

Opinion

I've fallen and I can't get up

After 30 years of wearing ski jackets I've finally gone legit. Yup, I went skiing. And now, my jacket is adorned with the lift ticket issued me on that fateful day. It'll fall off before I take it off.

There'll be no more hanging back when people suggest a week at Whistler. No more polite excuses when my friends suggest a leisurely scot down the Hannenkam. All because I can now identify with The Man Who Skied Down Everest.

Just a lesson at Glen Eden in their 1-2-3 Learn To Ski program, a couple runs down the Little Dipper (an understated name referring to the constellation Ursa Minor, the fastest moving of all star groups) and I'm a ski bum.

Skiing is easy: it's a breeze, a piece of cake, I laugh at my former trepidation. Ha Ha! However, falling is a different story.

I worked in a couple of controlled falls, you know, to simulate the experience, just in case it might ever happen for real. In reality, falling is as easy as well. It's the getting up that's difficult.

I can't get up without taking a ski off. It's just impossible for me to twist a leg underneath myself when the length of the ski makes it impossible to turn my foot. I can't do it because it's a physical impossibility.

Back on my feet again, and with my confidence increasing with each turn and a few pointers, I gained perhaps too much swagger though I was persuaded off the hill before I was able to kill myself with bluster. A couple whooshes down the hill and I was skier enough for me.

It is a little disconcerting when the person giving you extremely functional ski tips hasn't skied in 15 years and is constantly and continuously amazed by the changes in skiing technology. With the wonderous effect of the tips I was momentarily ready to anoint said person as my ski guru, but the fourth declaration of amazement at the technological improvements



**Reaume
With a View**
with
BRAD REAUME

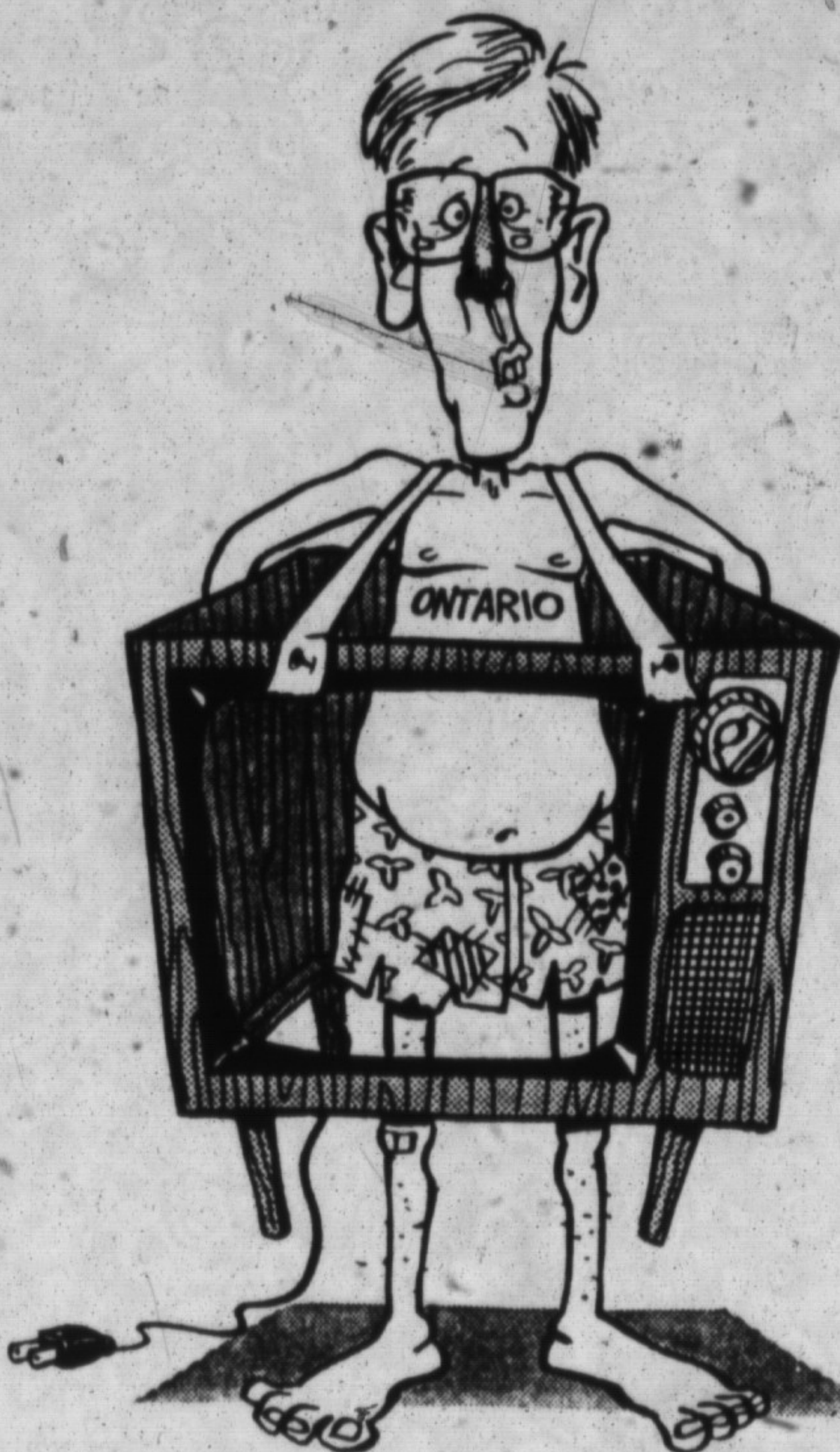
in bindings, put me off.

