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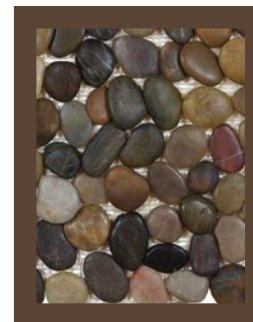
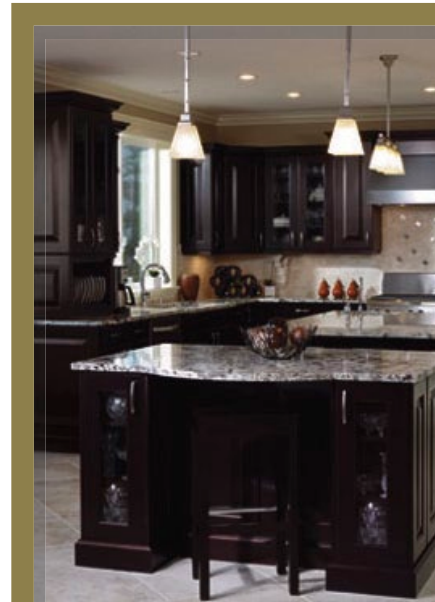
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From the Publisher

Publisher



One of my favourite quotes about spring comes from Yoko Ono:

"Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance."

Winter has officially passed and I am sure no one needs to be reminded of the perseverance only just recently required to get through the long nights and the cold, grey days. So when it's spring again I can't help but feel a little relieved. It's good to know that there is a happy medium where the weather is warm and the bugs are still absent. I become a little over-zealous when the oppressive cold gives hints of lifting—running right to the closet to take out my t-shirts and shorts. Who can blame me?

When I think of spring, I think of innocence. It may not be the perfect word, but it does capture the sense of being new that this time of year always brings. Everything is reborn out of the earth, and the sunlight finally returns. I can feel the energy and the refreshed sense of purpose reflected in myself, as well as in nature. It's easy to be energized and focused and to pursue your goals with renewed vigor when you can feel the sun and watch everything around you become alive again.

As glorious as it is, the trouble with spring (for me at least) is that it marks the beginning of my busy season between the INSPIRE Awards and Pride. Not that I'm complaining, I love being involved in the community and I wouldn't want to do anything other than what I do. Plus, I always have my self-awarded incentive to keep me going through the long hours of organizing and planning: my annual July cottage trip.

So get out there and soak up some of that mood-lifting vitamin D! Spring is hectic, and it can be easy to get caught up in the flurry of activity before the summer. Since most of my own work takes place indoors, I often need a reminder to get out and smell the roses. Luckily I have my dog Buddy for that, which is one of the many small perks that comes with being a dog owner. I can't wait to get out and take walks in the park and play fetch with him again. It's definitely one of my favourite parts of the season and it's a nice stress reliever when my responsibilities here keep me from running off into cottage country. Which, alas, is still several months out of reach. But in the meantime, here's to warmth, energy, and rebirth, as well as the many other gifts given to us by spring, including our latest edition of *Springplay!*

Antoine Elhashem

Springplay!

**Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
Community Seasonal from PinkPlayMags
Free • Spring 2013**

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Spectacular Spring Issue

Cover Illustration Wade Shaw

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After last year's epic rollercoaster ride of our "End of the World Mayan Prophecy" saga, we at PinkPlayMags thought we'd settle down for a relaxing stroll through the seasons, before launching into the excitement of World Pride in 2014.

Canada is lucky to have four distinct seasons. Few countries in the world can boast the bloom of spring, the sultriness of summer, the Technicolor foliage of fall and the fluffy whiteness of winter all in one place. Our first season of the year—spring—is like a favourite younger sibling, or playmate, we all eagerly await a visit from. We can shrug off the gloom of the dark and cold winter and look forward to April showers bringing May flowers. We eagerly search for the first sprouts of green and the first splashes of colour in the grey landscape, as the crocus and daffodil pop into being; we marvel as the apple and cherry trees explode into flower, turning the streets and sidewalks pink with petals. It brings the little kid out in all of us.

Trees are bursting with buds and ready to be clothed in green, even as we lose our own clothes and bare our skin to warm sunbeams and cool breezes. We may grumble at the rain as we struggle with umbrellas down windy streets, but we're glad it's not snow. New Year's resolutions and personal goals that crumbled in the

gloom of February are reawakened with the promise of summer. Festivals become more frequent and move outdoors, we throw open windows for a breath of fresh air and a good spring cleaning, or a drive down the street with the top down and the tunes blasting.

Spring is a time of transformation, change and rejuvenation. As the days grow longer and the sun shines brighter, our thoughts turn to drinking cold cocktails on bright patios with friends, finding the perfect spot for a picnic with loved ones, and breaking out the bike for a taste of freedom two-wheels offers.

These are the things that make spring, so join us in celebrating! Karen gets you all set with a tune-up and knowhow for touring around the city on your bike (page 12), which is the perfect prep for embarking on some of the two-wheeled travel adventures Bryn has lined up for you (page 31). Kelly proselytizes on creating the perfect picnic (page 19) and Shelley hits us with a double dose of plant power to rejuvenate us body, mind and soul (page 25 & page 62).

So throw open the windows, shuck your down coats, put away the flannel bed sheets and wool sweaters, crank the music up loud and sing along with the red-breasted robins: spring is here—let's get this party started!

Jeff Harrison



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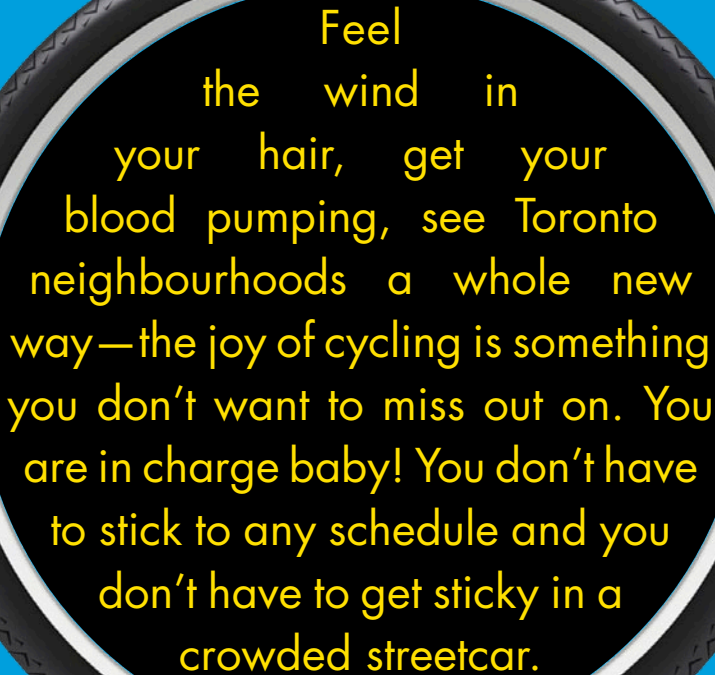
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Freedom on Two Wheels

by Karen Fulcher



Feel
the wind in
your hair, get your
blood pumping, see Toronto
neighbourhoods a whole new
way—the joy of cycling is something
you don't want to miss out on. You
are in charge baby! You don't have
to stick to any schedule and you
don't have to get sticky in a
crowded streetcar.

Yvonne Bambrick, urban cycling consultant, has more to add, "When you take the subway, you go down this rabbit hole and pop up at the other end and you miss the entire city."

When you ride you can stop anywhere you like and you will almost always find bike parking when you decide to check out a shop or cafe more closely. "You get to explore all the side streets, check out the ravines, the waterfront, see your friends... and save money," Bambrick adds.

She estimates the cost of owning a car is between \$8,000-\$12,000 a year. "That's before you add things like parking and tickets. If you ride once or twice a week you can improve your health; why drive to the gym when you can ride to the restaurant? It just feels good!"

Not only that, Bambrick adds that she feels safer travelling around at night. "I always feel better on my bicycle late a night than walking. You've got a vehicle and off you go—a quick escape if you need."

A hot mess?

Worried about being in disarray when you arrive? Bambrick asserts it's a myth that you can't wear nice clothes when you are riding, "I have an upright city bike which has a chain guard. That makes riding with dress pants a little easier. But if you don't have an enclosed chain, you just need a little Velcro strap to fold your right pant leg over and secure it."

There isn't a requirement to wear a helmet over 18 years of age and Bambrick estimates there is a 50/50 split of cyclists in Toronto who wear and who don't wear helmets. She offers tips for the helmet wearers: "Find a hair product that doesn't stay stiff. Use a product that is a little more malleable and plan to get to [your destination] a little earlier so you can hit the loo and fix your hair. You just add a little water and use your fingers to fix your hair."

Be a part of something

"There is a real camaraderie amongst people on two wheels that there isn't among drivers or pedestrians," says Bambrick. "Because we haven't adapted our streets to fully accommodate bikes yet, those who have gone forward (and there're more every year) have this fighting spirit. You need to have the guts to get out there. You're fending for yourself, but there's a 'hey, we're in this together—we all know how hard, this is but we also know how awesome it is!'"

Funny that cyclists were actually the force behind getting roads paved. Just imagine riding on cobblestone streets! Early attempts in the 1800s at bicycle inventions weren't that great. If you fell, you were falling from the height of the "tall wheel bike" and later iterations were heavy and cumbersome.

It wasn't until the late 1800s that bicycles were widely used and nearer in appearance to the bicycle of modern times. Dunlop adjusted the wheels to make riding more comfy and Susan B. Anthony declared that bicycling had "done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world." She was referring to women's increased mobility and less restrictive clothing. The bicycle got its modern day redesign in the 1960s when bicycles became lighter and easier to ride.

You're doing it!

Are you a beginner? Lucky for you, you're not learning on a bike made in the 1800s! Bambrick recommends you pick a park, a weekend, and go with a friend whom you trust to give



Yvonne Bambrick, Kensington Market.
Photo by Sarah Greene

you good information. Don't have a bike? Practice on a BIXI (toronto.bixi.com) from a station located close by or borrow a friend's bicycle. "In the park you can practice getting a feel for the bike, practice stopping and turning, going around an obstacle, looking over your left and right shoulder while going straight ahead," says Bambrick.

As far as road rules go, she emphasizes, "We are supposed to follow the rules of the road just like vehicles. Watch other cyclists. There is a rhythm to the roadways and you'll start to learn that the more you practice." And she adds, "It's not a race. We all want to get safely where we are going."

Download the Ontario Cycling Guide from mto.gov.on.ca and review the rules of the road. The website toronto.ca/cycling also offers loads of cycling information.

Cycling to work is the better way. Bambrick suggests you pick your route by visiting ridethecity.com/Toronto. You can choose direct (or fast), safe and safer routes. The safest route might take you longer, but it will help you feel more relaxed when you arrive at work.

Again, she recommends a test ride on the weekend. Sunday morning is usually the best. Plan your route, take a friend and when you arrive, figure where you'll lock your bike. This will save you frustration on Monday morning!

Safety first

Jared Kolb, Director of Campaigns and Membership for Cycle Toronto offers succinct advice for a cyclist: "Stay visible, communicate with other road users and be predictable (e.g. ride in a straight line)!"

Bambrick fleshes out the details, "Stay a metre away from the curb and parked cars, 'cause that's the door zone. You are allowed to take a lane if it is feasible and safer, but just remember: shoulder check and signal."

Love your music? Bambrick advises against listening, "I wouldn't recommend earbuds. You need to hear what's coming behind you and for cyclists around you...it stops you from communicating with those around you."

So now you are at cruising speed—just don't speed through the lights! Bambrick explains, "It's never worth not stopping at a stoplight. The number of times I've seen someone going through a stoplight... and then I catch up at the next lights! But what have they done in the interim: they've broken the law, put themselves at risk, they might have cut off a pedestrian, freaked out a driver who wasn't expecting them, and generally all the drivers and people around them who just saw them... It just reinforces the stereotype of cyclists being scofflaws."

Plus she adds, "Aside from the fact that you could be gravely injured, it's a \$325 ticket if you get caught—even when you jump the green. And one of the deaths in 2012 was because of that. There were more deaths this past year than since '98—it was a bad year."

"But there's this other side of safety; think of all the car accidents all the time. There are so many, we never hear about all of them. But even with the risks of bicycling, more people get safely where they're going than don't."

But if you do fall...be prepared, accidents can happen. No matter how cautious you are, you can't control the unpredictable behaviour of others on the road. Bambrick offers practical advice:

"In case of a collision, always ask for or accept help. Get the license [of the vehicle that was involved]." If the car driver stays, get insurance information from the driver and contact information of witnesses.

"Collect yourself. Get out of the roadway," she continues, "but if you are really injured stay where you are. Call 911 if you've been injured, it's always a good idea to call the police. Adrenaline does funny things; you might have an injury you're not feeling yet. Call someone... breathe... Don't get back on your bike. Take care of your injuries. Walk your bike home or lock it and have someone pick you up."

Your own two wheels

You now know the beauty and the beast of cycling in the city and you are ready to take the plunge by buying a bike. Think about your existing transportation costs and how much you'd be willing to spend on a bike. Think about how long your return on investment will be and you might be pleasantly surprised!

