

# The Oakville Beaver

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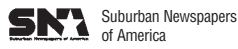
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PHOTO BY LAURA SHARP

**SPOTTED AT THE LAKE:** Oakville 'sharpshooter' Laura Sharp snapped this photo of one in a family of four living in Lakeside Park at Lake Ontario. Sharp was at the park with her son Ewan, 4, when they spotted the critter. At first she thought it was an otter. Now she thinks it may be a mink. She's happy to hear from anyone who may know what it is definitely. She said, "It's driving me crazy."

## Commentary

### Guest Columnist



Stephanie Syer

## Diagnosis was a shock

Stephanie Syer, Oakville resident

A biochemistry student, a varsity athlete, a lifeguard, and even an entrepreneur through Ontario's Summer Company Program, life was pretty hectic at 18.

I would spend my days in class, my evenings with friends and my nights working for Residence Life on campus.

Every day was fun and busy as the last and I liked it. That was until everything changed. It was at the beginning of my second year at university that I first began to show symptoms.

The pain would shoot through my abdomen, so intense it would keep me up at night and force me to stay there during the day. Sometimes it was too much to even stand upright.

I saw three different doctors, telling me three different stories. I was told I had to just eat healthier, more probiotics.

Then I was told it was stress from university due dates and deadlines, it was normal.

Then finally I was sent to a gastroenterologist. Being away at university, I went alone to get colonoscopies and barium tests.

It was just days before my 20th birthday I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease.

For me, the diagnosis was great. I had never heard of Crohn's Disease before, but it didn't matter. I had answers and soon I would have a cure.

Of course, soon after I discovered, this wasn't the case...at all. I soon found out that all a diagnosis of Crohn's Disease meant was that it was chronic and incurable.

If news like that doesn't knock you down, I don't know what can.

Continuous blood tests, specialist visits and drug cocktails that were continuously changed until they worked sure took a toll. It was hard enough to make it to a class, let alone study.

Crohn's Disease took my old life.

If that doesn't sound bad enough, Crohn's Disease, for a woman who was almost 20, is filled with stigma. It isn't glamorous to speak about a disease under the umbrella of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD).

I had a choice. I could let this disease overturn me. Speak nothing of it, be in isolation and cross my fingers that the next med cocktail would work better than the last, or I could embark on a journey for change.

Upon yet another visit to the specialist, I saw a pamphlet for the Crohn's and

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## Dining in Chicago with the essence of Oprah still in the air

We were cajoled (if not actually conned) into dining at a trendy (read: expensive) restaurant where, the previous evening, President Barack Obama had celebrated his 49th birthday with close friends — and, I swear, the essence of Oprah was still lingering in the air.

We were hammered by heat and crushed by crowds of sweaty souls at a music festival. We were practically fed pizza by two *Gossip Girl* cast members. Oh, and our middle son managed to get himself locked out of Wrigley Field when he slipped out of the Cubs' lair for a smoke (thankfully, he managed to talk himself back into the park).

It was my third sortie to Chicago. Three years ago, I took our sons on a bonding trip — to catch the Cubs and attend Lollapalooza, the three-day music festival that always leaves critics raving. We fell head-over-heels in love with the city, everything from the activities and energy to the sights and sounds.

The following year we returned, full family in tow, to prove Jerry Seinfeld wrong: there really is such a thing as fun for the whole family. My wife and daughter were seduced by the city — my wife fell for the quirky neighborhood shopping districts while my daughter loved the Magnificent Mile's big-brand shopping shrines.



Andy Juniper

The Graham Elliot Restaurant was a 'bistronomic' experience with its creative cuisine, relaxed atmosphere and celebrity guest list (Oprah, the President, me). Our eldest had scoped out the eatery and said entrées were pricey, but not outrageous. Until our server recommended we select two or three of the small-portioned items off the entrée list. Ah, no problem, we'll just secure another mortgage.

Lolla was Lolla. Only they've increased the venue size to accommodate more people. It's an ill-advised move: overcrowding made it hard to get within a country mile of some bands. Still, the festival rocks. Oh, and when my wife and I, wandering on our

This year, again lured by the lineup at Lolla and the opportunity to create a whole new Windy City itinerary — from Second City to a morning-long bike ride along the waterfront — we wondered whether Chicago's spell would wane, whether our offspring would be bored third time around. Not a chance. Upon arriving, we hit the ground running and never stopped until it was time to head home.

own, discovered *Gossip Girl*'s Ed Westwick and Jessica Szohr socializing at a renowned pizza place in the park, we took just enough pictures to make our daughter green with envy.

Yeah, it was a wild and wonderful family trip, typically marked by mayhem, madness, and the odd profound philosophical moment. On the final day before returning home, I was sitting on a bench on a busy street, soaking up the sun, people watching, and periodically perusing John Irving's *Last Night In Twisted River* when a homeless man approached and asked through twisted teeth and an apologetic smile if he could bum a cigarette. I told him, sorry, I don't smoke.

He took a few steps away, then turned and incongruously asked: What's the book about? About? It's John Irving, I thought, it's about... practically everything. I told the man, it's about life. He seemed satisfied. But as he was walking away, I saw him shake his head and I heard him mutter: What's life about?

Hmmm. Maybe life's about losing yourself (and finding yourself) in a place you could seriously imagine calling home.

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