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HOUSING FOR TEEN PARENTS OFFERS MORE THAN A ROOF

Hope, Support And A Brighter Future For Both Teen Mothers And Fathers In This First Of Its Kind Housing Project In Canada

KAREN MYKIETKA

Finding a decent place to rent in today's tight market is no easy task. Now imagine you are single, pregnant, a minor and in school. Your chances just dropped even further.

A new three-story walk-up apartment building across from the Commonwealth Stadium at 8616 112 Ave is providing 14 pregnant & parenting teens a good start for their young families. Aptly named "Hope Terrace," this unique housing complex provides affordable one or two bedroom apartments and offers a variety of on-site support services to encourage young parents aged 16-24 to strive to meet their goals while accessing the supports they require.

"It's great to provide bricks and mortar, but if you don't provide support services it's like warehousing," says Karen Mottershead, executive director of the Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens, in an *Edmonton Journal* interview. Terra partnered with Mikhael Management Corporation on

Morrison expressed her appreciation in a very emotional speech at the official opening on November 20, 2006. "I can't begin to express how it has changed my life in just a few short months."

The single mother of two-year-old Kaylee says, "Everything I need is right here." Instead of struggling to get by in a cramped bachelor apartment on her own, Morrison now has a support worker in her building and her best friend and Kaylee's best friend



HOPE TERRACE – A NEW AFFORDABLE WALK-UP APARTMENT BUILDING IN PARKDALE FOR PREGNANT & PARENTING TEENS



DANIELLE AND HER TWO-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER KAYLEE ENJOYING A BOOK IN THEIR BRAND NEW APARTMENT AT HOPE TERRACE.

this \$1.5-million facility. The Edmonton Housing Trust Fund contributed \$584,725 to the project, and the City of Edmonton \$209,875.

Eighteen-year-old Danielle

just down the hall. She belongs to a community. "There's not one person in my building who hasn't gone through what I'm going through or who doesn't understand."

Being surrounded by supports helps Morrison be a better parent. She plans to finish grade 12 and then look into taking a program at NAIT.

Hope Terrace is at full occupancy with four young couples, 10 young moms, and 14 young children ranging in age from two months to three years old. The parents range in age from 16 to 22 years old. Fourteen of the parents are attending school, post secondary or a day program and two dads are working full-time.

The basement of the building has a common area with a kitchenette for groups or gatherings, a playroom with various toys for the children and a donation room with household items, children's clothing and baby items. The Terra staff help run a playgroup for parents and their children, a support group for moms and a parenting class. Individual counseling is also available, as well as

referrals for everything from the food bank to doctors.

Hope Terrace is transitional housing meant to help young families get on their feet and get a good start. It's expected that families will move on after two to three years. Terra already has a waiting list for vacancies. Hopefully, more housing of this kind will be built, as Terra serves approximately 900 young parents every year.

Perhaps next time more forethought can be put into the design of the building. Hope Terrace has little lobby area, no main floor storage and no elevator. This means tenants on the second and third floors have to lug their children, strollers, backpacks and diaper bags up the numerous stairs. The stairwells are narrow and already damaged from moving furniture in the tight space and the constant up and down traffic of bulky strollers. This type of housing isn't

for everyone. Tenants have to be willing to abide by the house rules which include no alcohol, drugs or smoking. They also undergo a complete police check and are required to sign a crime free agreement. Some young parents have already moved out and some have been evicted.

But Morrison is nothing but grateful for the opportunity to make a home in one of the beautiful apartments at Hope Terrace.

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Love, chocolate and gardening?

DAWN FREEMAN

Ahhh, love, I have a soft spot for it. It is, after all, what brought me to this fine country. And what better month to celebrate it than in February, the very month of love because of Valentines Day. But don't limit yourself to one day, spread your love out over the entire month, or even the whole year. And don't just save it for one person (although one person might get the most!); spread it around. Smile at everyone and shovel your neighbour's walk. Catch the bus instead of driving and volunteer or donate. Take your kids skating or hang out and watch a movie together. Call your mom, or dad, or brother or sister or whoever it is you haven't seen for a while. Make a list of all the things you

like about yourself. What could happen if we all spread some love around? Who knows, but it can't be bad, right? For a wonderful love story check out this issue's Resident Profile on page 6.

I haven't even mentioned chocolate yet. Don't some people say that eating chocolate produces brain chemicals that make you feel happy like when you are in love? Ahhh, chocolate, I have a soft spot for it. It is, after all, my favorite treat. I believe that just like flowers, chocolate can send a secret mes-

sage. When we want to feel sexy and mysterious, we eat dark real chocolate. When we want to

feel carefree and young, we eat white. When we feel depressed or flabby, we eat milk chocolate – after all milk is good for you, right? And when we feel particularly annoyed with ourselves, we make ourselves eat dollar-store chocolate – that's

right, the stuff that is made from petroleum byproducts. This is the ultimate punishment, far worse than just denying yourself the treat, and guaranteed to

give you the shake-up you need! For more chocolate info, check out Cindy's story on page 5.

This month I would like to introduce to you a new columnist. She is The Gardening Diva (TGD) and she will impress, delight and awe you with her pearly words of gardening wisdom, located on page 3. TGD does ask that adoring fans and the paparazzi give her enough space to live a simple, yet stunningly regal life with her family; please book all photo and interview opportunities with her personal secretary. If you have questions for The Gardening Diva, send them to thegardeningdiva@gmail.com. She LOVES to get letters from her public, and the Rat Creek Press will endeavor to print them and the TGD's reply.

