

Freezing nights, warm days make best maple syrup

From page 25.

Today, there are more than 10,000 maple syrup producers in Canada, many of them waiting for ideal weather conditions to start the sap running.

Ideally, it should be about -4 C at night and 5 C in the day to get the sap running, said Robert Staples, who won the gold medal for maple syrup at this year's Royal Agricultural Fair, his third win at the Royal.

"It's gotta freeze at night, then warm up in the daytime," Mr. Staples said from his musically named Staples Maple Products farm near Peterborough.

Mr. Staples is putting taps into the 1,400 trees in his 20-acre sugarbush but, when reached last week, was waiting for better weather to begin the job in earnest.

He has been doing it for more than 40 years and welcomes the change from the old, labour-intensive days

when sap had to be collected and taken to the evaporator house for boiling. Today, tubing systems and vacuum pumps allow the sap to run directly from the tree.

The process underwent little change over the first 200 years of recorded maple making, at least until the tin can, made out of sheet metal, was invented during the American Civil War. It didn't take long for syrup makers to realize a large flat sheet-metal pan was more efficient for boiling than a rounded iron kettle, which let much of the heat slide past.

Mr. Staples, who also produces maple butter and maple sugar, said there are as many uses for maple syrup as there are food products.

"Anywhere you'd normally use sugar," he said. "If you like maple syrup, you can use it on anything."

Even french fries.

Maple adds flavour to many foods

According to Grandma Maple (Marj Andre of the Toronto Region Conservation Authority), maple syrup is not just a sweetener — it's a flavouring for many foods.

Some quick serving ideas:

- As a sweetener, it gives tea and coffee a unique taste;
- Pour it on oatmeal topped with walnuts and raisins;
- Add maple syrup and cinnamon to pureed cooked sweet potatoes;
- Combine with orange juice and tamari as a marinade for baked tofu or tempeh; and
- Spread peanut butter on a piece of whole wheat toast, top with sliced bananas and drizzle with maple syrup.

Maple Mousse

1 envelope unflavoured gelatin

1/4 cup cold water

1 cup pure maple syrup

3 eggs separated

1 cup whipping cream

Sprinkle gelatin over cold water and set aside to soften. Beat maple syrup and egg yolks together in the top of a double boiler. Cook over boiling water for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in softened gelatin and cook until dissolved. Remove from heat and cool over ice-cold water, stirring occasionally until cool but not set. Beat whipping cream until stiff peaks form. Fold this into mixture. Spoon into serving bowl. Refrigerate covered, until set (about three hours). Just before serving, garnish with semi-sweet chocolate.

World's Best Maple Vinaigrette

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

2 tablespoons pure maple syrup

1 teaspoon dijon mustard

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1 cup vegetable oil

Mix together in a jar by hand or, for a creamier dressing, use a hand blender.

Creamy Maple Syrup Dressing

1 cup (250 ml) mayonnaise

1/2 cup (125 ml) pure maple syrup

1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

Mix all ingredients together thoroughly. Chill and serve with salad.

Diary like watching several movies at once

From page 25.

Helen goes to live with her Aunt Madea, who grabs her pistol and marches off to find Charles, until a still hopeful Helen stops her.

What follows is Helen's unsuccessful attempt to recuperate with a new man and her successful nurturing of a red-hot hatred for Charles. None of these things make her feel better and she is stuck.

In a strange twist, she gets two chances to have her revenge, with two different outcomes.

The film's promising story is severely compromised by the film's scattered

focus. It's like the weather in Chicago; if you don't like it now, wait five minutes, it's going to change.

