



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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2001 - An Underground Odyssey

It is Milton, in the year 2001 A.D., and it is the week before Christmas ...

Snow falls gently outside a butcher shop window that frames two people standing inside the modest store. A woman is talking over the counter to the butcher. Between them are cooling shelves chock full of frozen geese, and geese only.

The butcher: "Look lady, I can't sell you a turkey. I sold the last two in my quota just before you came in. I'm sorry you don't like goose, but you know the competition equity law. Article 12, subsection 10; producers have a right to customers. Don't make problems for me, okay lady? If you won't buy a goose, I'm supposed to make a call, you know?"

At another local store, a hardware clerk stands with shoulders hunched and hands spread at his sides while his customer pokes him in the chest.

The clerk: "Listen, don't get mad at me. I know you need a power saw to build your deck, but distribution equity legislation says we can only sell toilets this week. Besides, your permit doesn't say wooden deck, it says interlocking brick deck. What? No, no I've never heard of a raised interlocking brick deck either. Maybe the Ministry of Compliance Enforcement can help you."

Meanwhile, in a local pub ...

The waitress: "No, you can't have another beer. According to your entertainment equity voucher book, you're long overdue for a rye or a vodka. You want me to lose my job? You want this place to be shut down for a month?"

Later that same day, at an area car dealership, a man is trying to sell a woman a car ...

The sales rep: "I'm sure you'll be pleased with the new Grand Gnat SE. It might be a little tight with five kids, but we can fit you out with an optional child seat, complete with safety restraints, in the trunk. And there's a trailer hitch to tote your groceries home."

"What's that? Listen, I know you want a bigger car. Who doesn't? But you've already used up your next 10 years of full-size sedan eligibility. You want your station wagon back? Sorry lady, we already unloaded your trade-in."



VIEW POINT

with PATRICK KELLY

That guy over there bought it, the one in the dark glasses. With the cane. Yeah, I know he's blind. But he's legally entitled to a big car, and you're not anymore."

Meanwhile, in the local government-run employment agency, a civil servant cocks his head to one side while staring at the papers handed him by the man on the other side of his desk ...

The civil servant: "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Hmmm. Say this is a nice resume. All nicely typed. Clean. Listen. What's this word? Academic? Ac-a-demic. Huh. And what about this one, here. Supervisory? Sup-er-visory. What's that mean, that you can see real good? Hey, look, I know I can't read that great. But this job is mostly talking on the phone, okay? Besides, what do you want? I only got grade 13. Geez, the nerve of some people."

That night, at a local parking lot, under the dim light of a streetlamp, a man unloads goods to several people huddled around his open car trunk ...

The vendor: "Okay lady, here you go, one 20-pound turkey. Cash. No tax. What about you bud? The power saw? No problem, just like you ordered. You, the guy in the back. You the beer guy? Listen fella, I couldn't get you any beer. Sorry. Takes up too much trunk room. Here, take this beer kit instead. Make your own. One fifth the price, and no taxes, as long as you don't get caught."

What about you? You the car lady? I thought so. Listen, a full-size wagon would usually cost you big time. But it's Christmas and I've got a deal for you. I got a great price on one just today from some blind guy. He was laughing like crazy ..."

Who will grow up with hypertension?

Reactivity may be a telling sign of whether the child is at risk for developing hypertension. Everyone's blood pressure increases under stress, but reactivity refers to how much that blood pressure goes up. The theory is that the more a child's blood pressure reacts (increases) in response to stress, the more likely the child is to develop hypertension later in life.

A study by Dr. Karen Mathews at the University of Pittsburgh followed high and low reactive college students for up to 36 years, to see who developed hypertension.

A test, which involved placing the student's hand in ice cold water while measuring blood pressure, was initially given to 910 adolescents. A total of 229 were identified as highly reactive students and 681 were either low or moderately reactive.

The researchers found that seven per cent of the highly reactive students developed hypertension by the age of 44, which was three times the rate found in the low and moderately reactive group. By the age of 54, fully 15 per cent of the highly reactive group had developed hypertension.

Genes and biology clearly have a significant role to play in reactivity and hypertension.



PSYCHOLOGY IN THE '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

Children of hypertensive parents show exaggerated cardiovascular reactivity by the age of five years. Similarly, we know that there are substantial gender and age differences — for example, after puberty men and women have different blood pressure responses.

