

# Visiting dad allows for mental health break



## From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

Some things never change. Summer gives way to autumn, the leaves turn colour, then fall to the ground to be sent swirling by the crisp wind until they come to rest on my front lawn — despite the fact I'm the only one on the street with no trees on my property!

But then who ever said life was fair? The province I've called home for almost half a century continues to pay the price for abandoning the decades-old tradition of electing middle-of-the-road governments capable of listening out of both the left and right ear. When will people learn that polarization in this country can only be productive inasmuch as it helps us decide what to do with our frozen north? Political candidates in municipal elections throw stones and plot plans of action; October stock market dives become an almost annual occurrence; China's leaders continue to deny wrongdoing in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

And through it all, the Toronto Maple

Leafs, the mere mention of whom once caused me to experience untold joy as a child, settle comfortably into their old familiar sanctuary at the bottom of the standings. Where's a guy to go for solace in the midst of such endless angst and anxiety? I decided on a recent afternoon that it was time to take a mental health break and go pay a visit to my dad, whose earthy wisdom and tempered approach to the global issues of the day in years gone by earned my increasing respect. Dad has been confined to a nursing home the past year as his Alzheimer's Disease progresses to the point where he can no longer retain any semblance of a lucid train of thought.

But that doesn't mean he can't still offer those around him a warm smile and a well meaning offer of assistance, even though his capabilities in all but the most basic of functions have deserted him. He's the darling of the nursing home staff, who can sense even in his failing state that he was once a caring, warm

individual who put the needs of family friends and even strangers first. The excuse for my visit was to purchase several pairs of new pants for my father. After several years of bodily shrinkage, which left medical experts puzzled as to the cause, he is now thriving on the food he's being fed at the home, sporting a hefty increase in waist size. Consequently, he's been unable to properly fasten his pants, leaving them open at the top and thus diminishing his reputation as a smartly-dressed senior dude.

I combed the nearby department store in search of the most comfortable, easy-to-maintain pants available, then brought my purchases across to the home for my dad to see. We retired to his room for a fitting, decked him out in the dressiest of the new slacks, and brought him to the dining room where dinner was to be served presently. He expressed his utmost gratitude, then inquired if I'd be staying for dinner. I told him I had to go tend to my brood back home. "Can I go with you?" he asked. This is the question you dread whenever you pay a visit to a person who has been institutionalized precisely because they can no longer function outside their predictable nursing home environment. "Not this time," I replied. "But I'll come right back when I'm finished." It was a lie of convenience I had used to many times upon leaving after a visit. A little dishonest perhaps, but it serves the immediate purpose of setting his mind at ease for the moment, which, in dealing with Alzheimer patients, is all that you can try to do. "I'll be here," he said, giving me that patented wave as I started for the door. After all, some things never change.

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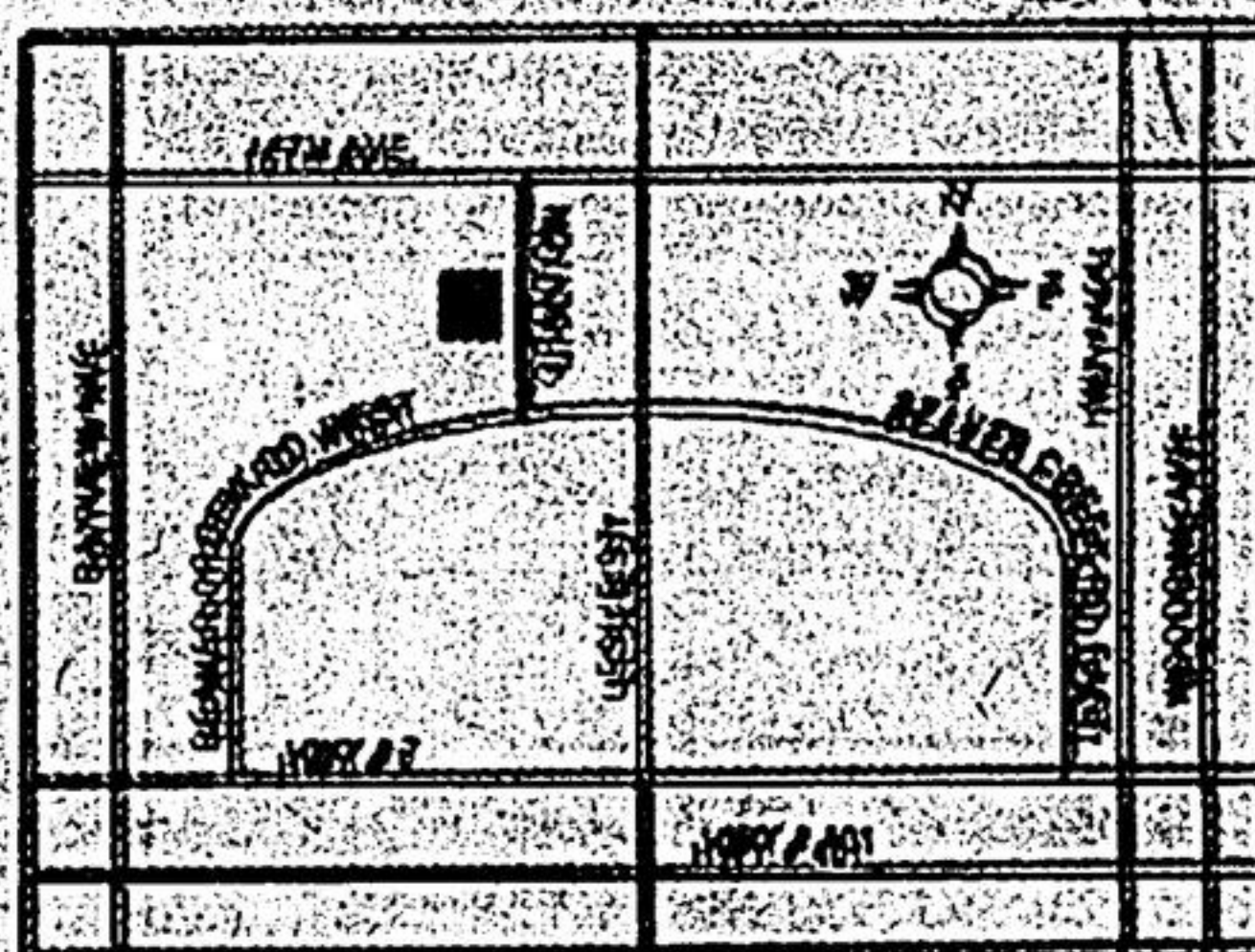
### TIME

Monday - Friday  
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