Bambrick suggests you also figure in the cost of a good lock and carrying gear. And under the law, you require a bell, and running front and rear lights from dusk and dawn. When shopping around, go on a rainy day (they're the best for service). But she adds, if you are female, "Many shops are kind of male-dominated and some are better than others engaging with women, so if you aren't getting the service you deserve, either ask for someone else to give you a hand or leave."

"If you are planning on buying a used bike, ask around, do your research," she adds. "You don't want that whole bad karma of buying a stolen bike. Lots of DIY bike shops can recommend legitimate second-hand used bikes that have been fixed up."

Think about how you are going to use your bike and make sure it feels comfortable. Take it for a spin (if the shop will let you).

Bambrick explains the different styles:

City bikes are much more prevalent these days. They are mid-size bikes that are good for commuting.

Mountain bikes are great for bumpy routes (especially if you want to go riding in the ravine or off trail) because they have fatter wheels.

Road bikes are lighter and have skinnier wheels.

Folding bikes are better for transit, bringing into an office or apartment, if allowed.

Beach cruisers have wider handlebars, fat tires, fenders. They are not particularly practical but they are more recreational for weekend cycling. But if you want to commute, remember, there's not a lot of room on city streets.

Hybrid bikes are a mix of different qualities and are best for commuting.

Step-through bikes are not girls' bikes; the style just means easier access. They're great if you have kids or have mobility issues. BIXI bikes are step-through.

Cargo bikes have an extra long rear so you can add a seat on the back. Sometimes you can put an electric assist on them. These are common for deliveries.

Don't forget to figure out how you're going to carry things. Bambrick recommends cheap panniers. "If they're not fancy, people leave them alone. I leave mine on my bike with a rain



Mackenzie Ogilvie of Urbane Cyclist

poncho, a shopping bag, a bungee cord, and a cloth to wipe my hands if I need. It's like your trunk."

Once you are all decked out, make sure you register your bike with the police at torontopolice.on.ca/bike so that if it is stolen and recovered, they'll know you are the owner.

One important part of riding is making sure your wheels are still there when you need them. Bambrick says you should learn how to lock properly: include the frame and wheels (if the wheels have a quick release). She also offers a great trick: "Use a thick chain lock rather than a U-lock. Because there are so many people riding now, there's a backlog in getting more bike parking in place. A chain allows you a lot more flexible parking options than with a standard fixed U-lock. Yes, it's heavier... But you can hear me coming!"

Maintain your relationship

A Service Manager at Urbane Cyclist, Mackenzie Ogilvie, advises that before you jump on your bike you should check that the:

- gears function without hesitation
- cable and housing on your brakes aren't rusty, frayed or cracked
- brake pads have defined ridges (don't let your brakes wear, they can damage your wheel rim)
- chain is clean and lubed (do this regularly depending on the weather and the conditions you are riding in)

Mackenzie advises, "Never go to a gas station to pump up your tires. Car tire gages are at 30-40 psi and most bicycle tires should be 70 psi or higher so you're actually just letting air out of your tires." He recommends having a floor pump with a gage on it at home and pump them up once a week. "You can lose 20 psi in a week and keeping your tire pressure higher will protect you from getting flats."

Mackenzie spent a generous hour with me showing me how to repair a flat and replace brake pads. He recommends you check out a bike co-op to tear a bike apart and learn how it works. The Community Bicycle Network at communitybicyclenetwork.org offers bicycle repair classes and some specifically for women: Wenchies with Wrenches.

Learn more tips and tricks by chatting with other cyclists. There is no lack of groups and events you can join. Bike advocacy groups let people know there can be improvements to the streets, share best practices from other cities, engage people in discussions with their municipalities. You have a voice and a chance to make changes.

Like the saying goes, burn fat, not gas! The more of us that get out there, the better our city will flow and the healthier we all will be. See you on the street!

Karen Fulcher is a freelance writer and fair-weather rider.



Bike Groups & Events

City of Toronto's Bike Month Group Commute and Pancake Breakfast happens in May and ends with breakfast! www.toronto.ca/cycling

Heart & Stroke Ride for Heart on June 2, 2013 is a great cause and neat because you get to ride on roadways you'd never have access to, like the Gardiner! www.rideforheart.ca

Raise awareness of the harmful effects that our dependence on nonrenewable energy has on pedestrians and cyclists. Get naked and ride on Saturday 15 June 2013 www.worldnakedbikeride.org

PWA Friends for Life bike rally is the main fundraiser to support people living with HIV/AIDS. Riders take a six-day, 600 km journey from Toronto to Montreal beginning July 28, 2013. If you can't ride, consider supporting a rider! www.bikerrally.org

Toronto's Tweed Ride in September is a fun event for the fashionistas and supports Bikes without Borders. Dress up in classic tweed and ride with class! tweedridetoronto.com

Join Gay West Bicycle Club www.queerwest.org/bikeclub.php

Every month, girls-only Cupcake Ride starts with a cupcake for fuel and a ride with the group. The organizers wanted to give women a chance to get together, but they've also hosted a mixed ride: The Poutine Ride. www.cupcakeride.com/blog

Like art? Art Spin is a bicycle-led, guided art tour of Toronto's west end art district. www.artspin.ca

In January every year, a Coldest Day of the Year group ride happens. cycleto.ca

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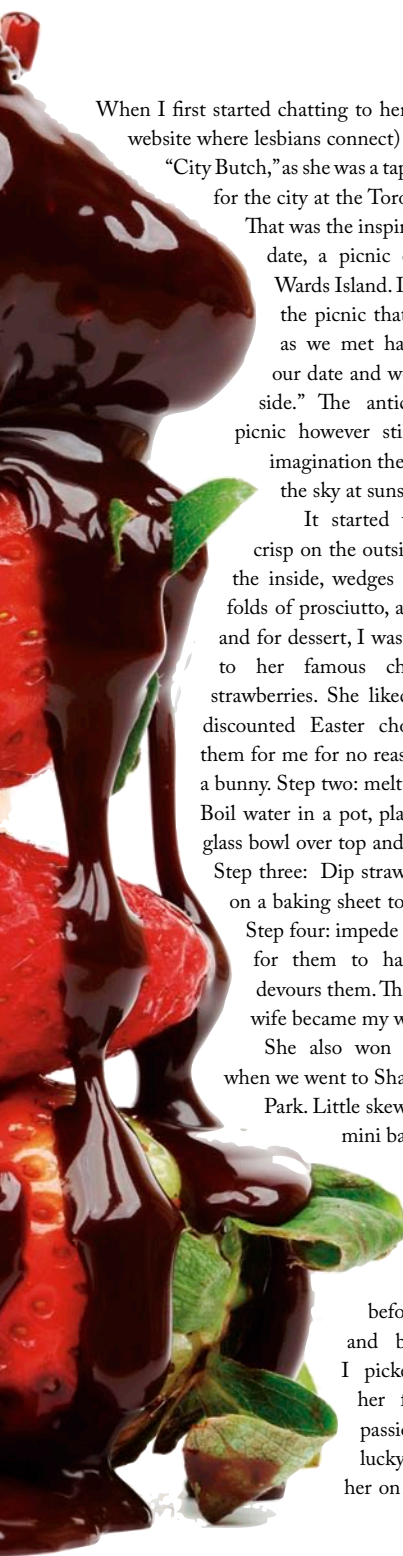


Perfect Picnics

The Art and Comfort of Dining Al Fresco

by Kelly Wilk

I can't help it. When I think of picnics my first thought is, the "ants go marching one by one, hoorah, hoorah," closely followed by how far can I stretch the novelty of eating on the couch before my toddler signs "done" and spits something out on the carpet. There was a time when I was nowhere near this pragmatic, when a picnic meant gazing at the stars or listening to the surf as I ate fruit and bread and cheese and drank wine out of a paper cup in the arms of my lover. The picnic is personal to me. Especially now I have one hell of a reason to be nostalgic. My relationship with my wife, now my late wife, began with the beautiful fantasy of a picnic.



When I first started chatting to her on Pink Sofa (a website where lesbians connect) she called herself “City Butch,” as she was a tap water technician for the city at the Toronto Island Plant.

That was the inspiration for our first date, a picnic on the beach at Wards Island. It turned out to be the picnic that never happened as we met haphazardly before our date and went to lunch “city side.” The anticipation of that picnic however still lingers in my imagination the way colour holds the sky at sunset.

It started with a baguette, crisp on the outside and tender on the inside, wedges of brie and pink folds of prosciutto, a nice white wine, and for dessert, I was to be introduced to her famous chocolate covered strawberries. She liked to pick up the discounted Easter chocolate to make them for me for no reason. Step one: get a bunny. Step two: melt the fluffer down! Boil water in a pot, place chocolate in a glass bowl over top and stir until melted. Step three: Dip strawberries and place on a baking sheet to set in the fridge. Step four: impede wife long enough for them to harden before she devours them. There is a reason my wife became my wife.

She also won my friends over when we went to Shakespeare in High Park. Little skewers of alternating mini balls of Bocconcini, sliced cherry tomatoes and basil marinated the night before in olive oil and balsamic vinegar. I picked a winner in her for her culinary passion, but I even felt lucky to PP’nJ it with her on a hike because it

really was less about the food when it was all about us: no distractions, no demands and no bill. The picnic is a pause in life to appreciate the food you are eating and the people you are eating it with.

As I said, the picnic is personal to me, but in the wider sense it really has become our way of connecting to nature and each other; I would like to think it has been built into how we socialize for as long as there have been people to break bread...or wildebeest as the case may be. Setting aside any hypothesis about the eating habits of the Neanderthal, the first recorded instance of the movable feast tradition was in Medieval Europe.

I think of the picnic as coming from a French origin, not just because of the baguette and cheese and greater instance of poetry over a picnic than at other meals. Ernest Hemingway’s quote sticks in my mind when he said; “Paris is a movable feast” (www.wikipedia.org), never mind that the Wiki gods tell me that “moveable feast” actually connotes a holy day, or feast/fast day during Easter. However this in part is true as Food Timeline (www.foodtimeline.org) says the first recorded picnics were outdoor feasts lavishly preceding the hunt in England and France in the 14th century. They served pastries, baked hams and other meats. Leave it to the aristocracy to do it big and expensive. It is suspected however that the French invented the word. From the French “piquer” means “to pick at food” and “nique” means “something small of no value.”

Food Timeline also sites the country banquets in the Renaissance era, the Victorian garden parties that Dickens and Austen were so fond of relaying in literature and Monet, Renoir and Cezanne were so apt to capture via painting. It was a freeing of the soul, a break from the very formal constraints of everyday life in these time periods. Who can be serious in a potato sack?

There is certainly a romanticized air around the picnic which one cannot help notice, bringing food to a common “table” and playing games, making music, sketching, engaging in whatever pleasurable pursuit that a picnic suddenly seems to make room for.

The picnic also presents a lovely opportunity for creative scope, which was a gift that my wife often gave to me. Almost like planning a mini vacation. You need the gear, you need the provisions, and you need the destination.



The Gear

If you are looking for a local place to prepare for a picnic I recommend the Toronto Kitchen Stuff Plus (www.kitchenstuffplus.com) for insulated bags and coolers, to keep the temperature of your hot or cold fare constant. I ordered from them over Christmas and their products were here in a flash. I also discovered www.Picnic-Basket.com, which boasts some truly beautiful baskets. It is an amazing looking American company that specializes in picnic baskets for all occasions, as well as backpacks, totes, outdoor games and BBQ supplies. They promise fast order shipping, product warranty, as well as secure online billing.

How do you take the picnic over the top to make it even more memorable, when dining outside in comfort is key? My wife had a waterproof army blanket we always used. Blankets and cushions are a must and if a fire is not permitted, consider candles. Musically inclined? Bring an instrument, or just an iPod with speakers. And don't forget essentials like matches, plastic cups, napkins, a corkscrew and a garbage bag! However if you are really opposed to the outdoors, bring the evening nosh inside. Candles. Roaring fire or Yule Log DVD. Champagne. Fruit and oysters (you can score an oyster knife at Kitchen Stuff Plus.) However, if push comes to shove, pizza and beer will do wonders to take it down a notch and focus on food, partners or friends!

The Provisions

So how do you make your feast more movable? Simple is good, so I tend to think a hot thermos of tea and a fresh made chocolate croissant, or sandwich from a local café, works as well as anything. However if you are up for the challenge get ye to the kitchen!

They say write what you know, and I would add, cook what you know. Take all the recipes you enjoy and see how you can transform them to take on the go. Make some chili or a pot roast and slap that puppy on a bun, or just take one of your favorite homemade soups to go, with a few cups! Since I am doing the dinner thing alone I have been renewing my commitment to cooking for the comfort. I have been mastering the art of stew and my wife's philosophy of just tossing stuff in a pot to see how it tastes. It frees you up to experiment and make mistakes.