“But don't limit yourself to one day, spread your love out over the entire month, or even the whole year.”

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THE FOOD DUDE

El Rancho is the whole enchilada – and then some

BRAD GOERTZ

For a long time hipsters, cool guys, and others in-the-know have been coming to Alberta Avenue, abandoning the drunken cookie cutter culinary clamour of Whyte Avenue with its stumbling suburban yobs and multiple stabblings. The reason for this migration? North Central Edmonton's stock of genuine ethnic cuisine: Ethiopia, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the smoked meat of the Balkans, and now El Rancho brings us Mexico and El Salvador.

It is common knowledge that if someone asks you out for a romantic evening and they take you to Julio's Barrio or Boston Pizza that there will be no more dates. If you are taken to the Italian Bakery for a casual coffee there is some hope for this relationship. For dinner, El Rancho is an excellent start towards a bright future.

The menu is a blend of comfortable as well as more intimidating fare. For a diner just beginning their Spanish

food adventure the burrito al carbon or enchilada Mexicana (both \$8.95) are delicious, no-risk entry points. I was delighted to find a beef-tongue taco on the menu and ordered

well prepared and varied. The warm New Mexican colour scheme is soothing and the restaurant is just as suitable for a business lunch or family meal as it is for a romantic Valentine's dinner.

I will leave it to you to discover the true nature of the beef tongue taco.

El Rancho Spanish Restaurant
 11810 - 87 Street
 Hours: Wed - Sun,
 11:30 am - 9 pm.

El Rancho are celebrating their 3rd successful year in business by hosting a customer appreciation dinner party, featuring their delicious food as well as live Latin music.

The event will be held on Saturday, February 24th at the Serbian Hall located at 12904 112 Street. Local band Combo Re, and DJ Moreno will be the entertainment for the evening. Tickets are available for sale at El Rancho. Dinner and dance tickets are \$35, with dinner starting at 6 pm. Dance only tickets are \$15, with the dance starting at 9 pm.

A great opportunity to sample some excellent local food as well as dance the night away! Book your seat today.



CANDY ARGUETA AND DORA AREVALU FROM EL RANCHO, AND YES, THE FOOD IS EVEN BETTER THAN IT LOOKS – AND IT LOOKS PRETTY DARN GOOD!

it without asking if it was ground or, as I pictured in my head, a beef tongue lolling out of a crisp taco shell. For the kids orders can be placed from the appetizer menu, which are all under \$10.

Drinks are also a treat with medium priced house wines and authentic Mexican soft drinks. I recommend the Jugos D'El Rancho, \$2 for a glass of fresh squeezed fruit juice.

El Rancho is a warm, friendly restaurant offering excellent value for food that is

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The Gardening Diva

In which she introduces herself and expounds upon the joys of growing tomatoes from seed

The Gardening Diva (TGD) is continually perplexed by those who believe that gardening is difficult. Now, TGD does admit that she routinely accomplishes the impossible, but gardening is not impossible. Everyone knows someone who starts his or her tomatoes from seed. Dear reader, this could be you! TGD plants a wide variety of seeds, including: Early Girl, Big Beef (the name does make TGD blush, she admits) Plum, Cherry, and Roma tomatoes.

If one is going to start tomatoes from seed, they need to start now. Ignore the snow! Plastic trays from a local hardware store filled with peat pots, dirt (sterilized dear reader!) filled old plant pots and plant cells, or old yogurt containers with holes poked in the bottom, or even egg trays filled with dirt will work to plant seedlings in.

Start seeds in a sunny win-

dow or use grow lights. Grow lights may be purchased ready made, or as TGD does: request the très wonderful gardening diva husband to make them.

The très wonderful gardening diva husband goes to a local hardware store, purchases workshop lights of the hanging variety, inserts full spectrum grow lights, and purchases metal chain. He screws eyehooks into an Ikea type wood shelf, and hangs the grow lights on the shelf, using the metal chain. Grow lights must be no more than 3 inches above the top of the tray.

Most tomato seeds germinate in approximately 14 days provided they are kept warm, so keep those darling little tomato seeds covered using the provided clear plastic tops or saran wrap. When the sprouts are reaching the top of the cover remove it, and re-adjust the light so that it is

3 inches above the seedlings. Continue to water when the top portion appears dry.

Now dear reader, please remember that their little lives and happiness depend on you. Don't forget them, will you? The little darlings really are very intolerant of drying out, and without regular water the très wonderful seedlings you have grown, will become très kaput!

After the seedlings have grown a real leaf (a real leaf, dear reader, is one that actually looks like a tomato leaf), you may begin fertilizing. Fertilize no more than once a week, and dilute the fertilizer to quarter strength. Dear reader, you are cautioned – more is not better. More is kaput seedlings! Now dear readers, I can hear your voices raised in question – a well rounded, 10-10-10 fertilizer will do the trick nicely for you.



THE GARDENING DIVA IS ALWAYS READY TO PASS ON HER EXTENSIVE GARDENING KNOWLEDGE

Now, your darling seedlings, much like darling children, have to venture into the world sometime. To accustom the seedlings to wind, and to prevent mould, rot or other unsightly occurrences, TGD heartily recommends that you take a fan, and direct a gentle flow of air at your seedlings. This will prevent tall, spindly and pathetic looking seedlings, like TGD had her first year. Reader, this situation is rather embarrassing, and easily prevented. Use the fan.

These instructions will certainly keep you occupied with tomatoes until next month. Now dear reader – go forth – you have seeds to buy.

