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Point of View

by Ralph Pohlman

Kids, Dogs and Heat



Canadians are a people who, in July and August, leave their comfortable, air-conditioned homes in order to commune with nature at a cottage where wasps are building nests under the eaves, just above the screen door.

We have a cottage in the Gatineau Hills north of Ottawa. Let me set the scene for you during a typical retreat to the family haven in the summer of 2001.

The weather was a reproduction of equatorial Africa in July. Furnace-hot, muggy, windless. If you lay still for 10 minutes, fungus began to grow in your armpits. Porcupines were bursting into flame and folks were melting on the roads. The sodden air was still, the only sound coming from your dripping body.

You get the picture.

We headed up there with six dogs in the car. Yes, that's right: six dogs -- Maggie, our aging springer spaniel, and five beagles. We'd been dog-sitting the beagles for Lisa, our newly-graduated veterinarian daughter who was away on a course. I don't think I have to elaborate on what it's like to drive five hours with six dogs in the car.

Anyway, we arrived at the cottage where we joined the rest of the family, meaning three daughters and their mates, five kids, three more dogs and Ernie, the cat. That is a total of eight adults, five kids, nine dogs and a cat. If I were to make a list of "Things to do today," it would read, "Let a dog in; let a dog out; let a dog in; let a dog out. Repeat 187 times."

Maggie was the smartest. She refused to get out of the car, giving me that liquid-eyed mournful look that said, "You're kidding!" When I did get her out of the car, she crawled under the deck where it was clear she intended to stay.

A little while later, the phone rang. It was a neighbour telling me Maggie was over at his place. She'd walked over to his cottage, scratched on the door, and when he opened it, wandered in and lay down. Smart dog. She had found her sanctuary.

I wish I had thought of that myself.

I spent a lot of time lying on the couch, reading Reader's Digests from the '50s, getting up occasionally and stepping over a sleeping dog on the way to the fridge.

What to do?

Well, it so happened the National Gallery in Ottawa was showing the work of Gustav Klimt. Thirty-six paintings and about 100 drawings. And, as a plus, the National Gallery is air-conditioned. Time for a little culture, pronounced "culcha." Without going into too much detail, I am a big fan of Klimt.

In case you have never heard of Klimt, who died in 1918, let me tell you a little about him. His most famous painting is *The Kiss*, which, in poster form, adorned the residence rooms of many a romantically inclined student in the 1960s and '70s.

Klimt was enormously controversial, and an inimitable genius. He shocked the proper Viennese with his mysterious paintings that depicted private preoccupations, angst and sexual longing and its satisfactions. His attitude was, "This is what I paint. If you like it, great. If you don't, well, that's tough."

As well, I have a small coincidental connection. I happen to know a guy whose aunt, Mada Primavesi, was painted by Klimt in 1912 when she was 9 years old. In 1946, after the war, she immigrated to Montreal where she died last year at 96. She had kept the painting all that time, and a few years before she died she gave it to her four nieces and nephews, my friend being one of them. They sold it through Christie's in New York for \$3.5 million, which they split four ways. That painting is in the National Gallery show.

I had a lot of aunts, but none of them left me a painting that was worth anything.

Of course, the National Gallery is itself a work of art. After years of being housed in an old office building on Elgin Street, the paintings and sculptures finally found a home a few years ago in the new gallery on Sussex Drive. Designed by Moshe Safdie, it is a spectacular glass reflection of the Parliament buildings and houses one of the great collections of the Group of Seven.

And then, after you've sucked up all that culture, you can walk down to the Byward Market for lunch.

Which I did. And then headed back to the kids, the dogs and the heat.

~ Letters ~

Bach to Blues Company thanks the community

To The Editor

On behalf of The Bach to Blues Company, I'd like to extend a sincere thank you to the following, all of whom contributed to the success of our concerts on Sunday, June 8:

Stouffville this Month, for help with promoting the concert; Birkett-Hassard Insurance and Card's Appliances, for selling tickets; Christ Church Anglican, for rehearsal and

concert space; Christian Blind Mission International, for all you do for us; Sobeys, for the donation of supplies for the refreshments; Summitview Public School, for the risers; Men of Note, for the keyboard; our wonderful guest artists, who added to our musical potpourri; and our audiences, for your warmth and appreciation of our efforts.

A big thank you also goes out to

those people who were unable to attend the concerts, but who made donations to our fundraising efforts for the Parkview Building Project.

Since our beginning, Bach to Blues has donated approximately \$5,000 to charitable causes. We appreciate the support of everyone who has helped us along the way.

Ann Gage, Director
The Bach to Blues Company

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Allison

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