Homemade stew: fry a package of stewing beef and one onion chopped. Add some balsamic vinegar or red wine and a hit of Worcestershire sauce for flavour. Add any veggies you want—how about carrots, celery, parsnips, squash, white or sweet potatoes, corn, peas, chick peas or beets? Add one tin tomato soup and 2 to 3 cans of water to make sure it's nice and runny, (less if that is not desirable.) Add a bay leaf and bake in oven at 250 degrees for four hours, or throw it in a slow cooker. Get a loaf of bread, pour stew in a thermos and the warmth and the comfort will travel with you!

Most things on a stick work well, but if you need a little inspiration look under recipes at www.Picnic-Basket.com and sign up for their newsletter. You can then download a free copy of "Bounty in a Basket," a collection of recipes devoted to beach picnicking with 17 themed menus and 101 recipes. It also has ideas just for our vegetarian friends!

Attached to this site is a blog devoted to the picnic (picnicking. blogspot. ca) so you can log on and see what they suggest.

I am intrigued by the "Cinco de Mayo Picnic" in celebration of Mexican meals. They suggest BBQs with fresh salsa and mole sauces and for a picnic, tortillas and the ingredients for hot or cold tacos. Make there, enjoy, shake out the blanket and go home. It reminded me of when my wife made me fajitas on a grill pan over the BBQ at the cabin. We also toyed with the idea of getting one of those sandwich presses you plug into the car so we could make grilled cheese en route.

Another idea suggested was Roll-Up Pancakes. Mix 3 eggs (recommend: hormone free or brown eggs), 3 tbsp flour (recommend: whole wheat flour), 3 tbsp milk (recommend: skim), 2 tbsp sugar, 1 tsp vanilla extract, Jam or Jelly of your preference (recommend: sugar-free strawberry) and fruit (recommend: strawberries, blueberries).

Directions: Heat up a skillet over medium heat. Lightly spray with olive oil or grease with butter. Mix all ingredients together. Pour 2 or more spoon-fills of batter onto skillet and smooth into a circle. Flip within the few minutes it takes for one side to lightly brown. Remove when both sides are evenly golden. Spoon your favorite jam, jelly, or fruit on one side of your pancake then roll it up and enjoy! I would only add that wrapping them individually so they hold their shape until you break them out might be a good idea.

As for a beverage my weakness is tea, as you may know. And you can make some seriously kick-ass iced teas to go! The Tea Emporium (www.theteaemporium.com) creates special spring and summer blends that are just fantastic iced! You can get technical when icing tea but I tend to like mine strong. I add four or five tablespoons of tea to a Bodum and let steep for at least half an hour. Cool in fridge. Add lemon, oranges mint or other fruit to spice it up. Then when you get to your destination pour over ice in a cup so it doesn't dilute the tea.

However if you are going to go with wine—Sangria is the way to go! I found a great looking one. Take a bottle of your favorite white wine, and slice a lemon, orange and lime. Put into wine with a splash of orange juice or lemonade (love), 1 small can of pineapple with juice, 2 tbsp of sugar and two shots of gin (love, love). Chill overnight and pack up. Serve over ice with raspberries or strawberries and some ginger ale (wine.about.com/od/redwines/r/partysangria.htm).





The Destination

I am a sucker for the beach. Spring, summer, fall, or winter, the water just has so many beautiful qualities that reflect the changing of the season. In Toronto I love Ashbridges Bay Park (Lakeshore Blvd and Coxwell). There are so many places to wander and take in the scenery: a long curling boardwalk by the beach, paths winding through hills and little stony beaches by the shore, picturesque any time of the year, and perfect for taking some amazing photography.

How about the Toronto Zoo (www.torontozoo.com)? It's open all year and the heated pavilions are great for rainy days. Allan Gardens is lovely any time of year, or you could take a trip to the ROM and sit inside near the funky glass windows and watch the world pass you by. All that matters is that you take the time for the people that you love and to enjoy yourself!

Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer, Reiki Master and Reflexologist. She is also a woman processing the death of her 35-year-old wife. To heal she has invented a seriously disheveled super-hero version of herself and started a blog.



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Flower Power

by Shelley A. Harrison



The surest sign of spring is the re-emergence of green growing things from the earth. We breathe a sigh of relief as the snow begins to melt and flow and our heart leaps with joy at the rebirth of the plants. As more of us add alternative, complimentary and integrative health care to our regimens, our knowledge of plants is widening beyond the salad bowl and the geranium on the balcony. The growth in popularity of Naturopathic Doctors has introduced many people to botanical medicine, or what traditionalists call Herbalism.

To enhance your walks in the park, I'd like to introduce you to some of the green growers that make their appearance this season and the medicine they offer. We will visit the uses of dandelion, violet, hawthorn, red clover and daisy.

Herbalism

There are many ways in which plants can offer us their gifts medicinally. When we use their material bodies (roots, bark, leaf, flower, seed) to treat our physical bodies, we find the tradition of Herbalism. We often refer to allopathic medicine as “traditional medical care,” but really its tradition only goes back 100 years or so. It is *conventional* medicine. The real traditional medicine is the use of plants by indigenous people worldwide. This use is as old as humans are. As our ancestors discerned what we could eat, they also discovered how to heal and rebalance the body with medicinal herbs. In its modern form in the West, practitioners may apprentice formally under another herbalist, or attend a school of Herbalism. Or, like Michael Vertolli, they may be apprenticed by the plants themselves! Michael is the founder and teacher of Living Earth School of Herbalism (www.livingearthschool.ca) in Maple, Ontario—a little piece of Canadian wonderland, just past the encroaching suburban sprawl around the corner from the amusement park of the same name.

“All of my life I’ve had a very strong connection to Nature,” says Vertolli. “When I was a teenager, I had fairly bad acne. I didn’t want to take drugs, but after awhile emotionally I felt I had no choice.” Forced to take antibiotics, Vertolli did a lot of research to find alternatives, but the best remedy he could find was through a couple of holistic doctors working with vitamin therapies and food allergies. “This got me off the antibiotics, but after several years I still needed to take very high doses of vitamins. I realized this wasn’t really healing the problem, only compensating for some kind of deeper imbalance.”

It was around that time he went to India and lived in an ashram for five months. “There I was,” he recalls, “exposed to homeopathy and Siddha medicine, a South Indian healing system similar to Ayurveda, which uses a lot of herbs. When I came back I read everything I could on homeopathy and Western Herbalism. Although I loved both of them, in the end Herbalism won because the idea of using plants from my environment resonated with my connection to Nature. I experimented a bit with different formulations and was finally able to get off all of the vitamins. But the most important thing was that after a bit longer I didn’t need to take the herbs any more. I realized something deep and profound was happening here and immersed myself in the world of plant healing. I was just following my passion. I had no intention of making a career out of it. That eventually flowed out of it naturally.”

Vertolli has brought back into use many of our local plants that had fallen out of the Western *Materia Medica* (dictionary of herbal remedies in use). “Traditionally, Herbalism, like all things, is rooted in place,” he says. “It is a natural expression of the healing capacity of the land where we live. In the last

few decades, the practice of Western Herbalism and the herbal literature have come to focus increasingly on exotic herbs from China, India, South America, etc. This is largely market driven, as manufacturers introduce exotic products and flood the market with information on them in order to gain greater market share. It doesn’t pay to invest in promoting an herb that grows in everyone’s back yard. Consequently, the vast majority of herbs that grow in our region have become largely forgotten.”

Vertolli gets to know his plants by being with them, harvesting them, and making medicines from them. “This is how traditional people all around the world discovered their medicines,” he continues, “by listening to the plant people and developing relationship with them. At the same time I do an extensive search of both the traditional and research literature to gather whatever information I can on the plant, as well as on any closely related plants from the same genus. Then I take the medicine for awhile and carefully observe what comes up. I use them in the form of tinctures [the appropriate plant part immersed in alcohol to draw out its medicinal properties] made from the fresh plant. Once I have a decent body of knowledge on it, I have groups of students take it and we record their experiences as well. Finally, I gradually begin to use it in my practice.”

As more alternative medicines and therapies become common practice, one wonders if Herbalism has been left out in the wilderness. “Absolutely not!” Vertolli states with passion. “The CCHA (Canadian Council of Herbalist Associations) has a very good working relationship with the federal government and has negotiated regulations and policies that protect our right to practice. On the provincial level it’s a little different. Herbalists are not yet regulated in any province primarily because we aren’t perceived as a threat and because there aren’t that many of us. The government

usually doesn’t want to regulate a profession unless there are about a minimum of 350-500 practicing in the province. I don’t think provincial regulation is going to happen any time soon in Ontario. They know we have standards and they are basically leaving us alone at the moment.”

Now that you have your roots down into the basics, let’s get our hands dirty with some of our herbal helpers popping up on your lawn, or in the local park. I consulted with Monika Ghent, Registered Herbalist, of Dreaming Willow Natural Therapies (www.dreamingwillow.ca). Monika studied at both Dominion Herbal College and Vertolli’s Living Earth School of Herbalism. She is on the Board of Directors of the Ontario Herbalists Association and is also the Chair of their Professional Membership Committee. She has also trained as a Plant Spirit Medicine Practitioner. Let’s have a look in Monika’s garden.



Michael Vertolli (above)



Monika Ghent (below)



Dandelion

Everyone knows this common weed with the bright yellow flower; however few remember how versatile an herb it is.

Monika says: "All parts of Dandelion are edible—flower, flower bud, leaf and root. Collect the flowers and unopened buds. They're really tasty in stir fries and have a meaty, chewy texture. The flowers are also used to make dandelion wine. The leaves can be collected anytime, but are the least bitter in early spring before the flowers appear and in the fall after a few frosts. The taproot is edible all year, but is at its choicest in late fall. Cook it like you would any root vegetable. The roots can also be dried and roasted to make a delicious coffee substitute.

"All parts of Dandelion are also valuable medicine. The herb consists of the leaves and open flower heads (minus the stem). Harvest them in early spring. You can use Dandelion herb and root fresh, dried or as a tincture.

"Dandelion leaves and flowers are an excellent urinary tonic and diuretic that doesn't leach potassium out of the body as do pharmaceuticals. In fact, they contain high levels of potassium. They can be used for any inflammatory condition of the urinary tract such as cystitis and nephritis, lymphatic conditions, edema, congestion and inflammation of the liver or gallbladder, and rheumatic conditions.

"The root is used for conditions of the pancreas, spleen, stomach, kidneys, joints, liver and gallbladder, such as hepatitis and gallstones, promoting healthy digestion, and balancing blood sugar in hypoglycemia and treating mature-onset diabetes. It's used for all manner of chronic toxicity related conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, acne, eczema, and psoriasis. It is a gentle, deep acting herb that will gradually and gently bring the body back to a state of good health and balance."

Violet

This pretty purple or white lawn plant thrives in the shade under trees with its heart shaped leaves. Leave it to grow and it will cover the whole lawn.

Monika says: "Common Blue Violet's leaves and flowers are a delicious spring edible. They can be eaten raw in salads, sautéed or added to soups as a nutritive thickener. They have a slightly sweet, peppery taste and are high in vitamin C and Rutin.

"The leaves and flowers are used either as a fresh tea or a fresh plant tincture. Blue Violet is used for any type of chronic toxicity related condition such as rheumatic conditions, fibromyalgia, acne, eczema and psoriasis. It is also used for conditions of the urinary system such as cystitis and incontinence. Excellent for respiratory tract conditions such as bronchitis, sinusitis and head colds, it can be used for inflammation of any of the mucus membranes, including sore throat, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers and diarrhea. Blue Violet is also excellent for vascular conditions such as varicose veins, hemorrhoids and broken capillaries. It can be used externally as a compress, poultice or ointment for wounds, bruises and insect bites."



Hawthorn



With white-pink blossoms smaller than the apple or crab-apple, the delicate scent of hawthorn is another of spring's delights. The hawthorn is a shrub or small tree with its most distinguishing characteristic being lots of slender thorns.

Monika says: "The young leaves and buds are edible and nutty tasting and provide excellent nourishment and energy. The berries can be used to make jams, pies and wine, though raw they are mealy and rather bland tasting. The seeds of the berries can be roasted and used as a coffee substitute and the leaves dried and smoked for a tobacco alternative, though I've not used it for these purposes yet.

"The parts used medicinally are the mature fruit when they are changing from green to red, in mid to late August, and the flowers and leaves collected early in their flowering period mid-May to early June.

"Hawthorn is best known as the premier tonic/restorative for the cardiovascular system. It protects, nourishes, restores and tones the entire cardiovascular system. It contains high levels of bioflavonoids and proanthocyanidins. It is excellent for such conditions as poor peripheral circulation, varicosities, arteriosclerosis, high and low blood pressure, heart weakness, angina, high blood lipids and LDL cholesterol and bruises. Taken over many months, it can help one to reduce the dosage of, or eliminate blood pressure or heart medications. Hawthorn has been consistently proven to be well tolerated by people with cardiovascular conditions with very low or negligible side effects." (PLEASE NOTE: decreasing or eliminating medication should only be done under the guidance of a professional Herbalist and medical doctor).

Red Clover

Yes, the same plant that you look for four-leaf clovers among, though the flowers are more pink than red, and the whole plant is larger than the white clover.

