

That one basic law of physics

I've always enjoyed getting airborne and rarely turn down an opportunity to view the world from a couple thousand feet. Whether it's in a Piper Comanche out of Brampton Airport or strapped into a helicopter, I always enjoyed the thrill of defying gravity.

But this past weekend, I had an opportunity to fly in a somewhat different manner.

Getting up in the air by means of the very basics of physics, I went hot air ballooning Saturday evening as a guest of Paul Armstrong Insurance in Georgetown, and the Pilot Insurance Company, which uses the balloon to promote their 70 years in business.

Joining me in the basket were Dave and Jackie Murdoch of Georgetown (who had won the trip through a draw) Dan Wagstaff of Cable 14 and balloon pilot Keith Ferguson of Skysport Balloon Co. of Richmond Hill.

With five of us packed in a basket about four by five feet, it was a bit cozy, to say the least.

Over the years, I've seen tethered balloons, I've watched free flight balloons cross the sky, and I even saw one become tangled in the trees out behind my house a few years ago.

But fly in one? This was to be an experience.

With the help of his assistant John Gibbons, Keith checked the breeze, called the airport weather service, hummed and hawed, and constantly surveyed wind conditions.

He explained how any wind over five knots was unacceptable. Not knowing a knot from a bow, he simplified it for me—if the leaves on the trees were moving, it was too windy.

By 7 p.m., John gave the go-ahead.

I didn't see it as an omen, but in all my previous flights, I'd never signed out a waiver before climbing on board.

It didn't upset me at all to sign a document saying I had no known back or knee injuries and was competent to board. (I did take exception however when asked if I was pregnant...)

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Ted Brown

Keith and John rolled out the balloon on the ground, and began inflating it. When about 80 per cent full, Keith fired up the burners and the huge envelop drifted upward.

We had to board quickly as Keith cast off.

The small crowd of people who gathered on the ground cheered and waved farewell to us and we headed on our tour of Georgetown.

The silence was unbelievable. Unlike aircraft, there's no turbulence—only a quiet ride with virtually no sensation of movement.

The ride lasted about 40 minutes, and we thumped softly to the ground in a field of alfalfa south of town. John followed along in the truck and trailer, maintaining radio contact.

After we helped roll up the balloon and load it on the trailer, Keith broke open a bottle of champagne to celebrate the landing.

He directed the four of us to kneel, and anointed us with alfalfa sprigs, then sprinkled a few drops of champagne on our heads, in observance of being initiated to the world of hot air balloons (and I suspect, safe landings.)

I returned to my car, somewhat romanced by the ordeal. I'd just flown, in a manner basically unchanged from the first balloon flights.

And for a brief moment I was thankful for Mr. Beer's Grade 13 physics class—it gave me comfort, knowing that one basic law of physics.