My greatest misadventures were initiated by the T-bar. Or better put, they were initiated by my application of the T-bar. Actually it's easy. Place the bar behind your legs and away you go. On one occasion something stopped the T-bar momentarily while we were on the side of the hill. Because of my increased confidence I had ceased to hold the bar during ascent. When it started up again, with its customary jerk, I was flipped head over heels, much to the amusement of all in attendance.

On another ascent I pushed the bar out of the way as I passed underneath it. It so happened that this was exactly at the place where it swings out of the way on its return trip down the hill. The resultant forces of physics led to my near decapitation and a greater respect for indiscriminant machinery and physics.

Unfortunately I didn't get the skiing bug. Skiing is like swimming to me. It's a pleasant activity but what are you actually doing? Even if I just measured my speed down the hill with an eye to beating my own records it would hold some meaning. Mind you, once I'm in the water it's difficult to get me out and I must confess I didn't really want to leave the slopes when it was time to go.

In reality skiing is pretty easy, especially if you are already able to skate. The balance and motions are fairly comparable. And if the truth be known I was on the slopes for less time than it's taken me to write about it.



Rethinking the effects of divorce

Children of divorced parents often have problems with school, aggression, anxiety and depression, research has shown. At the same time, however, many children who go through a divorce do not show these ill effects.

The question, then, is what are the factors that can protect or buffer children against the stress of divorce?

A recent study in the journal *Adolescence* tried to identify factors that may protect children during a divorce. Since school grades are particularly sensitive to family distress and divorce, the authors looked for differences in the families of children with a high GPA (grade point average) versus children having a low GPA.

Seventy-one children participated, and all were living with their mothers. The "low GPA" group each had a GPA below 2.0, on a 4.0 scale; the "high" group had a GPA over 3.5.

A number of potential factors were hypothesized to be important in determining whether the child did well in school after a divorce:

- degree of depression in the mother;
- mother's education level;
- frequency and intensity of conflicts between parents;
- frequency and intensity of conflicts between the mother and child;
- frequency and intensity of conflicts between the father and child.

The result showed children in the two groups differed on almost all of these variables. Children with the high GPA generally had fewer conflicts with their mothers, less intense conflicts with their mothers, and they observed fewer conflicts between their parents. In addition, their mothers were less depressed and had more education.

What makes this study especially unique is that it went on to weigh the importance of these factors. That is, which is most important in accounting for why children will do well versus poorly in school after a divorce?

The single most important factor was the amount of parental conflict that occurred in



Psychology
with ARNOLD
RINCOVER

front of the child — children who saw their parents fight and argue a lot, tended to perform more poorly at school. The second most important factor was the intensity of arguments between the adolescent and the mother, as more heated arguments tended to be correlated with worse grades. None of the other factors had a major impact.