Monika says: "Red Clover's leaves and fresh flowers are edible when they are very young, in the early spring. They can be used in vegetable stock, tea and salads, where they lend a delicate, slightly sweet taste. Clovers are legumes and they provide a protein that complements that of whole grains. Clover tea is full of nutrients such as beta carotene, vitamins C, B complex, biotin, choline, inositol, and bioflavonoids. It's a good source of the minerals magnesium, manganese, zinc, copper, and selenium.

"The parts of Red Clover used medicinally are the flowers and leaves just below the flowers collected mid to end of June to early July. Lots of tiny insects take refuge in Red Clover's blossoms. To ensure they don't end up as part of your medicine, transfer the flowers into a colander with big holes and shake the flowers like you're draining pasta.

"Red Clover is best used fresh. It is used for any kind of toxicity related condition such as chronic skin conditions including eczema, acne, and psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout. It is used as a very good expectorant for infants with drippy, irritable coughs, including whooping cough, where there is a thin, clear secretion that causes irritation to the cough reflex. Before vasodilators, people smoked anti-asthma cigarettes containing Red Clover. Red Clover acts on the female reproductive system and is used for the symptoms which accompany menopause and other female reproductive conditions. It has mild anti-cancer properties and is a mild blood thinner and should be used with caution by those on prescription blood thinners."



Daisy



He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me—those slender white petals around the yellow eye centre can do more besides divine your love quotient.

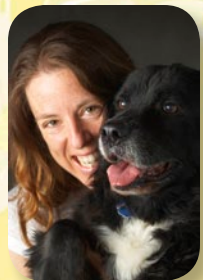
Monika says: "Ox-eyed Daisy is a common wild flower growing in the open wherever it can and usually in great profusion. Its leaves and flowers can be added to salads or soups.

"The parts used medicinally are the flowers and larger leaves and can be used fresh or dried as a tea or tincture.

"Ox-eyed Daisy is used as a digestive aid and can be used pretty much interchangeably with chamomile. It is used for indigestion, gas, bloating, cramping, heart burn and lack of appetite. It has antidepressant and anti-anxiety properties and can be used for stress-related conditions. Ox-eyed Daisy also works on the female reproductive system and can be used for delayed or light menstruation, cramping and uterine fibroids. It is excellent for fevers, colds, hay fever and sinusitis. Externally it can be used for wounds, bruises, varicosities and bug bites or stings."

Herbal remedies have always been folk medicine—medicine for the common people. You can take your health back into your hands, harvest your own remedies and get to know your generous green neighbors in the process. However, I highly recommend working with a well trained Herbalist so you can have optimum confidence in your remedies and work safely with the plants. Or you can register for courses at Vertolli's school Living Earth. He offers both interest courses and professional certification. At the very least, get a really good field guide like *Audobon's Guide to Eastern Flowers* so you are certain of your plant identification. It would really suck to have a poison ivy salad rather than a dandelion one. Unfortunately, harvesting in the city doesn't yield the most organic plants. Be sure not to harvest off lawns that have had chemical applications, and parks with pets. It's also a great idea to promote balanced relationship with the plants by offering them something back in exchange. A little pinch of loose tobacco will do quite nicely, or at least a hearty "Thanks!"

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 over 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine.



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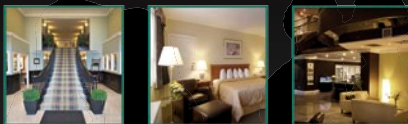
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10pm

June 3rd - Annual Rainbow Flag Raising @ St Catharines City Hall 2pm

June 3rd - Niagara Falls Rainbow Lighting Ceremony @ Dusk

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Two-wheel adventures

Putting Fun Between Your Legs

by Bryen Dunn

Spring is a time of renewal, rejuvenation, reawakening, and riding. It's a time to wake from hibernation and whip oneself back into shape, a time to tune up the body for those scantily clad summer days ahead, and a time to put the fun back between your legs. That's right, cycling season is once again upon us. PinkPlayMags has put together a reference guide for everyone from novice fair-weather cyclists, to the experienced long distance touring riders. Come enjoy the ride with us. Cycling is not only a healthy form of cardiovascular exercise, it's also an efficient and economical form of daily transportation, a great vacation travel option, and it has spawned a variety of fun-filled fringe activities to go along with it.



Bike Sharing and Bike Shops

In the past several years cycling has taken on an increased public awareness, especially within larger metropolises, which have typically been vehicle dominated. More people are choosing to commute short distances by bike rather than car or public transit, and the increase of bike sharing programs has helped spur this movement even further. Montreal's **Bixi** (toronto.bixi.com) bike-share program took off with great success several years back, and now has stations throughout most of the city and outlying areas, while Toronto's system began just a couple years back and is still in its infancy stage, and Vancouver's system is expected to be launched shortly. This is a great option for those only needing bikes for short distances in and around the city.

Bike shops have also changed, becoming community hubs not only for sales and repairs, but advocacy, communal rides, and a variety of events from fundraisers to movie nights. Toronto has an exceptionally large, tight-knit cycling community. **Bike Pirates** (www.bikepirates.com) is a collective of individuals offering a safe space for do-it-yourself repairs, including Sunday afternoons that are exclusively for trans-identified individuals and women only. Cycle Toronto is a diverse member-supported organization that advocates for a healthy, safe, cycling-friendly city for all, with one of their goals being to increase the number of people

cycling to work from the current 1.7% to 5% by 2016.

While cycling is a wonderful solo pursuit, it's also a great form of camaraderie between individuals. Cheryl Cohen, a long-time member of Toronto's **Out & Out** (www.outandout.on.ca), and co-lead of the weekly Monday Night Cycling says, "We have about seven routes that we alternate, and are always open to new ones." Some Out & Out members have also organized longer distance rides on the weekends, as well as out-of-town excursions.

The Gay West Bike Club (www.queerwest.org/bikeclub.php) offers a variety of group rides throughout the spring, summer, and fall seasons, including their annual Pride Ride and other themed tours. Many rides follow cycling routes off limits to vehicles, making them safe and suitable for cyclists of all levels.

Art Spin (www.artspin.ca) is a multi-disciplinary art crawl style bicycle tour of galleries, art performances, site-specific installations, and visits to artists' studios. This year rides happen on the last Thursday of the month from June until August 2013, usually ending with a reception/after party. This is a free event, and anyone regardless of age or cycling ability is welcome. Another great group ride is to check out the Cherry Blossoms in High Park, especially during the Promise ambient music gathering and picnic.

Day Trips and Overnight Getaways

For those looking to add a bit more adventure to their rides, getting out of the urban confines of the city is a great way to embrace the slow travel movement. There are many day trip options to explore, which can be done by simply jumping on public transit and discovering a nearby unfamiliar area. Both TTC and GO Transit buses have bike racks installed on them that are available at no additional cost, and trains and subways are also able to accommodate bikes with some restrictions. The TTC can take you from downtown to the Humber Arboretum, Toronto Zoo, Rouge Park, and Scarborough Bluffs to name a few destinations. GO Transit can get you further beyond the GTA to places like Hamilton, Simcoe County, and Oshawa, each offering great cycling paths and fun areas to explore, perhaps with other local queer cyclists.

Born to Ride Bicycle (www.borntoridebicycle.com) in Simcoe County is one of the most progressive outfits out there. Much more than a typical bike shop, the owners are continuously expanding their day and overnight tour offerings. Beyond providing rental bike delivery service to local area accommodation properties, they also have a great selection of Tasting and Adventure day tours, which can also be combined as longer Stay and Cycle packages. These guided cycling tours run May to October, and include visits to regional wineries, breweries and chocolatiers. New for this season is their one week all-inclusive Cycling Vacation Package that passes through several towns and villages in Simcoe County, with stops at heritage sites, area attractions, top culinary establishments, and overnight stays at some of the best accommodations in Ontario. Finally, for a truly unique experience, their Cycle and Fly Adventure package lets you ride the trails and roads of Simcoe County, then take flight in a Cessna 172 Skyhawk with a choice of aerial views over Lake Simcoe or South Georgian Bay!

The Niagara region is a wonderful area to explore on two wheels as well, and is another location served by both GO Transit and VIA Rail. This was also the pilot project destination for **Bike Train** (www.biketrain.ca) back in 2007, which provides actual bike racks in one of the cars to make transporting a bike that much easier. This allows cyclists the opportunity to do an overnight stay in the area at one of the many camping and accommodation options available. A weekend getaway can be planned by following the mapped wine routes, taking in a theatre production at Niagara-On-The-Lake, or trying your luck at the Niagara Casino. The Bike Train has since expanded to include Ontario Southwest (Windsor and Pelee Island), as well as Ontario East (Ottawa and Montreal).



Page 31: Photo credit: Alyson Adventures; Page 32: Art Spin, photo by Priam Thomas; Page 33: Photo credit: Broomfield Bicycle Club

Another recent start up offering overnight excursions is **Parkbus** (www.parkbus.ca), which was launched in 2010 as a private initiative by a group of adventure enthusiasts who wanted to make outdoor destinations in Ontario accessible by public transportation. They initially offered selected weekend transportation to Algonquin Provincial Park, before expanding new routes to Grundy Lake, French River, and Killarney, as well as the Bruce Peninsula. Bikes are accommodated on a space available basis, along with individual luggage and camping gear accessories. This is a transportation service only, so all other arrangements must be done separately, such as accommodations, and canoe or kayak rentals.

Prince Edward County is also a great cycling destination, as well as a growing wine and microbrew destination that is easily combined with a visit to nearby Kingston and Wolfe Island. **The Bloomfield Bicycle Company** (www.bloomfieldbicycle.ca) has been operating out of their quirky Main Street location offering repairs, rentals, and rides since 1990. This is also where the Bloomfield Bicycle Club begin their daily rides during the summer season that are open to both members and non-members, offering both road and off-road routes for everyone from weekend warriors to road warriors. They'll also customize multi-day tours, and take care of all accommodations, luggage transportation, and guide requirements as requested. As well, the Club hosts Century rides of 100km and 160km lengths on each of the long weekends from Victoria Day to Thanksgiving. Be sure to visit the mysterious Lake of the Mountain, and perhaps pitch a tent at Sandbanks Provincial Park while in the area.



Above: Nepal, photo credit: OUT Adventures; Right: Patagonia, photo credit: OUT Adventures

Going the Distance

Finally, for those wanting to go the distance, there are several tour operators offering a variety of cycling and multi-sport tours for one week durations or longer specifically for LGBTQ clients. **Alyson Adventures** (www.alysonadventures.com) has been in operation since 1995, and offers the majority of their cycling tours in Europe. In addition, Wild Kiwi traipses across New Zealand via kayaking, rappelling, bungee jumping, hiking, and biking. The Great Israel Adventure Tour proves that this destination is unlike anywhere else in the world when it comes to extreme adventure sports, with everything from rappelling down waterfalls, cliffs and salt tubes, to swimming through canyons, kayaking the Mediterranean, riding camels into the sunset, and biking in Galilee.

OutWest Global Adventures (www.outwestadventures.com) is run by Aaron and his partner David, who met in 1987 and started the company in 1995. Their Ireland's West tour is a leisurely paced one week excursion that provides opportunity for hiking, climbing, mountain biking, horseback riding, and sea kayaking, and is lead by David himself.

WomanTours (womantours.com) is the only all women bike tour



company in America. In existence since 1993, each tour is designed for women of all ages, abilities and interests. Their Cross-Country USA tour from one coast to the other is highly popular, as are their international tours in Ireland, Bhutan, and Italy. Home-cooked healthy meals are prepared daily by a travelling chef, and a comfortable bed beckons at the end of each day.

Toronto based **OUT Adventures** (www.out-adventures.com) don't offer specific cycling tours, but they do offer a couple of unique trekking opportunities in Croatia, Patagonia, Nepal, and Peru that will have you climbing mountains, kayaking, swimming, and sometimes even sleeping beneath the stars.

I've done my share of riding for as long as I can remember, from recreational and city commutes in my home city of Toronto, to long distance multi-day road tours around the world. I've also done quite a bit of off-road trail riding, and scaled down the slopes of Whistler, Mont Tremblant, and Blue Mountain. As well, I've rode in the Five Boro Bike Tour in New York, and the Tour de l'Île in Montreal, both fun-filled events sharing the roads alongside more than 30,000 other cyclists of all ages and abilities. Ernest Hemingway says it best: "It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best." It's that time of year once again to seek out new discoveries. Happy trails!

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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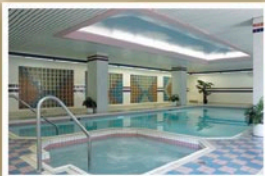
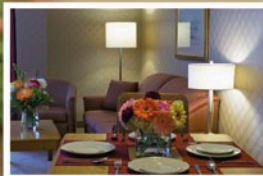
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Our Opinion... and we have one!



by Kelly Wilk & Jeffrey Luscombe

Kelly Wilk: One thing Idle No More brought to the attention of Canadians was our environment and natural resources, especially in regards to what's happening in Alberta. Who here has a major desire to exchange Harper for Obama when it comes to these issues? It seems like the "I want the world to have this for generations" perspective is just not able to compete with the "I want it now" strategy. I worry about the environment and keeping the world we live in safe for future generations, but it seems like Harper and his Conservatives have forced the hands of Canadians to protect the natural bounty and beauty of our country.