TGD (aka Cheryl Walker) lives and gardens in Parkdale, with the très wonderful gardening diva husband and the non-gardening dogs. She believes that everyone should have a garden; after all, time began in a garden, dear reader. TGD is also a firm believer in flowers started from seed and will cover that subject in her March Column.



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Avenue Initiative

Revitalization Strategy

help make a difference in our community
join a working group!

About the Avenue Initiative

People who live and work in the Avenue Area, 118 Ave from NAIT to Northlands, are working to revitalize your community, to make safer streets, vibrant shopping, green spaces, and healthy families. Since its approval by City Council in 2005, the initiative has brought in new streetlights, new signs, an increased police presence, and community events. Your involvement makes a difference!

Working Groups

Beautification & Cleanliness

Help keep the Avenue clean & green.

Development & Revitalization

Support the Avenue's growth and provide development direction.

Programs & Services

Support recreation, family economic success, and community involvement.

Safe Streets

Help make the community a safe place to live.

Streetscape

Assist in shaping the Avenue's character through lighting, street furniture and more.

For more information or to join a working group, contact:

email: judy.allan@edmonton.ca Phone: 496-1913 www.edmonton.ca/Avenueinitiative

Not just for Valentines Day

Two local bakeries offer tasty treats perfect for any occasion

PETER RAUSCH

Thinking about the perfect desert for your Valentine sweetheart? Tasty Portuguese



YVONNE FRIASS AT THE HANDY BAKERY

custard tarts, delightful chocolate mouse cups, creamy nugget rolls or any pastry from these bakeries will make an exceptional treat for that special someone.

The Avenue offers resi-

dents two of the best bakeries in Edmonton – Handy Bakery and Popular Bakery. For over 70 years they have been offering a wide variety of quality breads, buns, and desserts, and many of their loyal customers drive across town for their weekly and in some cases, daily supply of custard tarts, corn bread, cookies, or mafra bread. Their baked goods are featured in some of the best restaurants, hotels and catering in Edmonton, and both bakeries have been recognized with Best of Edmonton awards.

Both bakeries also include a further taste sensation in their delicatessens. The delis offer a range of soups, sandwiches, pastries, coffees and import fruit beverages. Other lunch treats include chorizo,



PAUL SOARES MAKING BREAD AT THE ALL NEW POPULAR BAKERY

sausage rolls or pizza. The best part is that you can get your fill for under \$5.00! You can also eat in or take home some fine imported cheeses, meats and sausages.

As you stroll through their stores you cannot help notice the wide range of imported grocery items. True to their Portuguese roots, their shelves and freezers are filled with seafood, canned goods, olive

oils, spices, and juices as well as daily staples. It's a great place to pick up unique items like red fish, dried salted cod, frozen sardines or shellfish.

Changes are in the works for both bakeries. Popular will be opening their Portuguese flamed chicken restaurant in the next few months and Handy has enrolled in the Avenue Initiative façade program. So, if you haven't been in either of these bakeries yet, do yourself a favour and stop in soon. Good for Valentine's Day – or any other old day too!

Handy Bakery
8660 118 Ave
471-1770
M-F 7:30 am to 6:00 pm
SAT 7:00 am to 5:00 pm

Popular Bakery
9303 118 Ave
477-8842
M-F 7:30 am to 6:00 pm
SAT 7:00 am to 5:00 pm

Business Briefs

Fiji Bazaar
8632 118 Avenue 474-3983
Hours: Monday to Saturday 11:00am to 7:00pm and Sunday 12:00pm to 6:00pm

This grocery store offers vegetables, spices, meats and canned goods that focus on items used in Fijian cooking. You don't have to go any further when looking for Curry leaves, Naibi, Taro, Chilies, Cassava or Palau Masala spices.

Cabin Cabob
11822A 103 Street 477-7884
Hours: Monday to Sunday 11:00 am to 10:00 pm

Located in Park Plaza near NAIT this restaurant offers Lebanese food, as well as burgers, donairs and other fast food. You have your choice of eat-in or take-out service.

The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy
10130 111 Avenue 425-1384
Bernie Kallal, Pharmacist/Owner
Hours: Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 5:30 pm

Located in the Royal Alex Plaza building on the corner of 101 St and 111 Ave, this newly converted Medicine Shoppe pharmacy is open and ready to serve. Renovations to improve the store are planned for February, and once finished, opening hours will extend to Saturdays as well.

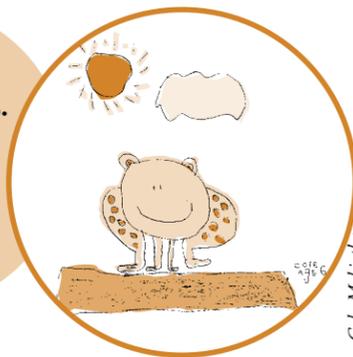
A Frog Tale

Sharon E. Riley

Fred, the frog, grew big and fat.
His tummy wobbled when he sat.
But he was quick as quick could be,
He caught those flies, one, two, three.

Then he hopped onto a log
And wished he hadn't been a hog,
For his tummy ached and he couldn't swim,
And his eyes were growing very dim.

He sat on that log for quite a while,
Then he burped, and gave a big smile.
He hopped into the waters deep,
And went to the bottom so he could sleep.



Cole Mylitzka

EDMONTON

Funding, Grant and Advice programs for Seniors Housing

Asset Management and Public Works Department, Office of Housing

Phone: 496-6030
www.edmonton.ca

Edmonton Seniors Homeowner Grant Program

The *Edmonton Seniors Homeowner Grant Program* is a flat rate grant available to lower income senior households. The City of Edmonton grant program was developed to assist lower income senior households with the possible increase in municipal property taxes.

