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Book Review

What draws us to the cottage?

By VINCENT EGAN
Thomson News Service

Half of the people of Canada, it seems, at this moment are at, or on the way to or from, "the cottage." Or the lake. The camp. The cabin. The beach.

The funny thing is that Canada's cities and towns are pretty nice in the summer. What impels us to trade the considerable comforts of home for miseries of weekend traffic and the difficulties of the rustic life?

This phenomenon is examined by Ottawa Citizen columnist Charles Gordon in his new book, *At The Cottage* (McClelland and Stewart; 217 pages; \$24.95).

We first learn that it only seems that half the population is hooked. Gordon puts the figure at 1,263,200 cottagers on a typical Friday evening in the summer.

"Once the Cottage was wilderness," the author writes. "Once it was solitude. Now it is neither. But it is still closer to wilderness, closer to solitude than the city..."

"That's why people are back again this year, despite having to sweep up miscellaneous animal leavings, despite having to take shutters off and risk further injury to backs.

"The cottage is different."

THE WEATHER

Gordon carries Mark Twain's dictum ("everybody talks about the weather") to new lengths. At the cottage, everything depends upon the weather and the weather forecasts are eagerly read even by those cottagers who think that news shouldn't be allowed to take place during the summer.

Reactions to the weather are of two kinds - to declare that it has never before been this wet (or whatever), or to proclaim that the weather was just like this back in the War of the Depression.

The women at the cottage are the

optimists, because sunny weather gets kids and their muddy footprints, out of the place. The men are the weather pessimists because rain provides the perfect excuse to postpone the painting of the boathouse and to sit inside, drinking and snacking.

The rain brings out all kinds of stinging insects that make your arm swell up to 20 times its normal size. Sunny weather makes people so eager for a tan that they gladly suffer a bad case of sunburn.

Such problems have one thing in common: They prevent people from helping out as much as they'd like. Getting by with a minimum of exertion is considered the ideal, by many if not most cottagers.

How does one manage to move very little, without actually sleeping? By reading a book, of course. Cottagers don't read to enrich their intellects. No, "the reading is fruitful because a suntan can be acquired at the same time."

Gordon recommends setting out for the cottage equipped with at least one book that you can talk about on your return - about a corporation that has an environmental problem, for example - so that you can deal with the guilt you might feel for reading lurid pot-boilers as well.

When reading begins to pall, you can turn to the games that are to be found in every cottage, including Monopoly, if you can pry the kids away from it and Scrabble, a favorite with those who find rummy games too noisy.

At the cottage, some people even play solitaire, a game that elsewhere has disappeared under the onset of singles bars, computer dating services and the present-day fear of being considered a loner.

MOMMIES, DADDIES

Twosomes, however, face special difficulties at the cottage, where the walls are thin and don't

always go up to the ceiling. And where double beds are narrow, and usually have one leg shorter than the others.

Gordon writes that while groans and cries may be stifled in the interests of decency and good taste, there's no stopping the short leg from bumping with every movement in the bed.

"In the event of discovery, the official story is: 'Mommy and Daddy are playing.'"

"The difficulty with such an official story is that it only works once. The second time, an alert child wants to know what Mommy and Daddy are playing and who's winning.

"A sufficiently imaginative answer will intrigue the children and cause them to inform everyone at the cottage that a game was being played. It will cause them to demand, every morning, that the game be played again."

Eventually, summer comes to an end, and the cottage has to be closed for the season, whether it is on Labor Day or Thanksgiving.