Jeffrey Luscombe: I'm not anti-tar sands (I steadfastly refuse to call them oil sands). I'm not one of those calling for a stop to all development; the tar sands are important to Canada's economy and its economic future. I just want more science and research before diving in—and a transparent government that shows the people of Canada the cost of development (and a debate about those costs).

More science and research could also yield better—less dirty—ways to extract the oil as well. But sadly, this government doesn't appear to be much of a fan of science, does it? I hope Alison Redford keeps her commitment to the "unprecedented commitment to openness and transparency of energy development" she described in her piece in *USA Today*. That being said, I'm not crazy about pipelines—and I definitely don't want to see them running through environmentally sensitive areas.

KW: Yes you have hit it! Those are sensitive areas to butt heads on. How do we ensure the responsible handling of our resources, the need for a good economy but also the livelihood of individuals? My wife's family is from Cape Breton or "down home" as they call it, and they were a coal mining family. When the Prince Mine closed down in 2001 it was the last of its kind and a whole generation of miners had no work. As my wife's great Aunt told us, the kids are all "going to the mainland" to find work and New Waterford was much changed and empty. Especially now



Idle No More on the Environment

that they have sought work in the “tar sands” as you say. They are away for up to nine months at a time, my mother-in-law told me, away from their families to support them. What else could they do? Coal ran in their blood, the kids traditionally got into the buckets when they were babies.

JL: And like coal, eventually the new technologies of tomorrow will supplant the fossil fuel guzzling of today. If Canada hopes to remain relevant in a post-fossil fuel world, it will need to invest in new—and cleaner—energy technologies. Profits from today’s tar sands should be directed into researching such technologies. But right now it seems the tar sands have a public relations problem, which is why Alison Redford wrote the piece in *USA Today*. I think a sober middle ground (away from the rhetoric of the right and left) to their development—with as little environmental impact as possible—is likely the best way forward for the tar sands and Canada.

KW: Absolutely. There needs to be a balance between our economical needs as well as our environmental ones

and one can’t negate the other or that will continue to be non-sustainable. And trying to fix the problem after it has happened doesn’t count. It seems like some corporations participate in green practices such as Earth Day Canada to make amends, but it never seems to balance the initial harm done by their non-green practices. And if Harper continues to allow these practices for the sake of profit, while dismantling our participation in the Kyoto agreement, it all just seems like PR on the government’s part as well as the corporations, until they are all allowed not to be responsible any more.

Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer, Reiki Master and Reflexologist (www.feetmatter.ca). She is also a woman processing the death of her 35-year-old wife. To heal she has invented a seriously disheveled super-hero version of herself and started a blog. To read her soggy Thursday capers go to www.captaingrief.com and be ready to laugh and cry along with her!

Jeffrey Luscombe is a freelance writer and author of the novel *Shirts and Skins*. He is also the creator and author of The Gay Groom blog (gaygroom.wordpress.com).

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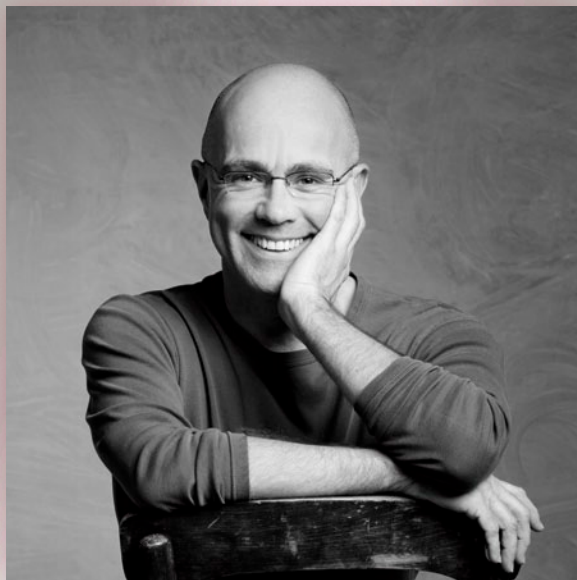
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HOT ARTIST: ROBERT MCQUEEN

by Jeff Harrison

Director, dramaturge and teacher, Robert McQueen, has worked across the United States, Canada and internationally. McQueen's past work here in Toronto saw him nominated recently for two Dora Mavor Moore awards: Outstanding Direction of a Play or Musical in 2012 for *Caroline or Change* and Outstanding Musical Production in 2010 for *The Light in the Piazza*. This spring he's back to direct *Falsettos*, the musical story of Marvin, his boyfriend, his son and ex-wife struggling to redefine their family amid the post sexual-revolution and the emergence of AIDS.

"*Falsettos* was actually Mitchell's suggestion [Mitchell Marcus, Artistic Director of Acting Up Stage Company]. "Mitchell's desire to do it was really because of his personal life," says McQueen. "It was a piece that had been very meaningful to him when he was a younger man, coming out, and now that he and his husband have two children, it really put him in mind of what does family mean?"

When Marcus made the offer, it got McQueen thinking. "What's my doorway in?" he wondered. "What's my connection to this piece?" What it brought up for him was nostalgic, historic. "I very clearly remember sitting on the bus on Fifth Avenue and reading a *New York Times* article about a strange disease that doctors

were concerned about and they'd given it the name GRID—gay related immune deficiency—and the whole city was going into panic,” he vividly recalls. “Then people started passing. There was ActUp and that whole period was right when I was in New York, so all of that is a very direct personal experience for me. That was my doorway in.”

Musicals are traditionally light and fun, an entertaining evening out, so *March of the Falsettos* was a brave production. “When it came out it was an important piece, it was addressing things in a way a musical never had,” McQueen says. “There was *La Cage aux Folles* in the mid ‘80s, but that was a very light, charming look at a married gay couple—it allowed an audience to stay somewhat distant. Then suddenly *Falsettos* comes along in the early ‘90s and it was really there. There was no candy coating. It was a little more in your face. I’m sure that a lot of people coming in from other smaller cities, or tourists, must have been kind of shocked.”

It’s this same bold passion that fires McQueen up about presenting it now in Toronto. “What really interests me about the play are the differences between Act One and Act Two. They were done almost ten years apart,” he says. “I thought it would be really great to go back and present these two pieces almost as individual one acts, lay them side-by-side. It’s an interesting way of looking at the writer and the composer—this is one of Bill Finn’s principal works—looking at how he’d grown, how he changed, how he evolved over those ten years.”

Pulling directly from his own memories gave McQueen an easily accessible vision for the production. “My clearest memory of moving to New York in the early ‘80s was the subways. They were covered with graffiti—New York had basically declared bankruptcy just prior to my arrival and the federal government had basically told the city to bail itself out. The city was pretty chaotic and violent, but it was amazingly creative,” he recalls. “There was a real spirit of possibility. All of the boring people had moved out of New York and gone to the suburbs, so it was a city rich with artists. It was a great time to be there. That is Act One, because when you listen to

it musically it is really quite chaotic, very non-linear and stream of consciousness.”

“Act Two is much more linear—musically and in terms of the text—it’s clearer, more traditional storytelling,” continues McQueen. “So when talking to the designers, I wanted Act One to be the subway and Act Two to be in Central Park. Metaphorically to me, if New York didn’t have Central Park the whole city would have gone mad...Angela Lansbury would be hosting Yo-Yo Ma and the Philharmonic and John Philip Sousa played for the fireworks display. All this in the midst of all the chaos going on around us—it really saved your heart in a lot of ways to be able to come together with friends in that way.”

“I remember us all spilling out of the park one night and seeing there were men holding hands and women holding hands and it was this moment where we were in the enclave, the embrace of Central Park where we just experienced this extraordinary music and we were pouring out onto the streets and there was this sense of gay, straight, it didn’t matter. Then as we got to the edge of the park everybody let their hands go and entered back into the city.” Here

McQueen pauses a moment, choked up by emotion, before continuing, “That’s Act Two for me.”

McQueen believes we can always be reminded of where we’ve come from. Just in our lifetime alone there have been extraordinary changes. “I think these two pieces remain in their period because they have to,” he says. “However, they are not museum pieces. You don’t look back on them fondly. I look back on this as an amazingly important and vital time in my life. I think it was for all of us.”

As we wrap up you can feel the air is heavy with memories for McQueen. “What I respond to is humanness when I read a script or look at material,” he says, breaking the moment of silence. “I think that’s what interests me most about being in the theatre: revealing the human heart. Truthfully, as in with most of the work I do, I want the audience to really love the characters.”



Falsettos April 23 to May 12, Regent Park Arts and Cultural Centre, 585 Dundas St. E.

Jeff Harrison is Editor-in-Chief of PinkPlayMags

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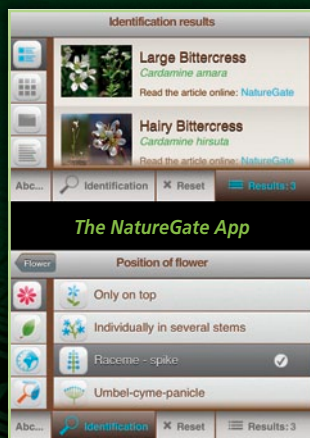


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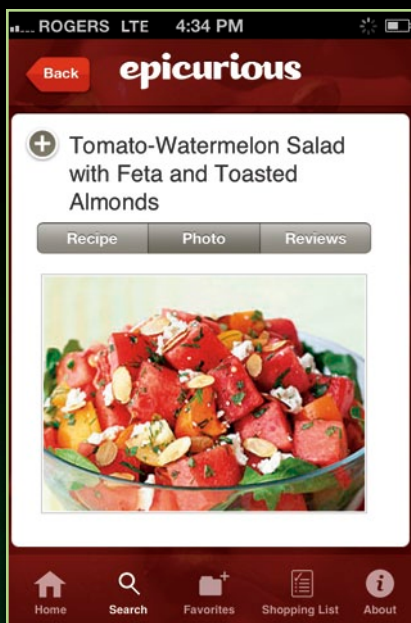
by Jaime Woo

Technology should make life simpler, not more complicated. The best apps seem to fulfill a need we didn't even know existed and then quietly move out of the way to allow their users to get back to being in the moment. After a long and slushy winter, most people can't wait to head outside, take in the fresh air, and shake off the cabin fever—whether you're taking the time to smell the roses, setting up a convivial picnic with loved ones, or going for an intense bike ride, there is an app out there to enhance the experience.

I have a terrible green thumb. I don't dare to keep plants anywhere near me, because inevitably they will die. It might be because of too little water or too much, hiding them from sunlight or letting them burn in the rays, or just sometimes forgetting they're there. Whatever the reason, the plants start to droop, then brown, and then end up in my trash. (Now, I have a beautiful artificial blade of rice plant that sits by my computer that gently sways as I type, and part of its calming effect is my knowledge that it will stay forever green.) This



isn't to say that I don't appreciate flora, however: I just wish I knew more about them. While before greenery neophytes would have had to dive deep into books to learn about plants, now, apps for the Apple and Android ecosystems are available to identify many of the species around us. **NatureGate** (www.luontoportti.com/suomi/en) enables users to identify over 700 flowering plants, based on the data accrued on its website. A neat feature is that NatureGate still works even when users are not connected to a data signal, so it really is mobile. Another cool app is **Leafsnap** (leafsnap.com), a joint venture by researchers from Columbia University, the Smithsonian, and University of Maryland. Leafsnap uses visual recognition software to pinpoint tree species based on database images of their leaves. Best of all, both apps are free.



There's nothing better than a picnic on a big grassy area. Fresh fruit, divine cheeses, maybe a little bubbly: it can be really idyllic. Well, once everything is organized. The planning part is the most stressful for a jaunt outdoors and here are two apps to help make life easier. First, there's the app by epicurean website Epicurious filled with over 30,000 recipes—including some perfect for a day out, like a tomato, watermelon, and feta salad—drawn from top-notch sources like *Bon Appetit* magazine. With *Epicurious*, users can save favourite recipes and create a grocery list to ensure no mix-ups ahead of the picnic.

There's a lot more to a picnic than just the food: the app *uPackingList* can help for everything else on a picnicker's checklist. Users can create custom lists and see their progress as they work through their checklist, and lists can be saved and reused so that planning for the next time won't require



inputting everything once again. This is especially helpful for me since I have a bad habit of creating lists on the back of envelopes, which inevitably I throw out leaving me back at square one.

In a previous column, I had mentioned the fitness gadgets that would make activities like cycling more efficient, such as the newly-released Pebble smartwatch and the Nike+ adaptor. While these gadgets are neat, a smartphone on its own can do a lot of great things as well. For cyclists, the *Cyclemeter* app (only for iOS) tracks data during each exercise session and stores it within the device. Users can visually see the distance they've cycled, the calories they've burned, and the time they've spent and then take that information to create new goals. I'm a big fan of fitness apps because they provide consistent feedback that is crucial to incentivizing workouts and staying on targets.