To qualify for the *Edmonton Seniors Homeowner Grant Program* each year, you must reside in your own home and receive the Alberta Seniors Benefit.

No application is required. The program is administered in conjunction with the Government of Alberta who will mail a cheque by the end of each year to qualified households.

The cheque may also include a rebate from the Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors Program, if the education portion of your property taxes has increased since 2004. Please note if you moved or turned 65 since 2004, eligibility for a rebate will be based on the year in which this event occurred.

If you feel you are eligible for a rebate and have not received a cheque by the end of the year, or if you have any questions about the Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors Program, call 427-7876 or visit www.seniors.gov.ab.ca

Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP)

RRAP is a federally funded program that assists low-income homeowners to complete major repairs or disabled modifications to their home.

Landlords may also qualify to complete repairs or modifications if the rent being charged is below the median market rent and the tenant is considered low-income according to the income-thresholds determined annually by CMHC.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Seniors Homeowner Grant Program or the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), contact the City of Edmonton's Office of Housing at 496-6030 or visit www.edmonton.ca.



Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board

Phone: 496-5959

*New location:
Nova Plaza, 8904 – 118 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5B 0T6
www.edmonton.ca/ltab

The Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board (LTAB) is a City of Edmonton agency providing information, advice, mediation and public education on landlord and tenant issues.

Information Line — 496-5959

- 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- select option 2, general information

Telephone Advice Line — 496-5959

- Select option 4 to speak to a consultant
- Open:
Monday – Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 4:15 p.m.
Friday 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Counter Advice (Walk-in)

- No appointment required
- Open:
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- Friday 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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- by telephone with Master Card, Visa or Amex

Information on Mediation or Public Education Services 496-5959

February fondue fun

CATH JACKEL

My birthday is the day before Valentine's Day, and I love chocolate. I also love parties. So for the past twenty years, I have thrown a fondue party in the middle of February. I have hosted chocolate parties in my parents' living room with the white wool carpet, in a one-bedroom apartment, and now in my own home in Norwood. For me, this a way to enjoy chocolate and time with my friends, outside of the Valentine's Day "couples" activities.

Because I run my chocolate party as a potluck, it's not that hard to do or super expensive.

If you'd like to give it

a try, here's what you do.

First, ask yourself the most important question. "Am I ok with chocolate drips on my floor or smears on my wall?" If the answer is no, put a tarp under the table, set up in the rec room, keep a spray bottle of carpet cleaner handy; or rent a hall. No guest means to drop their chocolate-covered strawberry, but it will happen sooner or later.

If you don't have a fondue set, improvise! Find an ovenproof casserole dish, put it on a rack over a tea light, dig out some plastic forks or short bamboo skewers, and you're good to go. Even if you do have a fondue set, try the tea lights anyway. The spirit

burners are too hot and will scorch your chocolate, and they are more of a fire hazard.

For chocolate sauce, use what you can afford. The easiest



SIMPLE, EASY, SOCIAL AND OH SO YUMMY!

is to pour a bottle of chocolate sauce into a microwavable container, add two or three plain chocolate bars, nuke it for a couple of minutes, stir, and repeat until it's all melted. If you like milk chocolate, add some milk or cream. The sauce will get thick; add a bit more milk, and stir it again. You can make a really good dark sauce by combining a basic chocolate sauce with baking chocolate. Boil one cup each of cocoa, sugar and water for five minutes. Stir it all the time, mash out the lumps, and watch that it doesn't boil over. Then microwave this basic sauce together with 6-8 blocks of Baker's bittersweet chocolate. (Microwaves are your friends as well for pre-heating chocolate sauce before you refill the fondue pot.)

Ask all your guests to bring something to dip in the

fondue. Some ideas are fresh or canned fruit, marshmallows, cake, cookies, or mini pretzels. My favourites are fresh coconut, candied ginger, and animal crackers! Most people will cut up their fruit in advance, but keep a space on your kitchen counter for a chopping board and a knife, and some empty bowls nearby.

Here are a few final tips.

- If any children will be attending, make sure you don't put any alcohol in the chocolate sauce.
- To reduce the mess, put out several stacks of small paper plates and napkins for parking fruit and forks.
- If you have space, set up two fondue stations, to spread out the crowd.
- You can make a wicked batch of fudge or chocolate cake with the leftovers!

Chocolate: here today, gone today

Little known facts about the most delicious of treats

CINDY BURGESS

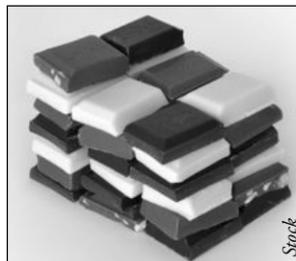
As Valentine's Day approaches, chocolate sales will soar again, but who needs an excuse to eat chocolate? Whether you like it bitter or sweet, here are some interesting facts about the world's favourite candy.

- Chocolate comes from the tropical rainforests of the Americas, where the cacao tree grows. First enjoyed by the people of Mexico and Central America as a spiced drink, chocolate soon made its way to Spain through the travels of the Conquistadors. Within 100 years of its arrival, it became a favourite flavour all over most of Europe.
- The chocolate chip cookie was invented by mistake. In the 1930s Ruth Wakefield (who with her husband operated a tourist Inn) was making chocolate cookies for her guests but realized too late she had run out of cocoa. Improvising, she broke a bar of chocolate into small pieces, hoping it would

melt uniformly through the cookie. Instead, it melted in "chips", hence the chocolate chip cookie.

