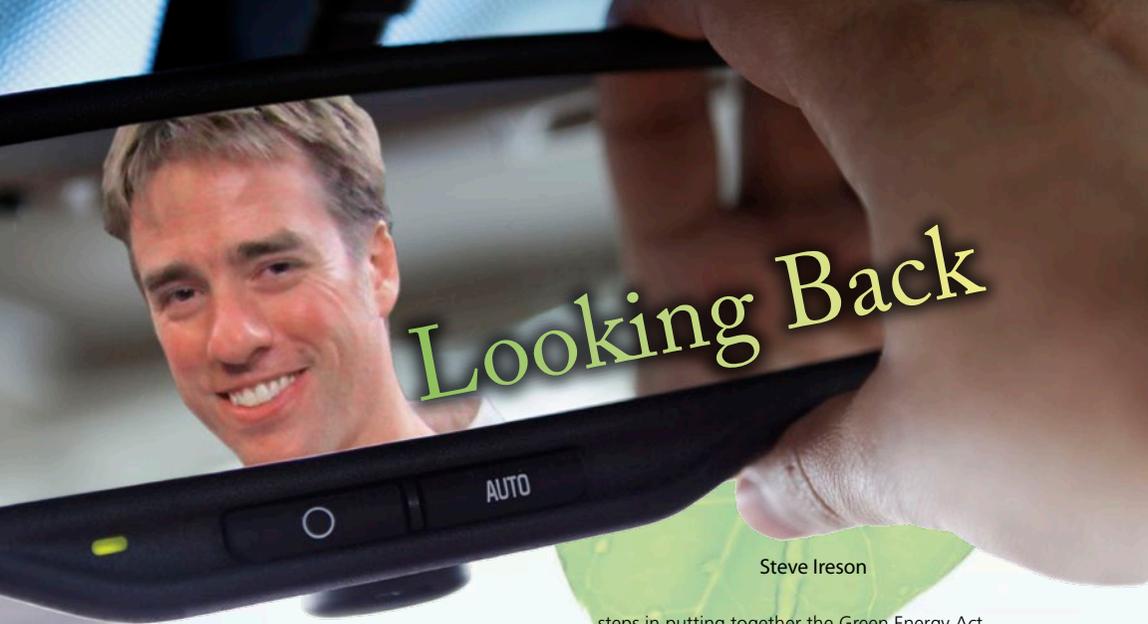
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Looking Back

Steve Ireson

I was already over the night club business when Peter Gaiten approached me back when he was first getting CiRCA going, and he was a hard man to say no to. When he finally got the liquor license many months later, I ended up going to work with him after all. When things at CiRCA fell apart though, I didn't want to go back into the same vein I'd been in. Having done it for 20 years, I was tired of it and it wasn't fun anymore. I had a real desire for change.

I got to thinking, Oh my God, now what? I need a new career! This was all just after my 40th birthday and when you've done one thing—well a bunch of different things, but all within the entertainment and hospitality industry—it's quite a challenge to up and change careers. You really question whether you *can* do it.

I figured if I'm really going to do this, I'll need some help. I went to career counselling and it was then that I started to realize it wasn't as scary as I'd first thought. When you really look at the things you've done, you start to see that the skills you've learned over the years can be applied to other fields. I've always had a very deep passion for the environment—ever since I was a kid. It was in Scouts and when I was a camp counsellor where I really developed my passion for the outdoors and nature, but even before that, every summer I was always up north in Muskoka with my family. So I guess my whole nightclub career was a bit of a side-track.

While trying to figure out what direction to go with my life, I decided that I would take advantage of the government's Second Careers program and return to school. Chris [my husband] and I were looking online and stumbled on a course at Humber College around renewable energy and sustainable building that got my interest. Ever since I was a kid I also had a curiosity about energy and infrastructure, like where are those hydro wires going? I even used to make little projects with solar cells, lights and motors. It sparked the idea that this direction touched on many of my core beliefs and interests. It's also where the planet and society needs to be going considering fossil fuels poison our environment and are a finite resource. At the time the Ontario government was making some big

steps in putting together the Green Energy Act.

I figured that if I'm going to take a course on renewable energy, I should talk to someone that knows about it. At the time George Smitherman was the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. I'd known George for many years, so I reached out to him and we met for coffee. I picked his brain and he could see I was really excited, so he offered for me to come and work in the office with him at Queen's Park until starting school in the fall. I'll tell you, it was a really steep learning curve, but I learned a lot.

I ended up not going to school, but staying with the Ministry and becoming an MPP liaison, a point person dealing with MPPs and constituency offices. This took me on a more political tangent than where I'd been originally headed, but also laid the groundwork for things to come. I was there until a couple months after George left to run for Mayor of Toronto, when I too left and joined his campaign team. It was just as eye-opening as Queens Park—I'd never even followed municipal politics before!

The way I looked at this whole thing was, okay I didn't end up going to school to study renewable energy as I was planning, but I took this whole experience as two years of training and learned a whole lot and made an incredible number of contacts.

Once that wrapped up, I connected again with the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association, which was where I'd started off volunteering in the beginning of this whole career change. It all came full circle, and I've been with them for the last year helping with environmental initiatives and education across the province. Though my contract is up and I'm looking for new challenges and opportunities, I've realized just how important the environment and our interactions with it are, and will bring this mindset to whatever comes next.

If you've ever been out dancing at a club in Toronto, chances are you've been to one of Steve Ireson's events. GoGo, Oz, Industry, It's a Boy's Life, 5ive and CiRCA: he's run 'em all. Switching gears to his childhood passion—championing the environment—has been a breath of fresh air. Catch up with him at steveireson.com.

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