One of the real obstacles people face is a surfeit of information overloading their senses. We get inundated with emails and tweets and Facebook messages, and it can seem hard to find a break. The flip side, though, is when that data can be used to support and improve our day-to-day experience, minimizing confusion and taking things off our minds. With the apps I've suggested, you won't have to feel guilty for bringing your smartphone with you outdoors.

Jaime Woo is a writer living in Toronto and the festival director of Gamercamp. An avid geek at the nexus of games and technology, he's just published his first book: *Meet Grindr: How One App Changed The Way We Connect*



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Shirts *and* Skins



Jeffrey Luscombe

An excerpt from the novel *Shirts and Skins* by Jeffrey Luscombe.
Published by Chelsea Station Editions

Following their teacher, the line of boys walked swiftly down the hall of Hamilton's Laura Secord Public School before entering, two by two, into the school gymnasium. Being last in, Mr. Tanner yelled "Shut the door behind you, Moore!" and Josh swung the big wooden door closed with a slam, wondering why, once they entered the gym, they were suddenly only called by their last names. The gym was freezing, like always, and the volleyball net that had been up for the last few weeks was gone. To the side by the windows sat a pile of yellow and blue plastic hockey sticks. "Floor hockey," said Mr. Tanner, pushing his chest out and placing his fists on his hips like the Jolly Green Giant in a tracksuit.

Most of the boys cheered, but Josh held his arms closer to his chest. "Ho ho ho," he said softly. And then looking at the clock on the wall, "Fifty-four minutes left."

Mr. Tanner quickly divided the class in two with half, including Josh and Matt, on one side along the windows and the other half forming a line in front of the climbing bars. How come they never let us climb on those things, Josh wondered. That would be better than floor hockey.

"Wakey wakey, Moore," Mr. Tanner yelled. "I'm trying to explain the rules so stop staring off into space and pay attention. You're holding up the game."

Twenty boys stared angrily at him.

"Like it matters," Josh mumbled. He put his hands behind his back and leaned against the gym wall.

"Ten minute shifts!" Mr. Tanner shouted. "Five men on each team. That's four players and one goalie. The rest of you stand off to the side on the white line until I blow the whistle. Then the next five go on the court. I don't care who's in goal. Choose for yourselves."

Josh closed his eyes and began praying. "Please

please please."

Mr. Tanner stretched out his hairy arm towards Josh's side of the gym.

"Skins," Mr. Tanner said.

"Fuck," Josh said, softly but still out loud. "He did that on purpose."

A few minutes later Josh stood shirtless at the end of the line and watched the red second hand sweep around the face of the clock. The boys were so keen they had pushed their way to the front of the line. Josh smiled. Luckily there were eleven boys on his side so he would miss the first two shifts.

Mr. Tanner dropped the puck in the middle of the gym floor to start the first shift. The sound of plastic slapping against wood filled the gymnasium.

"What a bunch of jerks," Josh said. He wished he could trigger an asthma attack before his turn.

After ten minutes, Mr. Tanner blew the whistle signaling ten boys to move off the court and ten more to move on. Now in the front of the line, five eager boys stood to Josh's left deciding which

unlucky one would have to sit out the next shift.

"Fine," Paul Boyarin finally said. "At least I don't have to play with him." Paul pointed at Josh and walked away from the others fuming.

The whistle blew. "Offside," Mr. Tanner yelled.

Josh looked out over the gym floor and tried to remember the rules of the game. *What the hell is "offside"?*

Biting his thumbnail, Josh noticed Matt running around the floor. One of Matt's shoelaces had come undone. He's gonna trip if he's not careful, Josh thought. Matt's body and arms were thin and very white, his chest caved in slightly at the breastbone. He looked like a puppy chasing a ball, always lagging a little bit behind the rest of the boys, a mane of light-brown hair flying behind him.

Someone scooped the puck with their hockey

**THE REST OF THE BOYS
PLAYED AROUND HIM,
YELLING WHENEVER HE
STUMBLED IN THEIR
WAY. "MOVE IT, FAT-
ASS," SOMEONE SPAT
AT HIM.**

stick and lofted it up to the ceiling where it hit the steel cage around one of the lights. Following the puck with his eyes, Matt looked up. His mouth was wide open and his long hair reached halfway down his naked back as he watched the puck fall to the floor. In profile, Matt's overbite was—*almost sweet.*

The whistle blew and Matt walked off the floor. The last boy off, Matt handed his blue plastic hockey stick to Josh.

"Thanks," Josh muttered.

Matt smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Fascinated by Matt's overbite, Josh tried to imagine it in profile again. Matt seemed more vague than dumb. Always alone, he would walk away from the school at the end of the day towards wherever it was he lived, shoulders slumped over, his long hair draping down from under a black wool toque, not noticing, or not caring, that he had a splash of dried bird shit on the back of his brown jacket.

On the floor, Josh never came close to the puck, only once half-heartedly reaching out his blue plastic hockey stick to where the puck had swished by a few seconds earlier. The rest of the boys played around him, yelling whenever he stumbled in their way. "Move it, fat-ass," someone spat at him.

Josh tried to run as little as possible, so his soft stomach would not jiggle over the waist of his brown *Husky* corduroy jeans while along the gym wall, Matt paced alone, away from the line of other boys, as if guarding his ratty old yellow shirt lying in a ball against the wall. The whistle blew again and Josh walked to the sidelines, handing his hockey stick to another boy like it was made of lead. Paul Boyarin snatched the stick and ran onto the floor.

"You're welcome," Josh said quietly, his face to the wall.

Ignoring the shouts and hollers echoing off the glossy white cinderblock walls, Josh hid his flabby chest and inverted nipples beneath folded arms

and inched toward Matt.

"Are we winning?" Josh asked.

"Don't know." Matt's low voice sounded as if his nose was stuffed up. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Josh.

Claude Donner stood waiting to get back on the floor for his shift. He looked at Matt and Josh and shook his head. "They don't know who's winning!" he said to the boy beside him who then rolled his eyes and turned back to the game.

Josh moved his eyes over Matt's hair. He wondered if it was as soft as it looked.

"I want a whistle like Mr. Tanner's got." Matt said. "I'd rather be the whistle blower guy than play."

"I don't like playing either," Josh said. "Do you think we'll have time to play another shift?"

Matt looked at the clock and squinted. A confused look appeared on his face as he tried to add and subtract to figure out how much time remained. Josh looked softly into Matt's light blue eyes while Matt studied the clock.

"I hope not," Matt finally said.

"Running too much hurts my leg and then I start to limp. I had an operation on it when I was a baby." Matt spoke slowly. Not much slower than normal, but like someone putting their finger down gently on a record album.

Standing by Matt, Josh was overcome with wanting something that he could not put into words. Still Josh knew whatever it was it had something to do with Matt. Maybe he just wanted to have long hair like Matt, or have a body like him so everyone would see Josh's muscles move and twist just below his skin, just like how Matt's back and shoulders looked when he reached for the puck. That was not it, though it was part of it. And the harder Josh tried to name this thing, this warm soft and sweet thing, the more it seemed to come apart—like a knitted scarf, unraveling from a single pulled piece of yarn.

With only a few minutes left before they would

**BLOOD RUSHED FROM
JOSH'S HEAD AND
STARS BEGAN TO BURST
FROM THE CAGED LIGHTS
OVER HIS HEAD IN THE
CORNER OF HIS EYES.**

head back to their classroom, Mr. Tanner blew the whistle and the final shift began.

Josh reluctantly accepted a plastic hockey stick once more from one of the boys leaving the floor and, dragging his feet, walked onto the court. When Mr. Tanner dropped the puck in the blue circle, Matt took off chasing it with the other boys, a small goofy chuckle in his throat every time he neared it. Josh didn't run much. He checked the clock and waited for the whistle. Along the wall of the gym, the other boys punched their arms back into their shirts. Josh was looking toward his shirt and sweater folded neatly against the gym wall when Matt, slightly limping, ran past and accidentally brushed his naked shoulder against Josh's side. For a second, Josh stood without moving, while the boys ran around him. Energized with a strange spark of vigor, Josh began running, following Matt as Matt followed the puck. Claude Donner shot the puck behind the net and the rest of the boys rushed toward it. Matt and Josh arrived last. As the boys dug their plastic sticks at the puck, Josh quickly gently touched the back of Matt's soft damp hair and then slid his hand down the skin of Matt's thin back to the waist of Matt's blue jeans.

The whistle blew.

Matt and the other boys moved toward the blue circle for Mr. Tanner to drop the puck once more. Matt had not seemed to notice Josh's hand tenderly caress him. Giddy, Josh gasped for air and ran toward Matt. He stopped. Mr. Tanner was looking directly into Josh's face. His eyes were squinted, his eyebrows met in a frown, and his broad chest heaved. For a moment Josh thought Mr. Tanner would hit him. Suddenly Josh understood what his teacher's hateful penetrating eyes had seen in him. Blood rushed from Josh's head and stars began to burst from the caged lights over his head in the corner of his eyes. Breathless, his asthmatic lungs closed tightly. Trembling and wheezing, tears blurred Josh's vision.

Mr. Tanner shook his head and rubbed his right hand over his moustache as if holding the words that he wanted to say in his mouth. Without waiting for Josh to get into position he blew the whistle. Josh wheezed and moved slowly around the gym, dragging his plastic hockey stick. He tried to stay as far away from Matt and Mr. Tanner as he could. At any moment, Mr. Tanner would blow the whistle.

"No," Josh whispered to himself. *It can't be true.*

Near the middle of the floor, Matt ran past Josh, chuckling as he followed the others. Josh turned and ran for the group of boys. Near the net, he reached Matt and, diving, Josh's round heavy body hit Matt in the back with a loud thump, pushing Matt face first into the hard gymnasium floor with a nauseating crack.

Matt's teeth smashed against the floor. The broken and sharp remnants of his front teeth, now jagged like an animal's, ripped through his bottom lip leaving a large bloody gash. Dazed, Matt lifted himself up on his elbows and screamed. Blood bubbled and oozed from his mouth and nose onto a white line on the floor. Mr. Tanner ran to Matt, examined his mouth and then yelled for one boy to grab Matt's coat and another boy to fetch paper towels. Mr. Tanner had Matt hold a fist-full of paper towels over his mouth while he quickly put Matt's yellow shirt with the brown stripes on him and did up the buttons. Blood dripped from the soaked paper towels onto his shirt as Mr. Tanner threw Matt's brown coat with the bird shit still on the back over Matt's shoulders.

"We're going to the hospital," he said. Then, picking Matt up in his arms, he rushed toward the door. As they passed Josh near the blue bullseye, Josh saw Matt's torn swollen lips and cracked teeth and turned away. His stomach roiled. And as he stood shirtless, looking up at the clock unable to move, Josh's lungs finally opened, and he breathed normally again.

Jeffrey Luscombe was born in Hamilton, Ontario Canada. He holds a BA and MA in English from the University of Toronto. He attended The Humber College School for Writers where he was mentored by writers Nino Ricci and Lauren B. Davis. He has had fiction published in *Chelsea Station*, *Zeugma Literary Journal*, and filling *Station Magazine*. In 2010 he was shortlisted for the Prism International Fiction Prize. He was a contributor to the anthology *Truth or Dare* (Slash Books Inc. 2011). He lives in Toronto with his husband Sean. *Shirts and Skins* is his first novel.



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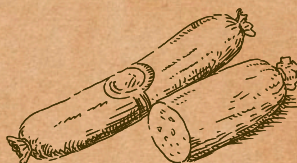


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Community Cornerstones

Ladybug

florist in the village

by cee sando



Who knows better how to usher in spring than a local florist who has been in the community for over a decade? Living on Church Street since 1997, Ladybug Florist is our neighbourhood landmark floral shop. Shop owner Claire Rose Ihasz, a community member herself, is proud to have grown up in Toronto's Gay Village, a neighbourhood she knows well and loves. Attending Jarvis Collegiate and living in City Park apartments as a child, Ihasz maintains that when she decided to open up her own business, there was no question that it had to be located in the Church Wellesley Village.

The tradition of giving flowers to celebrate certain occasions dates back to prehistoric times when ancient people believed that many species of flowers had medicinal attributes. Therefore, the giving of flowers was a charitable act. There are also records of flower giving dating back to Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese writings, as well as in Greek and Roman mythology. During the Middle Ages, strict church guidelines prevented couples from showing open affection in public. The practice of flower giving, including encoded messages within flower arrangements, allowed couples to display emotion in non physical ways. Today, we send flowers for a variety of occasions and reasons: to a partner on Valentine's Day, as a thank you for a job well done, to celebrate new life, or to grieve the death of a loved one. Ladybug has had the opportunity to fulfill less traditional requests, like a bouquet with a prosthetic foot; a rose bouquet with only the stems and thorns and no rose heads with the card reading "you're still a prick"; a floral arrangement for a dog wedding, which was featured on television; and even a box of sausages, no flowers, just sausages!

