

Opinion

A tale of diamond greed

Every February I like to write a simple, heartfelt little piece about the return of spring. Predictably I centre it upon the beginning of spring training, the flocks returning to Grant Field in Dunedin, and the crack of bat on ball.

This year, however, I am unable to summon the ardour necessary to commit my commitment to paper.

The major league brand of baseball has lost its lustre, lost that magic, lost that edge which made it something greater than the sum of its parts.

The players association and the team owners fought over the rights of about 15 players a year to apply for salary arbitration. For that they remained off the field long enough to ruin opening day and probably change the parameters of the season enough to require an asterisk beside it in the record books.

The players have asked the rules committee to change the requirement of five innings for a starting pitcher to qualify for a win to three innings.

Presumably this is to compensate the pitchers for their lack of suitable training time, which might cut into their win totals and thereby damage their bargaining positions for future contracts.

What's worse is that the owners, via the rules committee, agreed to the change. I suspect the owners were frightened of another impasse with the players and a further eroding of the season.

So much for tradition. Maybe the players association will insist that the new rule should stay. Why not make it even easier for pitchers? After all, it's a tough job throwing that ball 60 feet and six inches to a catcher.

The mound might be moved closer to the plate. They might bring back the spitball. Why not let the pitchers have a little chemistry set behind the mound? Hey, let's make the batters hit wrong handed. The pitchers' stats have to improve if they're going to make the big bucks they richly deserve.

We wouldn't want to leave batters at the bottom of the pay scale. Let's move the fences in and maybe get rid of the shortstop, he only



Reaume With a View

with BRAD REAUME

makes hitting tougher. The bases will have to be closer together; after all, a highly conditioned athlete has to sprint 90 yards for a triple, and that's tiring. Finally, every relief pitcher has to throw underhand. Yeah.

Now all the players can earn the optimum amount of money, though relievers and shortstops have to be sacrificed for the greater good.

The next prudent step is to nail down new TV contracts and the arrangements for food concessions and souvenir sales, as well as gate and parking receipts.

Strange, but I don't want a Blue Jay cap, or an overpriced DomeDog. I don't want to pay to see something which is twisted by greed, ruined by bloated lawyers and accountants, and fiddled with a cancer which stifles its heartbeat. Death watches were never my favourite affairs.

What will happen when 60,000 Cincinnati Reds fans flock to Riverfront Stadium to see the traditional opening game of the baseball season only to find it took place in Boston? It is the weight of tradition which defines and protects many things we hold dear. Chipping away tradition endangers the very foundations of society.

Despite the crumbling of the major league tradition I can still revel in the game. I can still experience the pure joy of playing, and the joy of watching others play.

I still have the thrill of the grass, a perfectly aromatic lawn with a crescent of smooth dirt defined by three pristine, white leather squares which form a diamond shape.

Despite the ruination of the major leagues I know, deep in my heart, that diamonds are forever.



The dating game - Part 2



Psychology

with ARNOLD RINCOVER

Dating can be a traumatic experience. Surveys show about one-third of all college students are afraid to ask someone (anyone) for a date. People in mid-life (or later) who have ended a long relationship report even more anxiety about getting back into the dating game.

Dating has a special place among social skills. It's more than conversational ability, eye contact, and the like, because it has to do with intimacy, displays of affection, and actually asking another person if they'd like to see you (date) again.

Four basic reasons are commonly offered to explain anxiety in asking for or going on a date. First, some people may lack the interpersonal skills. They don't know how to act, what to do. Perhaps they were unsuccessful in the past and, as a result, get very anxious.

A second reason is fear. It's like a phobia. In these cases, the anxiety has to do with a fear of intimacy, being alone with a member of the opposite sex, asking for a date, physical contact

(holding hands, caressing), or fear of rejection.

A third reason for dating anxiety is negative self-evaluation. Some people have standards that are too high and impossible to meet; others selectively remember and talk about past experiences which didn't go well; some feel inferior or don't seem to like themselves very much.

