

Precise language kicks the bucket

By Ralph Pohlman

sure you've noticed that I spend a lot of time to improve society. I want you to remember that when I was a kid we had a few nice days, and quite a lot of them in the mid-fifties. They just sort of happened, without planning or coaching. Now I should tell you that almost every day I go to the same convenience store to buy a newspaper and some licorice. When I go to the cashier to pay for them, which I usually do, she always, yes always, says "Have a nice day." I sort of wish that she might say "Have a GREAT day", but no, it's always "Have a nice day." I've been thinking of replying, "Well, yes, I'll try to, but I've just been diagnosed as having hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and I've been coughing up this yellow-green goop." Maybe folks could be more specific. After all, it may be difficult to have a nice entire day. How about, "Have a satisfying midmorning", or "May your midday be filled with unfettered joy." You get the idea. And then again, since having or not having a nice day may be beyond one's direct control, maybe folks should just be encouraged to do the best they can. And now for the euphemisms. I guess it started a long time ago, maybe even back in Victorian times when it was considered vulgar to mention body parts. So the terms white meat, dark meat and drumstick began because nobody wanted to hear Uncle Victor say, "Never mind the thighs, dear, let me have a nice, juicy breast." That's a euphemism, which is a word or phrase that softens reality, that obscures rather than clarifies meaning. Nobody consulted me, but I

do know that at some point in my life toilet paper became bathroom tissue. Some euphemisms simply put a better face on things. Stuff that used to be free is now complimentary. That is why some hotels or motels offer their guests (not customers) complimentary continental breakfasts (not free doughnuts). But the whole thing has gotten worse over time. Hospitals are now medical centres or health centres. Centre has become an important word. And whatever happened to the head nurse? She has become the nurse manager or the unit manager and a bunch of other terms I can't remember. Some places refer to patients as consumers. My social worker daughter calls them clients. And nobody is stupid, retarded, short or broke. They are all some kind of challenged, whether it's intellectually, vertically or financially. The drugstore is filled with that kind of stuff; deodorants have become anti-perspirants, cough drops are throat lozenges. For a long time there was no constipation on radio or TV, it was irregularity, but now we're back to constipation again. Which reminds me that my long-dead (dear departed) father-in-law used to have a joke that went like this: pretending that he was doing a crossword puzzle he would say, "What is a 12 letter word for 'to have and to hold'...oh, never mind, I got it. It's 'constipation'." And you can tell that the baby-boomers are getting older just by watching the evening commercials featuring products that help old people to poop, keep their dentures in, or have sex. Maybe it could all be combined in one product, like Polident with Viagra-enhanced Ex-Lax or Polivialax. But I digress. I notice that companies put a lot of effort into

Appointment with Pohlman



boosting their employees' self-esteem. At the local Wal-Mart they have a young guy who goes out in the snow to collect the shopping carts and he also helps some elderly or handicapped folk get their stuff to the car. You will occasionally hear him being paged. "Store standard, to the front, please!" That's him, the "store standard." Nobody is a store clerk anymore. They are a retail consultant or a service associate. I also notice a lot of TV advertising to treat E.D., otherwise known as erectile dysfunction. There are lots of euphemisms for that condition, as one might expect. Like willy-nilly. In England they sometimes use the term "brewer's droop" in recognition that it may be caused by too much beer. And a couple of years ago, when I was in Skagway, Alaska, where they have tried to keep the buildings the same as they were during the gold rush, I noticed a restaurant called Josie's. I asked one of the local's, "Wasn't that the whore-house?" His wonderful reply was, "We prefer to call them ladies of negotiable affection." And finally, I think there are probably more euphemisms for death or dying than anything else. A lot of folk don't like to say that a loved one died. They "passed on" or "passed away". Depending on your relationship, you might say they "kicked the bucket", "gave up the ghost", "joined the choir invisible", "shuffled off this mortal coil" or "have gone to their reward". Which, at this point, is probably what I should do. That is; depart, cross the bar, head for Davy Jones' locker, or maybe just drive over to the store and get a newspaper, some licorice and be told to "have a nice day".

Back to Spring



Bach to Blues choir is presenting two concerts on June 8. The first is at Willowgrove: Tickets are \$10 each or \$20 for a family. Guests are asked to arrive around 1 p.m., bring a picnic and enjoy the beautiful surroundings of this delightful facility. Proceeds will be donated to Rose of Sharon Services for Mothers, a not-for-profit, charitable

organization providing support to pregnant women and young mothers under the age of 25. At 7:30 the same evening, the choir will perform at Willow Springs Winery and light refreshments will be served. For more information on the choir visit www.bachtooblues.com.

Willowgrove turns 40

40th anniversary celebrations for Willowgrove and Glenbrook Day Camp will be held June 21 at 11737 McCowan Rd., off of Stouffville Road. Willowgrove is a not-for-profit organization that passes a day camp, an outdoor recreation centre and Willowgrove Primary School, and is located on a beautiful, 100-acre property which includes a hardwood forest, a pond, rolling hills and a rushing stream. The barn area houses pigs, chickens, goats, sheep and Jenny the donkey, as well as an indoor climbing facility and playgrounds.

Other features include a baseball diamond, soccer field, basketball court, campfire areas, maple syrup shack and swimming pool. Glenbrook has provided a day camp adventure to an estimated 30,000 campers and developed leadership skills in over 4,000 staff members from Markham, Stouffville and the GTA. On June 13, Willowgrove will once again provide the perfect setting for the Canadian Cancer Society's local Relay For Life. June 21 anniversary celebrations run from 3 to 8 p.m.

Bach to Blues performs at Cedar Beach Pavilion, Musselman's Lake, in January. The choir is presenting two spring concerts in Stouffville on June 8. The concerts are being presented in partnership with Willowgrove and Willow Springs Winery.

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