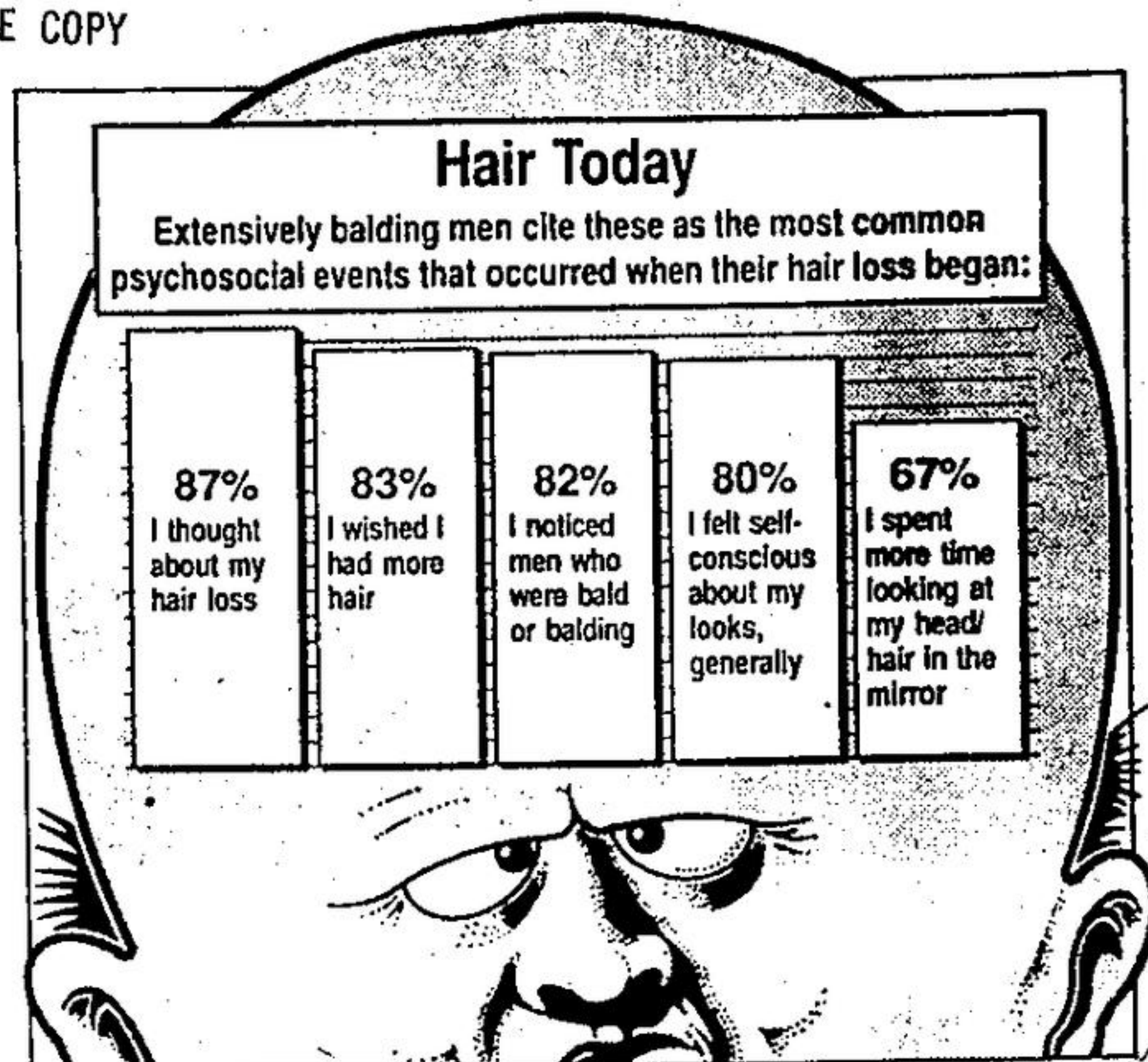
Until the following May 24, the place has to be emptied of every last crumb of food. The shutters have to be brought out and matched with the appropriate windows - even though they have become warped and bent a bit more since they were removed in the spring.

"The cleanup takes too long. Taking the pump apart is impossible. Moving all the outdoor furniture inside is a pain in the neck," Gordon concludes.

"Every person has a right to hate the cottage. And every person has a right to hate leaving it.

"There is regret at the fun being over. And there's regret at the fun never having started, at least not in the way you thought it would."

-Vincent Egan, travel columnist for Thomson News Service, is a counter-cottager.



Source: "The Psychosocial Effects of Male Pattern Hair Loss," by Thomas F. Cash

Almost 90 percent of men suffering from extensive hair loss say the most common result is that they think about their baldness. Nearly 70 percent say they spent more time looking at themselves in the mirror.

OUR LANGUAGE

by Jeffrey McQuain

In newspapers, banner indicates a large headline across the page. Wave this type of banner to support freedom of the press.

Anemic appears weak or lacking in vitality. Adding words such as anemic is a sure way to strengthen your vocabulary.

Q. My wife says "swam." I say "swum." Which one's right?

A. That depends. The past tense of the verb swim is swam, as in "I swam yesterday." The past participle, however, is swum, usually found after a helping verb: "I have swum several times this week." From now on, when you use swam and swum, you should be in the swim.

Something exclamatory is meant to be loud and clear. This adjective

starts like exclamation point, which should follow the writing of anything exclamatory.

In gardening, a trowel is a curved hand tool for taking up small plants or loosening soil. A neat hint: trowel rhymes with towel.

OUR LANGUAGE AD-VICE: A printing company has produced the latest winner of an Ad-Vice Award. This company offers to handle your printing needs, including brochures, business cards, and "stationary." Stationary describes something that stands still. Writing paper is stationery, spelled with an e as in letter. If you misspell stationery, stop the presses!

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