- Scientists have found over 300 chemicals in chocolate.
- One of the Jello flavours that flopped after hitting grocery store shelves was that of chocolate.
- Chocolate is good for you but highly toxic to dogs...keep your chocolate away from your pets as it can cause serious illness and even death to your furry friends.
- Milk chocolate was invented in Switzerland.

- Deanna Troi of Star Trek: The Next Generation said: "Forget love, I'd rather fall in chocolate!"
- White chocolate isn't really chocolate.
- Alfred Hitchcock used



chocolate to represent blood in the famous shower scene in the thriller "Psycho."

Chocolate as we know it came about in the 1700s as the

Industrial Revolution allowed for new ways to produce it in solid form. Prior to this, it was mostly available to the wealthy as a beverage.

- In 1923, Americans in 40 cities were showered with manna from Heaven when the creator of the Butterfinger and the Baby Ruth dropped chocolate bars from airplanes as a publicity stunt.
- Chocolate has comforted and nourished space travelers as part of the diet of U.S. astronauts.

One of the best places to find chocolate in this neck of the woods is the Italian Centre, located on 95 Street and 108 Avenue. When I was last there, I counted over 50 different brands and types of chocolate in various forms. Try a box of Baci chocolates for your sweetheart; each delicious chocolate comes individually wrapped in a love quote!

What Does Homelessness Look Like?

Sometimes, like this. Not all homeless people live on the streets. They sleep on couches or floors. They go to work or to school. They have jobs and responsibilities - but no place to call home. Governments, community agencies and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing are working to help. So can you.

Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing
There is No Place Like Home www.moresafehomes.net

Homelessness. To help call 211.

He loves me... he loves me not...

ANGIE KLEIN

If love was so simple that your fate could really be decided upon the petals of the innocent daisy, I wouldn't be able to keep them in stock. I remember as a child (and sometimes still as an adult) pulling the petals from the field daisies and reciting the words "he loves me...he loves me not," while thinking about some schoolgirl crush. I was always devastated when the petals gave me the wrong answer, so would try again with the next bloom - frantically pulling petals until the desired outcome was achieved.

Now I have a cooler full of daisies...all still full of petals. I also have lots of roses, which, at Valentine's Day anyway, are the world wide accepted symbol of love.

I think it was that simple daisy that set me on my life long love affair with flowers. Not putting down roses, mind you, or the romanticism of Valentine's Day, but I think the whole thing a bit silly. Why is it most of us are compelled to buy roses for our true love on this one day? Why not a tulip on Tuesday for no reason except to say I am thinking about you, or a sunflower on Saturday to show you that I care?

It's a nightmare and a blessing for us florists pricking our

fingers and working 14-hour days, making sure all those would be Valentines have their dozen



DOESN'T EVERYONE DESERVE FLOWERS? ANGIE THINKS SO.

roses in hand when they show up at your door. A labor of love, you might say...one I don't begrudge.

Still I'll be singing that song: "I'll give you a daisy a day-dear, I'll give you a daisy a day..."

I'll love you until, the river runs still... And that cold wind we know blows away."

See you on the 14th! Your Friendly Neighborhood Florist

PS...I'll be sure to have lots of roses!

Editor's note: Go see Angie at Petals on the Trail for all your flower needs this Valentine's Day (and any other day as well). She is located at 11807 St. Albert Trail, Ph 482-7673.

A love story in 3 acts

DAWN FREEMAN

The last time actors and partners George Szilagyi and Sharla Matkin did a play together they held guns to each other's heads. That play, *Ernest and Ernestine*, is about the slow disintegration of a relationship – an interesting topic for a long-term, happily almost-married couple. If this was Hollywood, then maybe the characters played would have come home to roost, but here in Edmonton, things are a little more practical.

"Fuses were a little short sometimes at home, but mostly because of the workload, not the characters," says Sharla. "And actually, it was kind of cathartic. It's not very often you get to scream at each other and get away with it!"

With the juggling of kids, home schooling and everyday life, the two actors don't often get to work together, although that is how they met.

"In 1994 we were both puppeteers on a touring kids show. We sort of knew each other through mutual friends in Lethbridge, where Sharla was living still, going to the U of L. Shortly after the tour Sharla moved to Edmonton, and once we had both sorted out prior, um, entanglements, we got together," laughs George.

A few years later they managed to make it through a situation that would be a testing point for most relationships – traveling and working together in a foreign country, in this case teaching English in Korea.

"Korea was hard, but good," says George. "I have to say it really was one of those experiences that becomes a meter in your life. I was glad to come home though."

Although, home then turned out to be another one of those milestones – with George thinking they would



GEORGE AND SHARLA LOVE TEA AND ALL THINGS CHOCOLATEY

return to the way they were, and Sharla wanting to move forward by living together, – the relationship foundered.

"George moved into his parents' basement..." starts Sharla.

"And wrote a play about the angst ridden years of my twenties. After that I figured, why the heck not [move in together]..." continues George.

"You did not say that! You said your life was better with me than without me!" Sharla finishes. George admits that perhaps he did say that and the pair laugh. Their easy camaraderie shines like a beacon, and it is obvious they are still very much in love with each other.

It was a bigger decision than they both knew, for within a year of moving in together they had bought a house in the Spruce Avenue area and discovered they were expecting their first child – a boy named Elijah born in the summer of 2000. Their repeat performance happened in 2002/2003 with a daughter named Rain and a new house in the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood.

"2003 was a crazy year. Elijah was 3, Rain just a year and then we got accepted to do a performance at the

Edmonton Fringe Festival!" says Sharla. "Thankfully we have great family support. George's mom came up from Lethbridge to help out, then came again when we remounted the show at Theatre Network last year."