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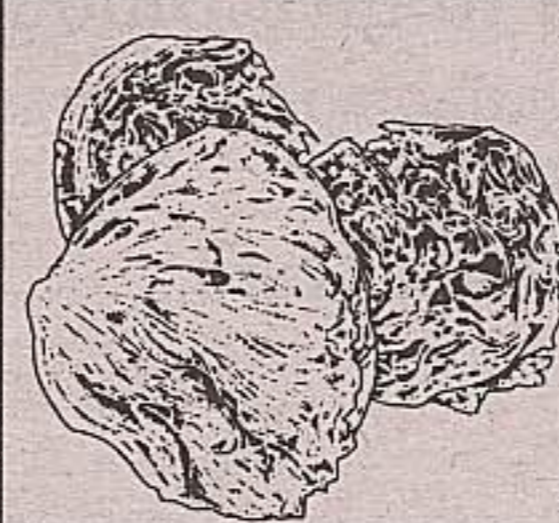
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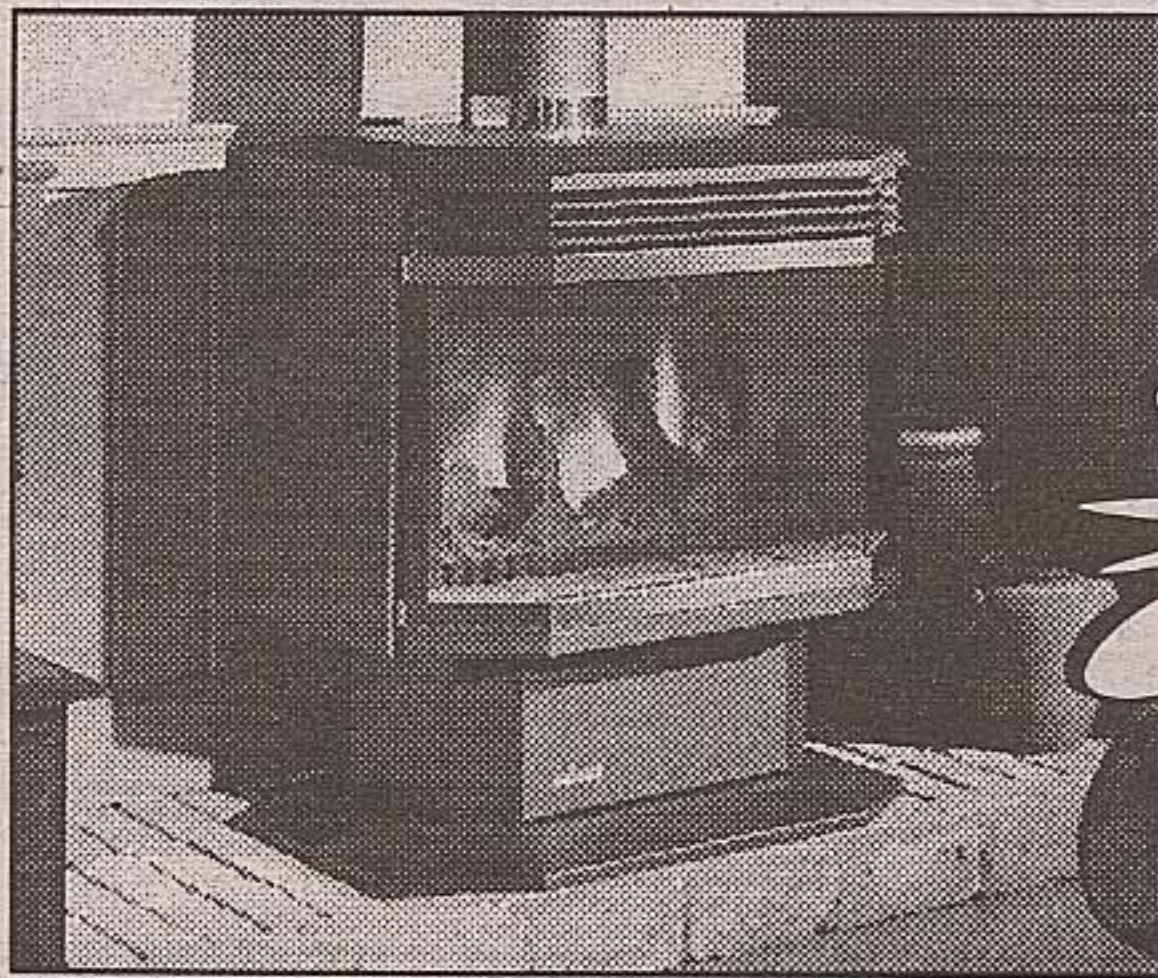
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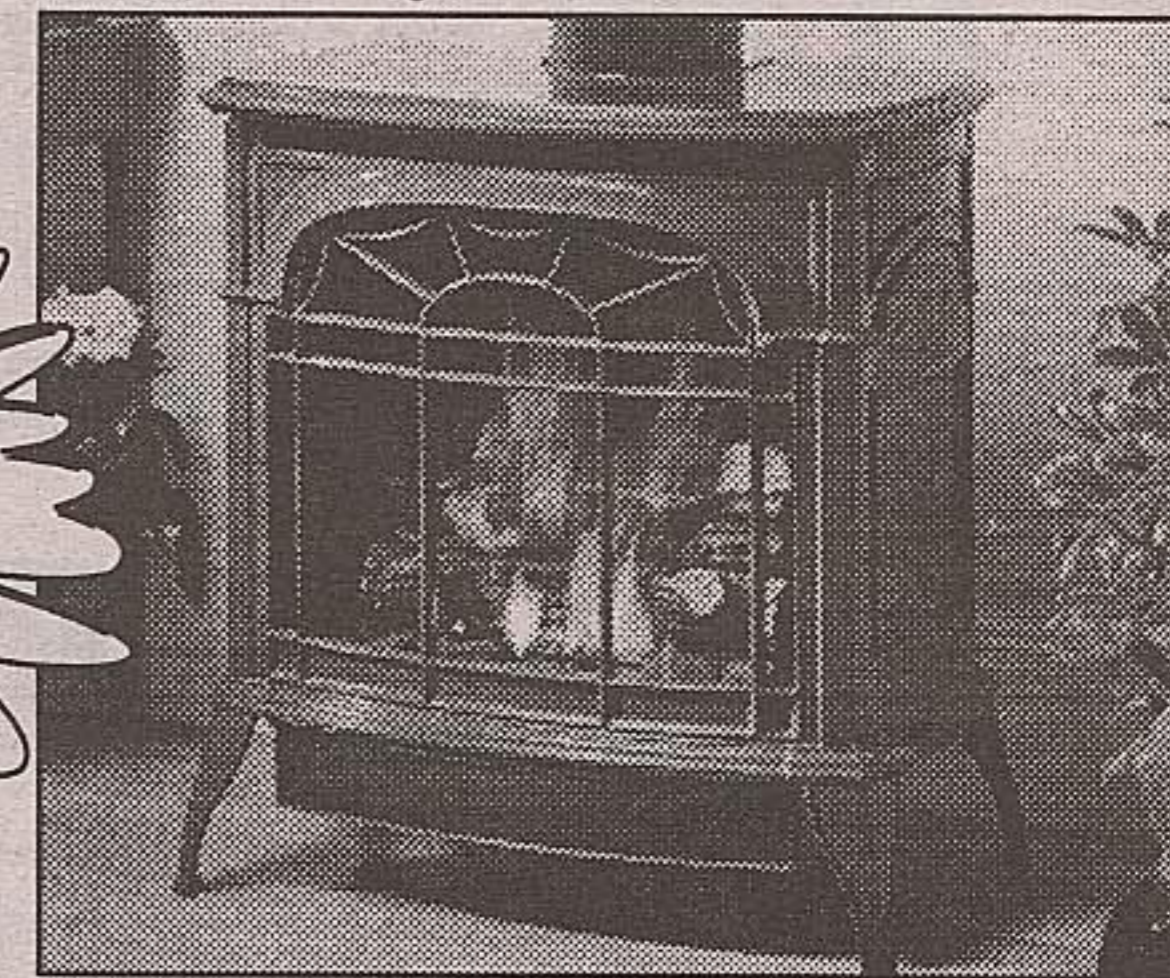
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