But, in an age where flowers can be purchased just about anywhere, including online, how has a local floral boutique been able to set itself apart for the past 16 years? "I think it's the extra little touches and the fact that people trust us and our work," says Ihasz. "In this business you are with people at the best and worst of times. You might be sending flowers to someone's new boyfriend, sending flowers to say thank you for the dog walker, or designing flowers for someone's dad's casket. It's very personal and intimate. I like to compare my shop to a pub. You have your regulars and you know what they want. They come to trust you and you know what's going on in their lives." Ladybug also ensures that it carries as many blooms grown in a sustainable way as possible. Ihasz purchases plants from "eco" growers in Colombia who focus on providing good employment, healthcare and education for their workers. Ihasz actually traveled to Colombia herself to see firsthand how the blooms she purchases for the shop are grown and packed.

The iconic shop has delivered bouquets for more than a few celebrities including Margaret Atwood, Tina Turner, Martin Short and the late Jack Layton. They have also provided flowers for the Much Music Video Awards and Toronto Film Festival for numerous years. When Dame Edna was in town for a show, the Ladybug Florist owners were particularly honoured to be able to provide the gladiolas for her performance!

Ladybug provided the flowers for an incredibly iconic moment for Toronto's LGBTQ community—the very first legal gay wedding in the city. The couple, Joe Varnell and Kevin



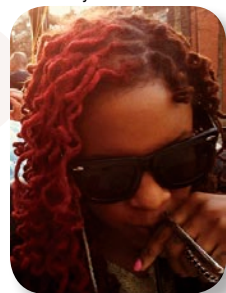
Claire Rose Ihasz, Owner
Photo by Ori Dagan

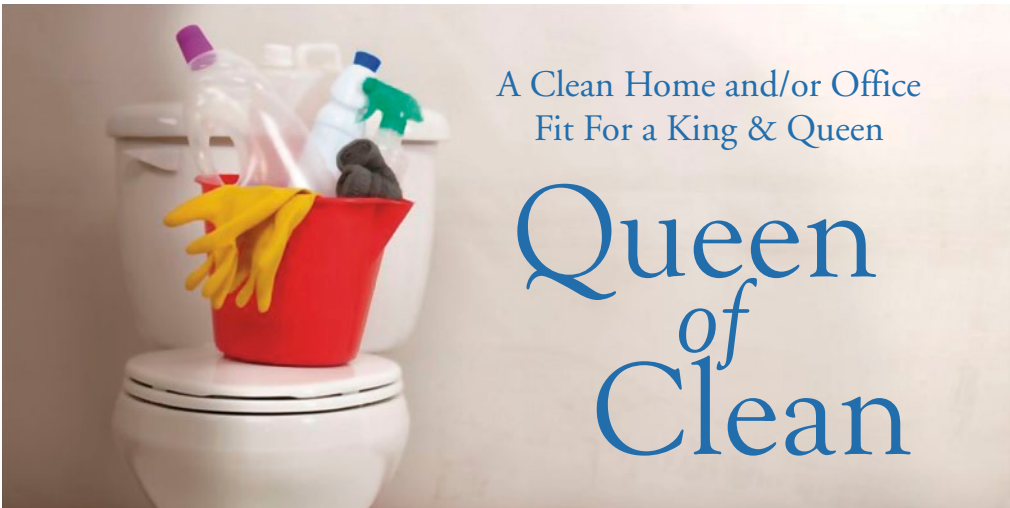
Bourassa, married at Riverdale's Metropolitan Community Church on January 14, 2001 and continue to be loyal regulars. In fact, gay and lesbian customers continue to flock to the shop for their wedding arrangements. "I remember a specific couple of women who had lived in rural redneck Texas and had to pretend to be sisters for 20 plus years!" Ihasz recalls with particular sentiment. "Can you imagine what their life must have been like? They had come to Toronto to get married and were shocked at how open our society was. When I met with them to discuss their wedding flowers, they started crying. They had gone from a society where they had to keep their love secret for so many years, to a big city where it was okay to publicly show your love for your same sex partner. They could finally reveal to me what they had secretly desired all their lives—a big, gorgeous, wedding where they could show the world how much they loved each other! It was very touching.

Though giving, receiving and displaying of flowers may seem like small gestures, it is clear that this practice holds a lot of meaning for many, especially members of the LGBTQ community. The very existence of a flower shop like Ladybug that makes every effort to provide exceptional service and of course gorgeous arrangements, is an inspiration. The love and care Ladybug has offered to the local community for the past 16 years, truly makes it above the rest. When the next occasion comes around for me to order a bouquet... I know that I will not hesitate to call Ladybug!

Currently calling Toronto home, cee sando rarely sits still.

Jet-setting throughout the Caribbean, France, Dubai, India, Mexico, the USA and Canada, cee documents her experiences through words, photos and her fashion choices. Obsessed with style and pop culture, cee has a bohemian heart and readily admits her love for the classic rock-and-roll lifestyle.





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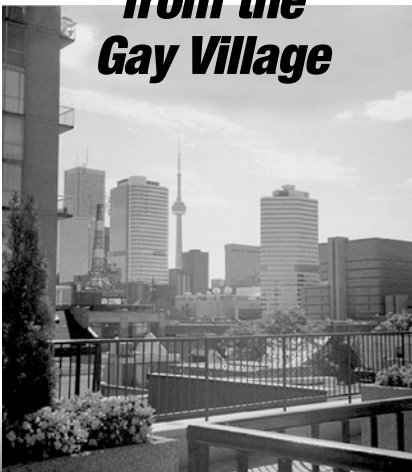
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SPRING IN THE CITY

by Jesse Trautmann

Spring is surfacing! In Toronto this transitional season often crawls along like a slow moving creature, but when she fully arrives all is forgiven. We forgive the chilly yet rising temperatures for sometimes not being warm enough. We forgive the rain because, hey, at least it's not snow! Yes, it's easy to forgive spring for all of her flaws because of the great things like sunshine and the replenishing of the city's greenery. I always look forward to the surprise of that first day that's warm enough where you can go outside without a jacket. Spring in the city is a great chance to get out and explore the variety of things to do.

FOOD

Springtime in Toronto can be hit or miss, but we do get some beautiful days that you should definitely take advantage of. A great way to do that is to go for a picnic. You can always pack a lunch, or why not grab something to go, and then head to the park. Below are some great places where you can get delicious sandwiches that make for easy eating on a blanket.

The Country General

936 Queen Street West
416-531-4447

www.thecountrygeneral.ca
\$10 – \$14

A definite favourite choice is the Fried Chicken Thigh Sandwich with avocado chutney, coriander, and green onion. Or you can try the Trio of Steamed Pork Buns with a side of frites sprinkled with spice and house-made smoked ketchup. Also what's great

about this place is that the owners have visited all the farms where they get their products.

Tip: *It's located right next to Trinity Bellwoods Park, how convenient!*

The Black Camel

4 Crescent Road (Opposite Rosedale Subway Station)

416-929-7518

www.blackcamel.ca

\$5 – \$10

If you venture out early enough and feel like a breakfast sandwich try the eggspresso sandwich served until 11am. What's cool about this is that the eggs are cooked with an espresso machine steam wand making them beautifully light and fluffy.

Tip: *Be sure to top-up your order with the many sauces, condiments, and extra toppings available for less than a buck. Go nuts!*



CONCERTS & EVENTS

The Killers

May 15

8pm

Air Canada Center

50 Bay Street

www.theaircanadacentre.com

\$60 and up

After a few years on hiatus The Killers are back with a new album, *Battle Born*, and are ready to tour. "Runaways," the first single from the album, was voted the Best Song of Summer 2012 by *Rolling Stone Magazine* readers and the second single "Miss Atomic Bomb" was voted the Best Song of 2012. How awesome is it to get to see these and other tracks come to life on stage?

Tip: Head to YouTube and check out some of the bonus tracks from the album like "Carry Me Home" and "Flesh and Bone" (Jacques Lu Cont Remix) before heading to the concert.

New Kids On The Block, 98 Degrees, and Boyz II Men

June 7

7:30pm

Air Canada Center

50 Bay Street

\$79 and up

Attack of the boy bands! Well I guess you'd have to say man bands now because the guys from all these groups are all grown up. However, the auditorium will be filled with euphoria and nostalgia as these groups will be playing all their old hits that'll transport you back to the good old days.

Tip: Bust out your old CDs (I know you have them in the back of your closet!) and have a listening party with some friends and some drinks before heading to the concert.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival

April 25 to May 5

Multiple locations and screening times, contact event organizers for more details.

www.hotdocs.ca

\$10 – \$19

Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival is North America's largest documentary festival. Every year there's a selection of over 100 cutting-edge documentaries from Canada and around the world.

Tip: If you're looking to get your doc-on and see as many films as possible, you can save money by taking advantage of the packages and passes designed to have you seeing more for less. Check out the website for the different options available.

Inside Out: The Toronto LGBT Film Festival

May 23 to June 2

Multiple locations and screening times, contact event organizers for more details.

www.insideout.ca

\$6 – \$13

Currently the largest event of its kind in Canada, the Festival entertains film buffs of all stripes, showcasing the best and most diverse work of interest to LGBTQ communities. Taking place over 11 days, the Festival draws crowds of 35,000 to screenings, artist talks, panel discussions, installations and parties that highlight more than 180 films and videos from Canada and around the world.

Tip: Since 1991 this Festival has grown in scope as well as attendance, becoming the largest event of its kind in Canada and one of the top five LGBTQ film festivals in the world!

Artfest: The Spring Art & Crafts Show

May 18 to 20

11am – 6pm

The Distillery Historic District

55 Mill Street

416-619-0953

www.artfestontario.com

FREE

Artfest Toronto will launch the summer season Victoria Day weekend with a celebration of artists & artisans from across Canada. Artfest Toronto is a celebration of the top 85 artists & artisans featuring pottery, glass, jewellery, paintings, woodturning, gourmet foods, live music and more. Come stroll the cobble stone lanes and take in the beauty of the Distillery District.

Tip: You can check out Artfest's blog at www.artfestontario.com/blog to get the lowdown on all the talented participants from last year in order to get a sense of what's in store.



THEATRE

Falsettos

April 23 to May 12

Tue 7pm; Wed – Sat 8pm; Sun 2pm & 7pm

Regent Park Arts and Cultural Centre

585 Dundas Street East

416.733.0545

www.hgjewishtheatre.com

\$39 – \$55

Set against the backdrop of the post sexual-revolution and the emergence of AIDS, Falsettos tells the story of Marvin, a Jewish father who—in 1979—leaves his wife and son for another man. Told with great humour and spirit, this Tony® and Drama Desk award-winning musical, breathtakingly depicts the birth of a non-traditional family amidst a time of astonishing change.

Tip: A great date night out!

The Book of Mormon

April 30 to June 9

Princess of Wales Theatre

300 King Street West

Tue – Sat 8pm; Wed, Sat & Sun 2pm

For tickets see www.mirvish.com

\$35 – \$200

This Broadway hit tells the story of two young Mormon missionaries who are trying to spread their scriptures to the people in a remote village in northern Uganda while a brutal warlord is threatening the local population. This religious satire musical is from Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the creators of *South Park*, and *Avenue Q* co-creator Rob Lopez. Need I say more!

Tip: The Book of Mormon has earned nine Tony Awards, which gives me great confidence that this show will definitely live up to the hype.

Of a Monstrous Child: A Gaga Musical

May 14 to May 26

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

12 Alexander Street

Tue – Sat 8pm; Sun 2:30pm and 8pm

www.buddiesinbadtimes.com

\$30 – \$39

If you missed the Born This Way Ball Tour back in February you can still get your Gaga fix with this musical cabaret devoted to one of our most enigmatic and polarizing pop stars, Lady Gaga. This piece of queer theatre investigates the religious dimension of pop stardom and poses questions about authenticity, appropriation, and the redeeming power of the creative act. The show is brought to you by queer trailblazers Ecce Homo (Alistair Newton and Matt Jackson) and features a collection of the art world's greatest icons and celebrates the place where high culture hooks up with low art.

Tip: New this year, *Buddies* is offering rush tickets that will be made available at the door for \$20.

CULTURE

Allan Gardens

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19 Horticultural Ave. (Carlton and Jarvis Street)

10am – 5pm every day

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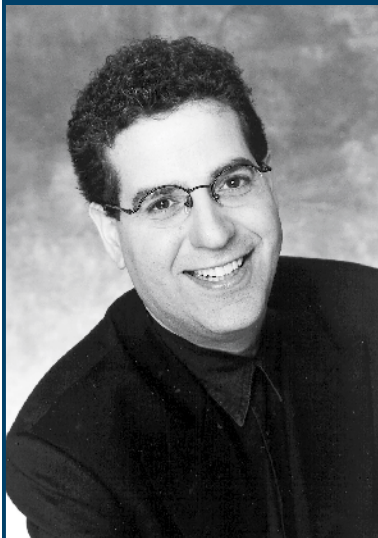
Tip: Although it's open all year long the spring is the best time to visit the gardens with the seasonal plants blooming in all their glory.

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" and he also pens the hilarious blog, "I Shaved My Ass for This?"