That was the show when they held the guns to each other's heads. Things are less tense theatrically now, although no less busy. With the decision to home-school the now 6-year-old Elijah, choices had to be made.

"I took a leave of absence from my part-time job with the Edmonton Public Library when I knew we were going to work with Elijah at home. I wanted to be able to concentrate my time on getting a schedule set up and really settling him into the new routine," says Sharla. "Then, of course, I got offered two parts that I had auditioned for. I thought I'm going to have to turn them down..."

"But I said no, we can do it. It works to share the home-schooling, and other family duties between us; when I'm in rehearsal Sharla does it, and when she is, I do it," continues George. "We support each other."

The pair insists they are

very practical when it comes to love and even have a tendency to forget anniversaries and other hallmark occasions.

"I thought about holding a

party for our tenth anniversary. Then I realized it was already a week after," laughs Sharla.

"And then there was the time in Korea that you forgot, and I remembered," points out George.

"You'll never let that one go, will you," Sharla replies. "George had bought me a ring, and chocolates, which are very hard to come by in Korea, and I forgot. I raced out to the bakery down the street and bought the only thing they had – a jar of red hard candies. It was all dusty and looked like it had been on the shelf for years."

"And they were all stuck together too," adds George with a smile. Sharla glares at him, and then smiles back.

George says they are "too busy for romance." This writer thinks they are doing just fine.

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Curing the holiday blues

Hiking in the desert a perfect antidote to winter

GORDON VICKRUCK

So there we were, a half hour drive from Disneyland (the hap-hap-happiest place on earth!), heading off 200 km in the other direction into the desolate desert. Why go to a desert in November? The stress of city life will drive one to do crazy things like that. We desperately needed a diversion from the chaos and commercialism of Christmas, and as it turned out, it was the perfect antidote to the blaring carols, giftwrap and consuming that occupies most of our lives, particularly at the holidays. Oh, and did I forget to mention the weather? We left - 20 C to go to + 20 C! (Travelling tip - don't go in the summer! It gets up to 50 C!).

Joshua Tree National Park reaches a maximum elevation of 4,500 ft. and as such it boasts some very distinctive flora and fauna. The town we stayed at outside of the park is called 29 Palms, referring to the variety of palm trees in the area; however, very few are native. In the park

itself, the predominant variety is the desert fan palm, which is found in several very impressive oases. They tower up to 75 feet, with the shards at their base fanning out to create a natural shelter large enough for animals or even people (my retirement home?).

Where to find more odd shaped spike-topped heads than in a Dr. Seuss book? Try the Mojave Desert, in the western part of the park. No doubt Dr. Seuss, who lived only a few hours away in San Diego, got his inspiration from the unique plant life in this desert. Dozens of varieties of palms and yuccas and cacti, and of course, the park's namesake, the very peculiar and striking Joshua tree. (I say "striking" because one of them caught me in the side of the head with its long

sharp leaves. Thankfully my Tilley hat saved my eye.)

The Joshua tree looks like a cross between a cactus, a palm tree, and a toilet bowl brush! Some of the trees are several hundred years old but grow only a few inches a year. Apparently it got that name



GORDON, THE INTREPID HIKER, AND THE BARREL CACTUS

from Mormon pioneers making their way across the desert. To the travelers, wearied by weeks of the long, hot dusty

trek (the Interstate is also like that), the tree resembled the Old Testament prophet Joshua with arms outstretched, exhorting them on to the promised land. The yuccas, a squatty, humorous looking cousin, often have large flowers protruding 10 feet skyward. Of course, there are the cacti in myriad shapes, sizes and colours - pear, barrel, and cholla - peeking out from behind concave rocks or hiding in crevices.

A simple rule of thumb in the desert: all is not as it seems. Case in point - beware of plants that look soft and cuddly. That would be the "teddy bear" cholla. Despite the bold signs posted everywhere, "DO NOT TOUCH THE CHOLLA CACTUS. VERY DANGEROUS," they proved just too fuzzy looking to resist. We felt compelled to take a group photo huddled around several of them, and it required pliers to remove the tenacious barbs from our clothes and boots and hands. One of our foolhardy crew still has a slightly swollen knuckle, 6 weeks later, to show for it.

The mystique of the desert is the element of surprise. From

a cursory scan, the Mojave is merely a vast expanse of rock and sand, with very little obvious life. But when you get close up, the scene changes. It is in fact teeming with life. Everything hides, and for good reason. You turn a corner and tucked away under a bowl shaped boulder is a desert hare or a roadrunner. You take a step further and find a salamander or tarantula frantically scurrying to get out of the way.

And then the colours! Like the artful framing of a painting, the beauty of every little living detail is intensified by the monochromatic background. Pasted against the drab sandstone backdrop is a bright red or yellow barrel cactus or Desert Rosy Boa! The only thing prettier would be to see them in full bloom in the spring.

That in fact would be our plan: to be back in the spring, hiking the 30 K Boy Scout Loop which takes one past exotic locations like "Indian Cove" and "Keys Ranch," with no doubt an abandoned gold mine, and parched cow skeletons strewn about. Well worth another trip. Note to self: take plenty of water.



PETER GOLDRING
Member of Parliament
Edmonton East

Rebalancing the Scales of Justice

For too long, Canada's justice system has failed to adequately protect law-abiding citizens and to effectively punish criminals. The system has focused on "reforming" criminals at the expense of victims' rights.