Finally, several studies have found that personal attractiveness is strongly associated with frequency and success at dating. Although we can't do anything about some aspects of physical appearance, many factors that contribute to attractiveness can be altered. The way you carry yourself, weight, dress, facial expressions, complexion and grooming habits can all enhance, or reduce, a person's attractiveness.

There are many reasons a person may be anxious about asking for a date, and the treatment varies according to each person's problem.

If the problem is primarily one of fear, then a therapist might try to desensitize you to the feared event. Starting with scenarios that produce very little anxiety, one can practise asking for a date, holding hands or having a conversation until the anxiety dissipates.

Then the next (slightly more anxious) situation will be tackled. For example, in the case of asking for a date, the first step might be role-playing it with the therapist. When that becomes easy, the next step might be asking out a non-threatening woman over the phone (such as someone working with the therapist), using a script completely written out and read. Then, perhaps the client will move up to asking this person face-to-face, then without a script.

The sessions can continue to build toward more realistic and more fearful situations gradually — asking a 'gorgeous' woman out, facing the woman who says "I'm afraid I'm busy that night" or voices other reactions the client might be afraid of — in each case practising the most effective ways of asking and the best ways of handling different kinds of reactions from the potential date.

Often, however, fear is not the only problem, and desensitization is not the only solution. If the person's problem includes not knowing how to ask for a date, or how to behave on a date, then the treatment must teach new dating skills (and perhaps get rid of some obnoxious or irritating behaviours along the way).

When parents leave home

And then suddenly, they were all gone

When kids grow up, they leave home. That's right, isn't it?

My eldest child is only 11 years old so I haven't actually put it to the test.

Sure, I know there are a few 'kids' around who leave home only to return later with their own offspring in tow. But those are isolated cases. Aren't they?

I have to tell you that something mighty unsettling has been happening in my family over the past few years. It's the parents who have been leaving home.

I remember October 31, 1969 very clearly. That was the day I waved good-bye to my mother. She boarded a plane for New Zealand. Not for a holiday, but to live there permanently.

Sure, I was grown up in a way. After all, I was into my second year of teaching up north. Yet how, I asked myself, could my mother just up and leave me like that? I felt strange and alone.

I always figured she would be "around". It's not as if we got along well; most of the time we didn't. Still, she was my mother and she belonged closer to me than the other side of the world.

Her life's journeys have led her hither and thither and nowadays she is a mere two hours' car drive away.

The only moving she does these days is rear-



On the Home Front

with ESTHER CALDWELL

ranging the furniture in her living room — about once a month. That must help her get rid of the irresistible urge to head off into the wild blue yonder.

I ended up with a number of parents as I grew up. For a time I lived with an aunt and uncle in Ajax. From what I could tell, they had lived in that town forever. They were well entrenched in the community; business, golf, church, curling, friends, theatre.

They even built their dream home in Ajax, on a hill overlooking Lake Ontario. It was a beautiful home and I spent a lot of time there.

One day they announced they were moving. To British Columbia. How could they leave me? I took this personally, you see. And how could they uproot themselves so easily and transplant themselves to the west coast of Canada in the town of Nanaimo? But they did, and now their new home overlooks the sea and they can watch the ferries arrive from the mainland.

My aunt was like my mother. She never hesitated to voice her opinion and of course, boss me around. (At least, that's how I saw it.) She still does, but she can't drive such a hard punch from that distance.

Even when she was at her most irritating, she was still family. And family shouldn't live so far away, should they?

On my husband's side, his aunt and uncle owned 100 rolling acres near the village of Bethany.

When we lived in Peterborough, we visited them frequently, especially for occasions like birthdays, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Their century farmhouse was full of memories.

They sold it without any misgivings and moved into an apartment in Guelph. What's more, they bought a truck and a fifth-wheel trailer and tooted off, saying they weren't sure when they would be coming back.

These are retired people, I thought to myself. What business do they have wandering around the countryside like gypsies? They should be content to stay put and entertain the young folk (us).

My father lives in the same tiny house he built 40 years ago. Is he going to drop a bombshell one of these days and tell me he's moving to Hawaii?

Is this what I have to look forward to in my golden years?



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