This doesn't mean, however, that physiology and genetics are the only variables controlling reactivity and hypertension, or even the most important variables.

In a later study with 112 children in grades 2 through 12, Dr. Mathews and her colleagues found that a positive, supportive family environment will lower the likelihood of developing hypertension.

Conversely, a negative family climate seemed to promote anger and hostility in children, and several studies have found that is



A trek and tumble revisited

Regular readers may remember some interesting and often painful episodes concerning my pony Pat. There are many of these adventures (with yours truly almost always the loser), and I thought I'd share a summer one today:

When the weather is hot, Pat and I like to head out in the evenings for a little communing with nature. If I close my eyes I can still hear the crickets chirping and the birds singing their lazy evening songs.

The air is filled with the smell of hay and horses and wildflowers. High humidity makes clothing stick gently to skin. There's something magical about summer on the farm. (Are you getting that winter feeling yet?)

Pat is deceptively calm, barely twitching an ear as I bridle him and swing my leg up over his back. Heat and humidity combine to make my legs stick to his sides and we amble comfortably out of the barn, feeling almost like one being.

Lazy in the heat, we decide to circumnavigate the back field, walking and trotting 'round the ploughed and graded track that hugs the gentle hills of the property.

The earth moves softly against the pony's hooves and we walk in a slow, stilted fashion, like someone casually kicking a stone as he strolls along. Pat's shoulders shift jerkily under my knees and his tail swishes dreamily against the flies buzzing around us. Idyllic.

correlated with reactivity. Consequently, a negative climate in the home may actually place children at greater risk for heart disease in adulthood.

Several behavioural or personality characteristics may be related to reactivity. In particular, the Type A personality (intense, impatient, competitive, workaholic), chronic anxiety, and learned helplessness (feeling that you have no control over events in your life) each seem to increase reactivity levels. People who are highly cynical and distrustful, even if they aren't aggressive, also have higher levels of reactivity.

Most important, perhaps, is the fact that there are a number of strategies for dealing with high reactivity. Anything that helps to combat stress and anxiety will help to mitigate against high reactivity.

It's hard to tell who is highly reactive just by watching them. While some highly reactive people are fidgety and seem wound up tighter than a drum, others appear calm and relaxed. The only way to tell if a person has a high level of reactivity is to take some form of stress test, administered by a physician or psychologist trained to conduct and interpret such tests.



PETS AND YOU

with ANNE NORMAN

That's the only word to describe the scene.

A sudden, incredibly loud whirring and the launching of a missile from the long grass beside us breaks the mood. The pheasants seemed to lie in wait to zoom up and spook horses.

Ponies get spooked sometimes, too. In Pat's case, there always seems to be a weighing-up of possible advantages before he reacts, so I tend to doubt his sincerity. This particular evening, we are halfway around the field and there is some interesting grazing between our position and the barn. He decides to spook.

Naturally, we both gave starts of alarm when the pheasant catapulted itself noisily from the ground. A I attempt to slow my heartbeat, Pat snorts loudly, throws his head back and rolls his eyes.

When this fails to impress me, he falls back on a time-honoured method, putting his head down and giving three rapid bucks.

Wise to this move, I wrap my legs tightly around his fat middle, while pulling up his head. We both take a quick breather, panting and sweating in the centre of the path.

He turns his head and looks at me in a most calculating, almost human fashion. I try to do the same.

We move forward a few choppy steps, and flush another pheasant. Pat is ready for this — he bolts.

I sit on air for a second, then smack down onto the ground so rapidly that the breath leaves my body with an unceremonious grunt.

Not in the least bothered, Pat pulls some succulent grass and mumbles it around his bit, not 10 feet away from me. He's laughing.

Gingerly, I check myself for broken bones. Nope, only busted pride, with the fine layer of dirt sticking to my body the final insult. "Come on, Pat," I coax, and he pretends to be thinking of something important. He lets me get to within an inch of his dangling reins, then he's off, rushing a full five feet to the next clump of grass. He flicks his ears at me and begins grazing again.

We eventually arrive at the barn, where he thoughtfully lets me catch him so he can be put in the lower field to join the horses.

As I turn him loose, he reaches back and bites me. Not hard, not spitefully, just acknowledging the differences and similarities in our natures.