Fortunately, we have a new government that is committed to ensuring that Canadians feel secure in their homes and on their streets. With a series of important pieces of legislation introduced over the past year, it is clear that criminal behaviour will no longer be tolerated.

Criminals accused of serious crimes involving guns have found it far too easy to get out on bail. The government's bail reform package will change this. Those charged with serious crimes involving guns will now have to demonstrate to the courts why they should not stay in jail until their trial.

The government tabled legislation that will impose stricter conditions on repeat offenders in order to keep them from offending again. Offenders convicted of a third violent or sexual offence will now have to prove that they should not be declared dangerous offenders. Those who fail to do so will be subject to an indeterminate jail sentence, with no eligibility for parole for seven years.

Both of these Bills free the courts from having to prove that a criminal should be treated more severely. Instead, the onus is now on criminals to prove why they should receive more lenient treatment.

The government is also making other changes to toughen up Canada's justice system. For example, it will increase the mandatory minimum penalties for gun crimes, ban house arrest for serious offences, raise the age of protection to protect young Canadians from sexual predators, and crack down on street racing.

The bottom line? This government is taking decisive action that will rebalance the scales of justice in favour of the safety of hardworking, law-abiding Canadians like you.

What do you think?

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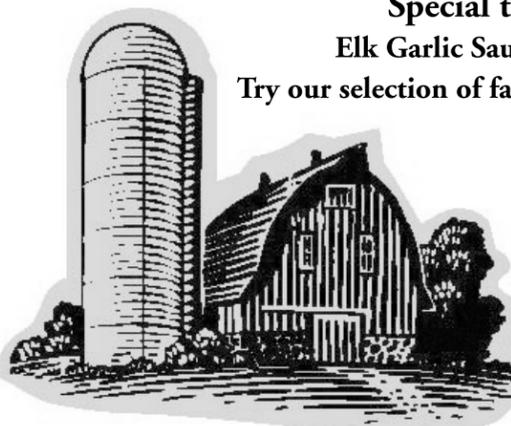
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FREE PUBLIC SKATING SCHEDULE

WINTER SEASON
September – December 2006

Clareview Arena 3804 139 Ave
Saturdays 11:45-12:45, except
Oct. 28; Sundays 1:30-2:30, except
Sept. 24, Oct. 29, Dec. 24 & 31

Londonderry Arena 14520 66 St
Sundays 1:30-2:30; Wednesdays
1:30-2:30 Senior Skate only, except
Dec 12 & 19

Oliver Arena 10335 119 St
Tuesdays 6:15-7:15

Westwood Arena 12040 97 St
Sundays 3:15-4:15, except Dec.
24 & 31

Eastwood Community League Rink
Public Skating Wed to Fri: 4 pm - 8 pm, Sat 2 pm - 9 pm, Sun 2 pm - 8 pm

Parkdale/Cromdale Community League Rink Public Skating Mon-Fri: 5 pm - 6 pm; Shinny hockey 6 pm - 9 pm, Sat 12 pm - 6 pm, Sun 12 pm - 5 pm

Spruce Avenue Community League Rink Public skating Mon, Tues, Thur, 6.30 pm - 9 pm; Fri 7 pm - 9 pm; Sat 2 pm - 9 pm; Sun 2 pm - 5 pm. Spruce Ave. also has a small side rink for young children.

FREE COMMUNITY SWIMS
Alberta Avenue and Parkdale
Community league members can swim for free at Eastglen Pool (11410-86 St) on Sun. from 12-2 pm. Call your league to buy a membership.

Spruce Avenue community league members can swim for free at the MacEwan Centre for Sport and Wellness (10700-104 Ave) Sundays from 2-5 pm.

For membership or more info call Ray at 474.5354 or Verna at 479.8019. You must present your 2006-2007 community league member card at the pool.

FAMILY DAY CELEBRATIONS
Spruce Ave. Annual Family Day Event

Monday, February 19.
We will be hosting a Winter Wonderland with the aid of the City of Edmonton. There will be horse and buggy rides, skating, tobogganing, games, snowshoeing, a campfire and yummy beef on a bun with hot chocolate and cake. Keep watching for the flyer in your mailbox.

Eastwood Community League Family Day Celebrations

Call the hall for details at 477-2354

Alberta Legislature
Monday, February 19
Interpretive Centre and pedway
Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Free guided tours every 10 minutes from 12-3:30 p.m. Kids' carnival, entertainment, mascots, exhibits and free hot chocolate in the pedway from 12-4 p.m. Skating on the south grounds rink from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. (weather permitting).

Churchill Square Family Day
weekend Event
February 17 – 19

Family Festival Winter Magic Downtown
Monday, February 19.
See www.edmontondowntown.com for more details.

Muttart Conservatory – Treasure Island Family Day

Monday, February 19, 1 pm – 4pm
Cost: Regular admission
Escape from winter into our green and glorious pyramids. A treasure hunt and pirates await you. Go on a hunt through the jungle and enter to win some prizes.

Rutherford House
Monday, February 19, 12 pm – 4pm
Celebrate the Family Day weekend with a visit to the historic home of the first Premier of Alberta, Alexander Cameron Rutherford.

SNOW-SHOVELLING HELP FOR SENIORS

Need someone to clear the snow off your sidewalk? Find out who can do it at reasonable rates – call the City of Edmonton Citizen Action Centre at 496-8200 or Seniors Assoc of Greater Edmonton 423-5510 or Seniors Caring about Seniors 465-0311.

ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED?

