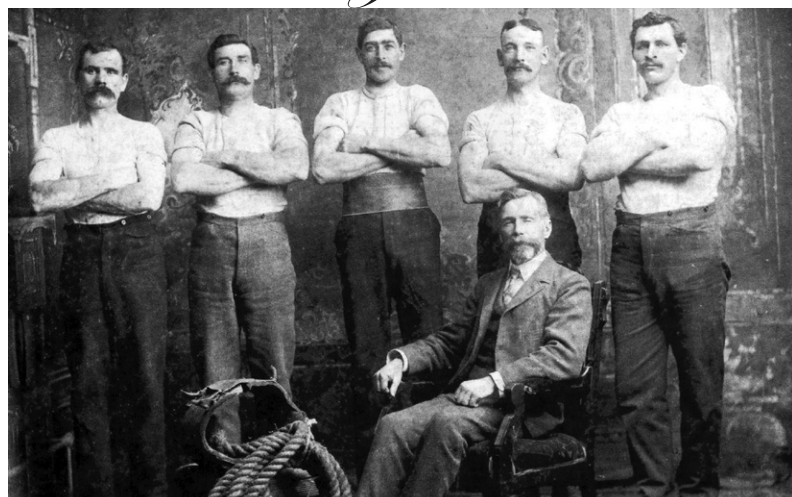


# COMMENT

*The way we were*



## Tough guys

Scotch Block (southwest Halton Hills) tug-of-war team was the local champion in 1901. Coach and Captain Neil Gillies is seated in front of William McDonald, Daniel Adams, John L. Hardy, Henry Wallace, and David Given.

*Photo courtesy of John McDonald,*

*Text, John Mark Benbow Row, Bats, Balls & Sticks: The History of Sports in Halton Hills*



*From our readers*

## NOW THAT'S A FOXHOLE!

Tunny Wong took this picture of baby foxes at Dublin Line in Acton on April 17.

Got a photo you want to share? Email [cgamble@theifp.ca](mailto:cgamble@theifp.ca)

## Dr. Jeff Sutherland's journey with ALS

*The following is an edited excerpt of Dr. Jeff Sutherland's essay, Animate Me, about his journey with ALS. The full eloquently-written version is posted on his fundraising page for the June 6 Walk. Go to <http://www.walkforals.ca/en/provincial-walks/ontario>, click on Georgetown/Acton walk, and click Individual and Team Search.*

Lying here, staring through my prison wall of stainless steel bars, I can't help but think of the circumstances of my imprisonment. I plead, "I haven't done anything; I am innocent." My pleas fall on deaf ears as if the pleas were only expressed in my brain.

Death will be my only escape but I am not ready to die. Staring at a featureless wall of beige I think back to the beginning of my sentence. "My darn left arm keeps twitching" I state matter of factly to the neurologist. After a test he confirms my worries of the last six months. He brings me into a shabby dimly lit office and hesitantly says, "There is a 90% chance you have ALS."

I take that knowledge and return to the bright blue and white confines of my own office and wait for my first patient of the afternoon to be called in. Their problems help me escape from my grim new reality. This would be the case for the next two years of my life.

During this time only fleeting memories remain. Snapshots in a brain numbed by shock. Images, such as: telling our three young sons about what to expect, seeing my middle son cry when hit with the brutal statistics of the disease while a well-meaning church member tried to drum up support for our first walk. Professionally, requiring two hands to manipulate surgical scissors inter operatively, as if I was using garden shears to trim bushes. I remember the last time I cradled a newborn baby, my last emergency shift and my last hospitalist week strolling through the medical unit with a walker to keep my balance. Recognizing the irony that my life expectancy was shorter than the patients in my charge.

Slowly, over the next four years, I became inanimate. Singing, speaking, eating and swallowing even the saliva in my mouth was lost and replaced with nothing. My eyes have become my guide to independence as their movements are the only muscles I can still voluntarily control. Through my eyes and the wonder of technology, I can speak, write, learn, teach and explore the world. Some people talk about the evils of the digital world but without it I wouldn't want to be alive...Without it I wouldn't be alive.

"Mr. Sutherland, we are ready for you." They don't know how this grates at my already fragile motor nerves. My inner voice calls out like McCoy on Star Trek, "I am a doctor, God-damn it! I was just like you." I never was much for titles when I was "nor-

mal" but having it taken away from you makes the longing for it that much more intense.

"I hate what I have become!" she (his wife Darlene) exhaustively states. "I feel guilty all of the time," she continues. This is the toll that ALS puts on a couple. My brain interprets the statements to a single message. "The breaks aren't long enough and now I feel lost in the forever of our circumstance."



**DR. JEFF SUTHERLAND**

On these dark days, I think to myself "Why make two lives miserable just for a limited existence." My happiness is unfairly derived from her happiness. Without it, I feel responsible for every tear that falls. My guilt is overwhelming. She feels guilty for being able, I feel guilty for being an obstacle for her to be physically hugged, kissed and caressed— from having a normal husband.

From the onset of the diagnosis of this illness every moment of life has been tainted with the question, "Why us?" and "What would our lives be like if we had no illness?" Questions that remain in the unspoken because to utter them too frequently would demean the attempt "to live in the present."

Why keep on going you might ask? A good question would be my reply. My stubborn body refuses to quit right now. I know that there will come a time when it will just give up. I hope that it comes at a time when my family will be okay. I know now that time is near...

I add to my arsenal of technology a permanent ventilator. Now I am without movement. As if I was a rock in a wheelbarrow I get transported from location to location through the exertion of someone else.

Adaptation is the key to survival. I think of the many obstacles in my path but I have found what is essential for my happiness; a dash of hope, some purpose, independence of thought with the ability to explore my environment and most importantly to be loved and to be able to communicate love...Even if this is expressed through a synthesized voice.

The alarm clock ring from the other room returns me from the wilderness of my brain. "Please don't press the snooze button, my big toe is bent and is killing me," my inner voice pleads. I am pinned to the mattress. Gravity can be an overwhelming wrestling foe. My beautiful partner, the person who married me twice and vowed, "in sickness and in health, through the good times and bad times, until death do us part" comes to my aid. Still half asleep, she turns me in bed and the view of my prison changes. New stainless steel bars come into view, the beige walls are replaced by windows and I can see the first light of the new day. Comfortable again, I nod back to sleep, ready to dream of being animated once again.

My mind falls asleep to Stephen Hawking's synthetic voice saying "Where there is life, there is hope!"

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