Photos by Karel Matkovic



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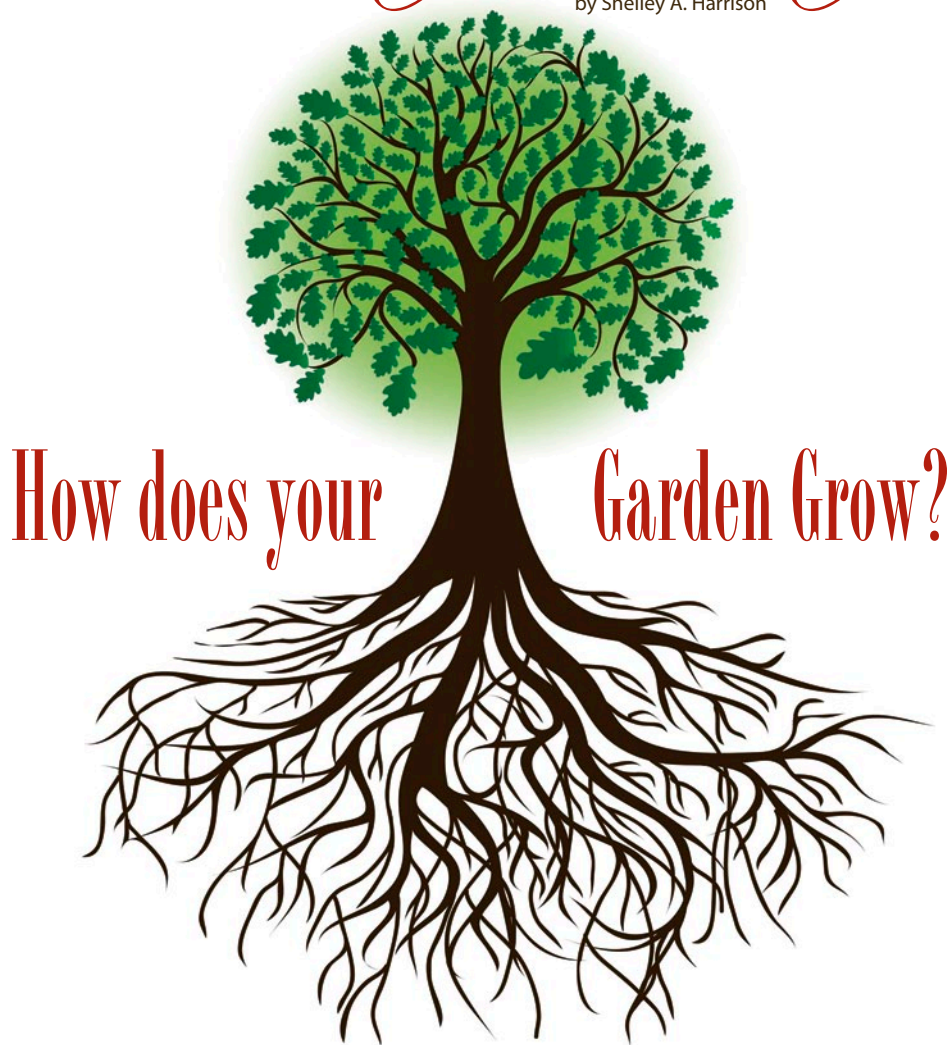
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From the Heart

by Shelley A. Harrison



Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? Do you feel contrary as spring rouses itself, or does your garden grow with know how? Do you anger easily, or not at all? Does your hope waver easily or do you have the verve to overcome obstacles? Are you tapped into your life plan?

Spring is the season of renewal, rebirth, and regrowth. Now that we eat produce from California and further afield, it doesn't quite hit home as much that we have survived the long winter. In pre-industrial times, we would have had to store enough food to last us through the cold season, and spring was a great time of renewed hope. There would be life again, fresh food, and the cycle would continue. Even in modern times, the relief of the winter cold melting away brings joy as the days grow longer, and we feel the sap rising again. Spring provides us the energy to make new plans and expand our growth as the plants do. As a tree taps into its genetic blueprint and adds another ring of wood according to that plan, so too must we consult our soul purpose to be guided appropriately in our growth.

In the healing system of Classical Chinese 5-Element Medicine, the ancients understood the cycle of seasons very well, and saw these basic five elements of life reflected in our own bodies, minds, and spirits. I learned this approach to health while studying Plant Spirit Medicine, which is based on harmonizing our health in accordance with Nature's laws.

There are 5 elements, or energy expressions the Chinese elders recognized: Water, Metal/Air, Earth, Fire and Wood. The nature of each is embodied in many visible expressions, such as the season, a colour, an emotional expression, different organs in the body, and a distinct taste.

This year in my "From the Heart columns," as we explore the theme of seasons, I will share with you some teachings about these 5 elements, according to the element that is an expression of each season.

So we start with the season of spring! Spring is predominant with Wood energy. We don't really think of it as an element. It is the structure that is created when the other elements come together. Wood's season is spring, its colour is green, the emotion anger, the physical organs represented are the liver (seat of our life plan), and gallbladder (in charge of making decisions to enact that life plan), and the taste is sour like a pickle.

Spring embodies wood energy, expressed as rising up quickly to grow, hope, birth, decisiveness, and go get 'em enthusiasm. Green is the colour of the fresh new leaves, and the colour our skin can emanate when we are out of balance in our wood.

The liver, the organ represented by wood, is also called the "Official of Planning." It is not only the physical organ, but a spirit in the body that holds our life purpose. Expressed on the level of the mind, it makes us good at tapping into our vision, and making plans. When this official (just like a minister in the government) is in balance, we are good at organizing; out of balance we are very scattered and unfocused.

The gallbladder is the "Official of Decision Making and Judgment." He is like the contractor that works for

the architect, the liver. When the gallbladder official is in balance, we are decisive and have a clear plan of action; out of balance, we can become very hesitant, which bogs down our growth and expansion.

The elemental energies within us can be balanced, in excess, or in deficiency. Anger, the emotion of wood, arises when someone crosses our boundaries. It leaps out to protect and reset the boundary. Someone whose wood is in excess could be pushy, loud with a shouting sound to the voice, over-reactive about their boundaries and thus irrationally angry and irritable.

Deficient wood expression could be someone who is a classic doormat—they constantly allow their boundaries to be overstepped with no energy that arises to defend themselves. They may lack any vision or dreams, or the necessary initiative to pursue their plans. Without the enthusiasm and vitality characteristic of the rapid revival of plant life in spring, their growth energy collapses into hopelessness, depression, or aimlessness. Pot smoking is a great way to bash your wood. It creates the illusion of creativity, but frequent use drains the necessary drive to organize and manifest our blueprint. We can become the classic "slacker."

If wood's energy of anger is healthy, it arises, resets any crossed boundaries, and then rests. Wood in balance also has dreams, visions, plans and hope. It produces feelings of patience, steady, seasonal personal growth in cycles, with natural ebb and flow. Our growth has vigour and vitality, but is tethered within the limit of the blueprint.

A plant that embodies a predominant wood energy grows just like this—it is hardy and not easily eradicated, increases its territory steadily season by season, but never overproduces beyond the resources available to it. Think of it as determined, but reasonable, excited, but grounded: roots sinking down deeply to anchor, a strong trunk to centre it and channel energy and sap, and abundant branches rising up and spreading out to reach the sun. Spring is the perfect time to vision for your new growth and set those life plans in motion.

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 over 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



Spring Horoscopes

by Joan Ann Evelyn

Aries (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

Feeling more vital and alive, you will enjoy a high energy month in April. Think about what you would like to accomplish and commit plans to paper. In May, start a new project that will pay off big down the road. In June, you would benefit from attending conferences or workshops.

Taurus (Apr 20 – May 20)

Get plenty of rest and relaxation in April. In May, reorganize your finances to the best of your ability. Review your budget and come up with a new financial plan. In June, you are a love magnet. Schedule weekends away with your sweetheart. Make plans in advance to avoid mix-ups.

Gemini (May 21 – Jun 20)

In April, accept a board position with a club or organization. In May, your skills may not be recognized on the job, but do not let anyone else take credit for the work you do. In June, build on your successes over the past year. Some Geminis will make wedding plans.

Cancer (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

Immerse your energy into your job in April, but avoid power struggles with your boss. In May, accept invitations and attend events with friends. Get out and about and network. In June, you will experience a new lease on life as you enter a positive financial period.

Leo (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

Take a last minute vacation in April. Enjoy fun activities with your children. In May, enjoy the recognition you get for your work efforts. A good time to begin a new career project. In June, you will not be in the mood to take a back seat. A missing item could turn up.

Virgo (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

In April, your attention shifts to a quest for knowledge. Upgrade your skill level to move ahead on the job. In May, people in high places will be aware of your skills and talents. Make presentations at work. In early June, you could be offered a new position.

Libra (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

In April, restructure your daily routines to make better use of your time. Take a conservative approach to spending money. In May, pay off debts and deal with taxes or insurance. Spend time with your family in June. Invite friends over for a home cooked dinner.

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

Do a craft project with your children or pursue your favourite hobby in April. Close relationships will be more demanding in May. Spend special time with the one you love. Take a chance on a lottery ticket in June, you could attract a windfall.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

In April, volunteer to coach a children's sports team. Singles should consider Internet dating. If you are restless and ready for a job change, send out resumes in May. In June, if a conflict arises, work out a win-win compromise with your partner. A legal matter could be settled in your favor.

Capricorn (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

Clean up the clutter and get rid of anything you no longer need in April. Give your children extra attention and do self-expressive, creative work in May. Take an art class or join a drama group. In June, pace yourself, do not take on more than you can handle.

Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

In April, you may have difficulty achieving a balance between home and career. Your home life could be more demanding than usual. Organize a family get-together with your siblings in May. In June, spend time alone with your thoughts and write down your dreams.

Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

April may be a demanding financial month. Do your best to pay down debts and save money. In May, make sure your car is in excellent working condition. Slow down on the road. In June, focus your energy on making home improvements or buying a new home.

Passionate about Astrology, Joan Ann manages her own consulting business AstroConsultation. She is President of the Canadian Association for Astrological Education and teaches intermediate to advanced Astrology. Joan Ann gives presentations and workshops on her favorite subject Astrology.

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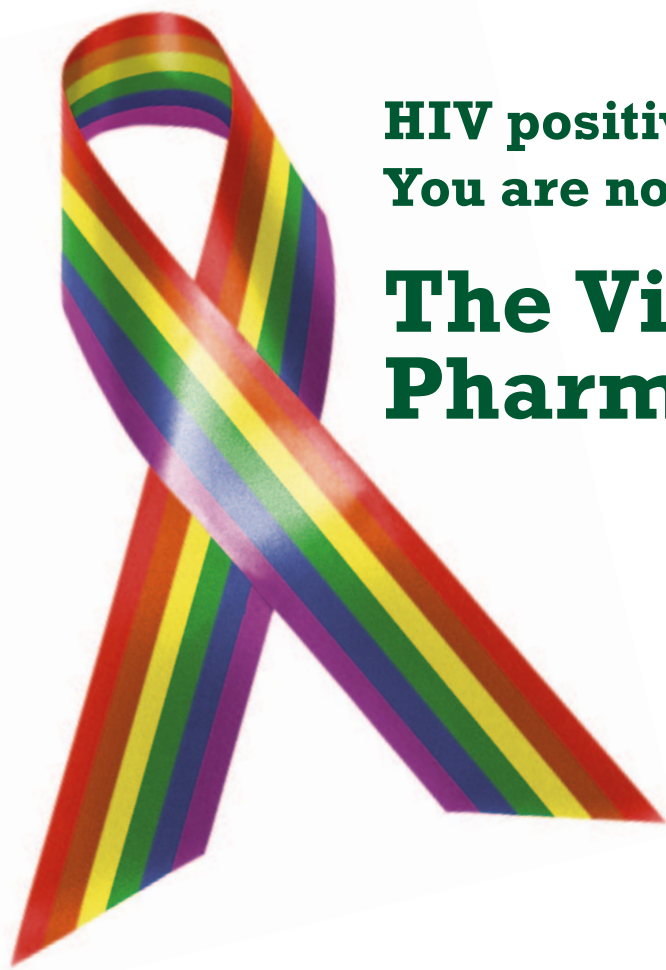
THE SWEET O'THE YEAR

by Charles G.D. Roberts

*THE UPLAND hills are green again;
The river runs serene again;
All down the miles
Of orchard aisles
The pink-lip blooms are seen again;
To garden close
And dooryard plot
Come back the rose
And bergamot.*

*The ardent blue leans near again;
The far-flown swallow is here again;
To his thorn-bush
Returns the thrush,
And the painted-wings appear again.
In young surprise
The meadows run
All starry eyes
To meet the sun.*

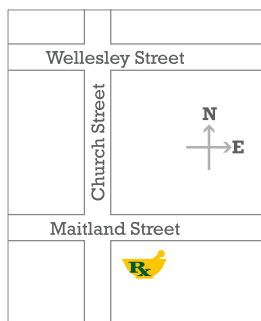
*Warm runs young blood in the veins again,
And warm loves flood in the rains again.
Earth, all aflush
With the fecund rush,
To her Heart's Desire attains again;
While stars outbeat
The exultant word—
"Death's in defeat,
And Love is Lord."*



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