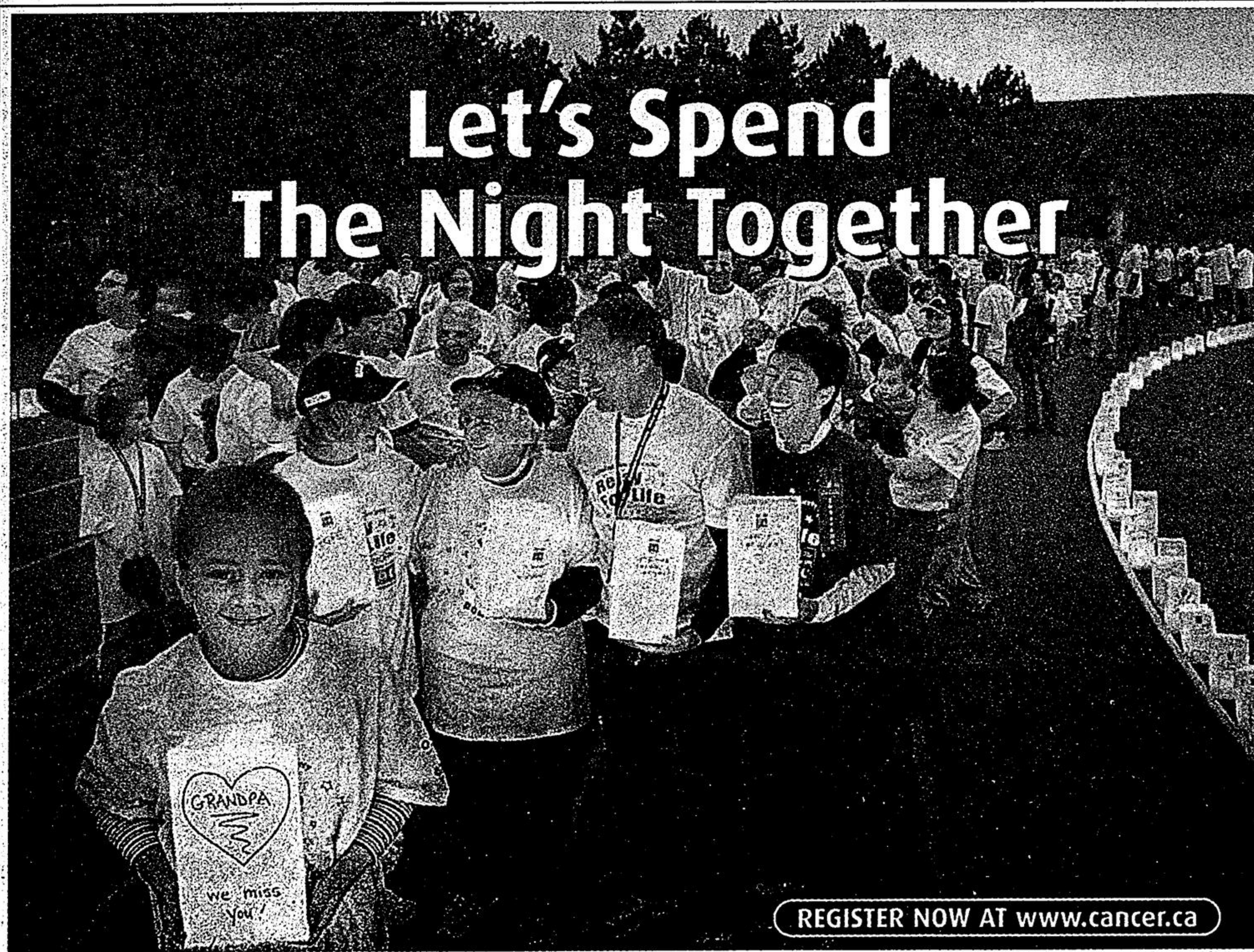
From a morality tale to a slapstick comedy romp to a tear-soaked melodrama and gospel chorus redemption, it's unpredictable to a fault.

In the end, it's a proclamation of faith.

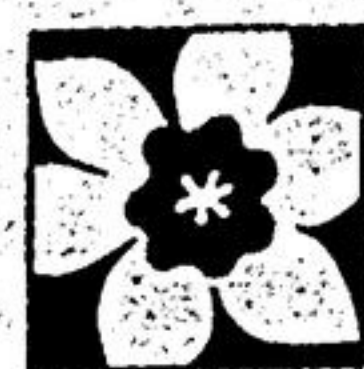
Madea's comic moments are often outrageously funny. Helen's sudden indulgence in cruelty is interesting. But it's like watching several movies at once... and none satisfy.

Finally, who is the mad black woman, Madea or Helen? It's anyone's guess.

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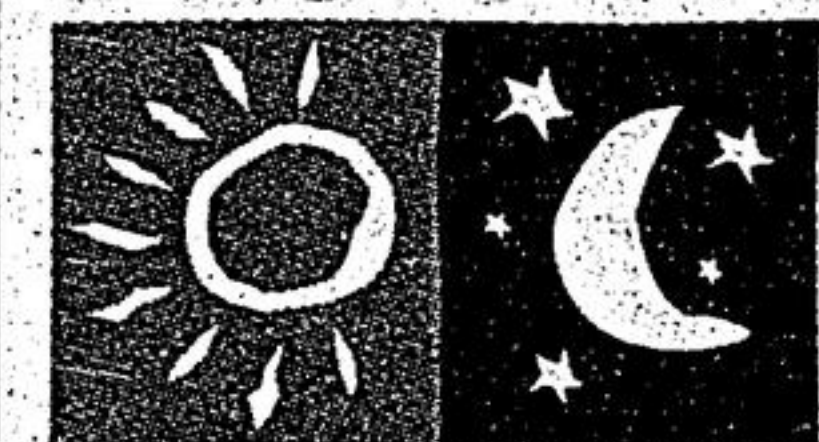
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