

TAKING PART IN MY FIRST RAMADAN FAST

THANKS SO MUCH
FOR THE INVITATION,
BUT NO DATES
HERE, WRITES
HERB GARBUTT



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GARBUTT
Column

I know if I close my eyes, I'm doomed.

The third of three alarms I set is ringing on the nightstand. I roll over and look at the time. 4:04 a.m.

I'm a night person. If I'm awake at 4:04 a.m., it could mean only one of two things: 1) I'm going to the airport; 2) I haven't gone to bed yet— Hey, when 'Shawshank Redemption' comes on at 2 a.m., you are obligated to watch it for the 37th time.

Of course, I knew this was part of what I signed up for when I agreed to take part in virtual Ramadan, including the fast.

Muslims began celebrating Ramadan Apr. 24. One of the key elements of the month-long celebra-

tion is the daily fast between sunrise and sunset. It is an annual reminder to be grateful for what you have.

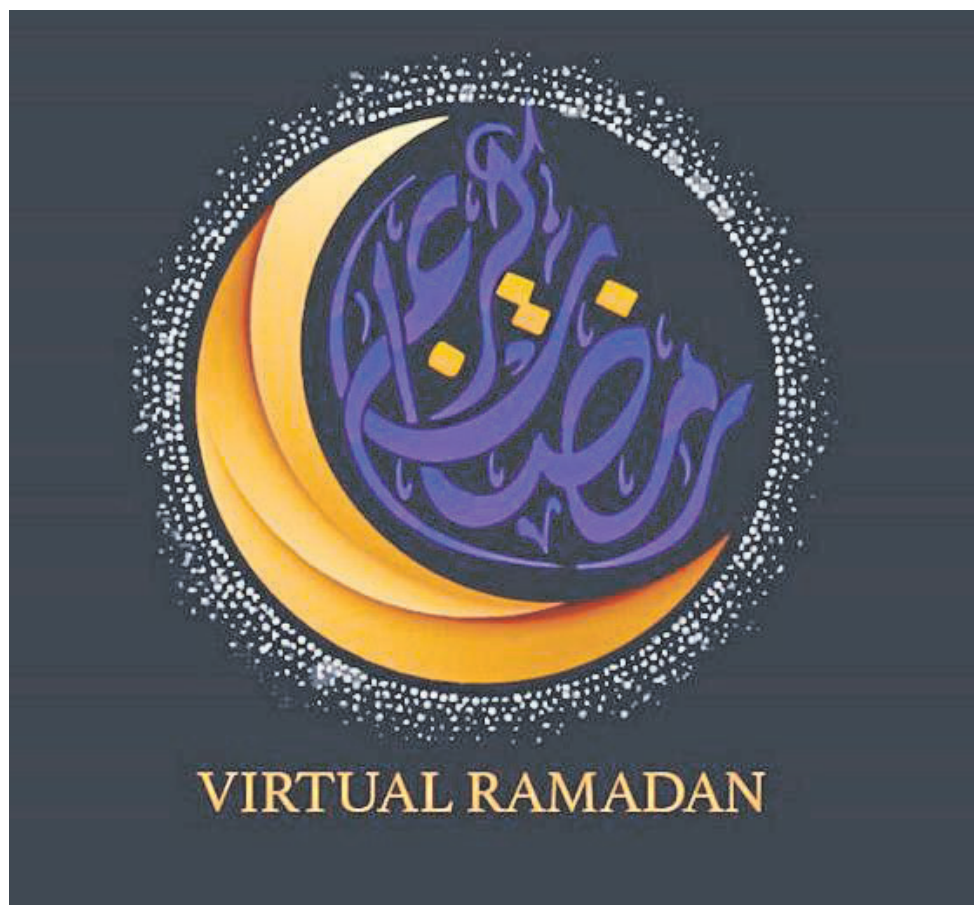
So rather than dwelling on having 2.5 hours of sleep, I should be thankful I have a warm bed to sleep in and some food to eat.

Speaking of which ... it's time for suhoor. "Breakfast" definitely doesn't seem like the appropriate term, since this will be my last meal for 16 hours.

The advice I've received is a good, protein-rich meal. Normally, this would have me going all Joey Chesnut on bacon sandwiches, but since eating pork is prohibited in Muslim culture, out of respect, the bacon stays in the fridge.

So I break out the eggs, lots of eggs. Four scrambled eggs, four pieces of toast with butter, a banana and a litre of water to keep me hydrated throughout the day. And potato chips, just because.

And then back to bed. Now I can appreciate the challenges of fasting while trying to maintain a daily routine. Lucky for me, I'm fasting on a weekend, so I sleep until 11 a.m. Judging me would not be in the spir-



VIRTUAL RAMADAN

Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at photo

Reporter Herb Garbutt took part in his first Ramadan fast earlier this month.

it of Ramadan.

At least I'm not waking up hungry. I know from busy days at work, if I keep myself occupied, time not only passes quicker, but I also don't get hungry. It's not unusual for me to not even think about lunch until 3:30 p.m. And even then, I only stop because I know I should take a break and eat, not because I'm hungry.

I work on a project for my hockey pool. I play my guitar. I watch a movie. Still, a couple of times, I wander aimlessly into the kitchen without even realizing I'm doing it until I open the cupboard.

Surprisingly, I don't get thirsty much throughout the day. I also don't really do anything too physically taxing, either. This has to be tough when Ramadan falls in the summer for those in warmer climates, or when you have a physical job.

By 6 p.m., I'm starting to think it would be nice to have something to eat, but I'm in the home-stretch now.

Just before 7 p.m., I join a Zoom call with members of the Milton Muslim community, local politicians and others participating in virtual Ramadan. Prayers are recited from the Quran.

Messages from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Doug Ford are played.

Charity is a major aspect of Ramadan, and some of the work of the local Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at is highlighted, particularly their work with the Milton Hospital Foundation that has raised more than \$40,000 for a delivery room and an exam room in the emergency department.

Through the window, I can see daylight starting to fade. Those of us not used to fasting share our experiences. While the Muslim community would usually gather for iftar, the meal to

break the fast, this year everyone is staying home due to COVID-19. So everyone shares the meal they plan to break the fast with.

Traditionally, the fast is broken with dates. Dates are the food of choice because they are high in sugar and provide a boost of energy.

I haven't had dates since my Grandma made date squares when I was a kid. My brother and I would take our trucks and flatten them into her carpet. Sorry, Grandma. Then, of course, we ate them, because that's what you do when you're six, and for some reason they tasted better after G.I. Joe had run over them with a tank.

Needless to say, I don't have any dates in the house. The best alternative I have for a small, sugar-laden food is a Caramilk cream egg.

It's delicious.

Ramadan is also a time of self-reflection. My adviser for all things Ramadan, Maqbool Sheikh, says each year during Ramadan, he focuses on one aspect of himself he'd like to improve. This is great idea regardless of your faith.

Over the past 24 hours, I'd like to think I was conserving energy. But I realize I've conserved a lot of energy since the stay-at-home order. Probably longer, if I'm completely honest.

Starting tomorrow, I'm getting on our dusty treadmill. I'll work on procrastination next year. Right now, I have to finish this leftover pizza.

Herb Garbutt is a reporter with Insidehalton.com and TheIFP.ca.

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, we will be making some changes to our website and newsletter. In regards to Canada's federal government advising against all unnecessary travel, we will not be promoting any flights, travel deals and travel packages until further notice.

But, just because our travel deals have been put on hold, our team is dedicated to providing YOU, our amazing subscribers, with inspiring and informative blog content during this time! If you haven't done so yet, please sign up for our weekly newsletter so we can keep you up to date!

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