This study suggests the most effective buffers for children during a divorce are the reduction of conflict between parents; and a positive relationship with his/her mother. Why? Perhaps divorced parents who have few conflicts tend to agree more and be more consistent about parenting practices.

The absence of conflict may also free the parents from emotional distress which allows them to spend more time with their child and engage in more appropriate parenting. In addition, we know that reducing conflict helps the child, improving his/her ability to adapt and function in a variety of areas, including family, school and social situations.

The importance of this study extends well beyond a child's grades. The factors that disrupt school performance will undoubtedly be harmful to children in other areas too — social life, anxiety, depression, self-esteem and behaviour problems. Consequently, it becomes truly essential that divorced parents reduce conflict.

Studies show parents can learn conflict resolution skills, and thereby reduce conflict. Programs are available to teach parents (and adolescents) effective communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills, empathy, and how to praise and criticize effectively.

They call it 'packing' don't they?

I felt I had to justify to my husband everything I took with us over the Christmas holidays. After all, he was the one who had to carry the tons of possessions from house to van.

"What do you need this for? Are you crazy? I can't believe this!" On and on the guy went.

I must admit that when I walked out to my large van and saw the entire back of it loaded to the ceiling, and food coolers spilling over onto the third-row seat, I too wondered how we had managed to gather up so much junk. How did we ever do it other years when we used to mere station wagon?

Ten days we would be away from home. That meant, for starters, enough clothing to see us through our stay at the cottage. Of course, in winter, that included one suitcase stuffed with heavy clothing — snow pants, scarves, extra mitts, and hats.

Now just in case the ice on the lake was thick enough (it wasn't) and relatively smooth (forget it), we brought five pairs of skates, and if there was snow (there was), our toboggan and various sleds had to come along too.

The three cats travel light — just a litter box, a bag of litter and a box of food. The poor things rubbed their furry spines along the van ceiling as they negotiated among the suitcases and boxes.

I left the kids on their own when it came to which toys they would choose. They didn't get carried away.

Since we had brought home with us last fall all perishable food, that accounted for the coolers and two boxes of edible items. I threw in a cookbook as well. Never know when I might want to become a gourmet cook.

Now we come to my stuff. Love me, love my books, hubby dear. I always have unrealistic expectations of how much I can read in any period of time, but this past holiday, I read two autobiographies (Eric Lindros and Kurt



**On the
Home Front**
with ESTHER
CALDWELL

Browning), two figure skating magazines, and two Sue Grafton mysteries. Still waiting for my perusal is a book on arthritis, another on choreography for skaters, and a third one on weekend adventures. (Staying at the cottage no doubt would have been rated "mellow" as opposed to "wild" for winter camping.)

And then there were the three bags of unread newspapers going back to mid-October. I flipped through them, a few each day, cutting out clippings that I will eventually read, hopefully before they yellow.

Since taking our huge upright piano was out of the question, I brought along our latest acquisition — a 61-key keyboard that's light enough for me to carry under my arm. And yes, I did practise on it.

I am solely dependent on the computer so it couldn't possibly have stayed at home. I threw into a bag the Christmas cards and letters we'd received with the hope of replying to them.

I couldn't forget the accounts book, the latest bank statement, and the calculator. Balancing the books every month always brings me back to reality.

And finally, those items that will make me a better person: an audiocassette on improving my speaking voice, ankle weights, a list of exercises for strength and flexibility, and a new board game for mental stimulation.

So there you have it. No wonder hubby chose to drive. He was the only one in the van who had leg room.

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Publisher — Ian Oliver
General Manager — Neil Oliver



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Jane Muller — Editor
EDITORIAL: News: Rob Kelly,
Karen Smith. Sports: Brad Reaume.
Photography: Graham Paine.

Neil Oliver — Advertising Mgr.
ADVERTISING: Sales: Debbie Pells,
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CIRCULATION: Bonnie Walsh.

Tim Coles — Composing Mgr.
COMPOSING: Mark Dills, June Col-
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Julie Green.

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