Join OSP's Youth Employment Program for youth 16-30 who have a disability. Successful applicants will receive a living allowance while participating in the program. For info. Call 488-8122

CRYSTAL KIDS

8718 118 Avenue: Ph 479-5283
www.crystalkids.org

Parents and Tots drop-in
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 am – 12:45 pm
This is a free program. Snacks are also provided.

Seniors drop-in
Wednesdays 11:30 am – 12:45 pm
This is a free program. Soup and coffee is provided.

ST FAITHS ANGLICAN CHURCH
11725 93 St: Ph 477-5931

Junior Chef Program – Learning to cook more than Mac & Cheese – and Without a Microwave!. For anyone from Grade 7 – 18 years. Thursday afternoons from 1 – 3 pm. Call 477 – 5931 to sign up. Cost is \$2.00 per week.

Senior Chef Program – Cooking together on Tuesday mornings from 10 am – 12 pm in smaller portions to prepare meals to take home. If you are over 50 years old and interested, call 477 – 5931 for more information and to register. Cost is \$2.00 per meal that you take home.

Collective Kitchen – 3rd Wednesday of the month from 5:30 – 8:30 pm. Cooking together

in quantity to prepare 3 or 4 nutritious meals to take home for yourself or your family for later use. Call 477 – 5931 for more information and to sign up. Cost is \$2.00 per meal that you take home.

SPRUCE AVENUE PLAYGROUND

RE-DEVELOPMENT MEETING
Monday, February 05, 1 pm in the Spruce Ave School. For more info contact Karen Gilson @477-3610.

CPR AWARENESS EVENING

Monday February 12, from 6:30-7:30 at the Spruce Ave. Community Hall. Learn how to recognize a cardiac arrest, when to call E.M.S. and how to do one-rescuer adult C.P.R.

COMMUNITY GARDENING INFORMATION SESSION

Tuesday, February 13, 7 pm
Eastwood Community Hall
Grow your own food, meet new friends, enjoy a healthy outside activity, and learn new skills. Hear about the successes of community gardens in Edmonton and how we can start one in our community. A green thumb is not a pre requisite...just your enthusiasm to see our community GROW!

EL RANCHO CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DINNER PARTY

El Rancho are celebrating their 3rd successful year in business by hosting a customer appreciation dinner party, featuring food and live Latin music (local band Combo Re and DJ Moreno). The event will be held on Saturday, February 24th at the Serbian Hall at 12904 112 Street. Tickets are available at El Rancho. Dinner and dance tickets are \$35, and dinner starts at 6 pm. Dance only tickets are \$15, and the dance starts at 9 pm.

THIS OLD EDMONTON HOUSE, FORT EDMONTON PARK

Are you the owner of an historic home, full of character, charm and outdated electrical systems? If so, you'll be interested in this series of public seminars about owning, maintaining and restoring a historic home. An expert in the field will lead each seminar. Come prepared with your questions and problems; leave with potential solutions and answers. First session: February 26. Introduction to Heritage Home Designation. Cost: \$10. Call 496-2925 to register, or go to www.edmonton.ca, and then into 'special events and programs' in Fort Edmonton Park for a full list of seminars offered.

NORWOOD CHILD & FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE.
9516 – 114 Avenue. Call 471-3737 to register for any of the groups.

Rhymes that Bind, in partnership with Centre for Family Literacy: Wednesdays, January 17 – March 21, 11:45 am – 12:30 pm

Books for Babies, in partnership with Centre for Family Literacy: Fridays, March 2, 9, 16 & 23, 10:00 – 11:30 am

Books & Fun for Toddlers:
Tuesdays, January 23 – February 27, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Tuesdays, March 13 – April 24, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Tuesdays, May 15 – June 19, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Children between the ages of 13 months – 2 years can attend this program with their parents or caregiver. We will explore books, play games, sing songs, and do crafts and many other fun activities. Lunch will be provided. If you need transportation please call Tina at 471-3737.

Books & Fun for Preschoolers:
Thursdays, January 18 – February 22, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Thursdays, March 15 – April 26, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Thursdays, May 10 – June 14, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Wednesdays, January 17 – February 21, 2:30 – 4:00 pm
Children between the ages of 3 – 6 years old can attend this group with their parents or caregiver. We will read stories, tell stories, sing, dance, do crafts, play games and meet other families. Families can choose to attend either Wednesdays or Thursday. Lunch is provided with the Thursday group only. If you need transportation please call Tina at 471-3737.

L.A.P.S. – Literacy and Parenting Skills

Wednesdays, March 14 – May 2, 9:30 – 11:30 am. For parents who have children between the ages of 0 – 6. This group will provide support for parenting, community building, alternatives to TV, safe places for children, as well as learning reading and writing. Childcare is provided while parents are in-group and must be booked in advance with the Early Start Program upon registration. Transportation is not available for this group.

DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR READING, WRITING OR MATH SKILLS?

Call the Learning Centre at 429-0675

Edmonton Public Library

SPRUCEWOOD BRANCH
11555 - 95 Street Call 496-7099 to register

Sign With Your Baby

Tuesday, February 6, 10:15 am.
Participation Limit: 15. Teach your pre-speaking, hearing baby or toddler how to communicate with you. For parents with children 6 months to 2 years and babies are welcomed and encouraged.

Family Storytime – Hearts, Hearts,Hearts Saturday, February 10, and ongoing, 2 pm. Participation limit: 15. Valentines Day stories, songs, activities and fun for everyone.

LBI 3 – Murder in the library Saturday, February 17, 2pm. Ages 10-12. Participation limit: 15. Yet another librarian has met a tragic end! Help us solve the mystery of what happened to our latest manager by evaluating clues and motives.

Baby Laptime Tuesdays, February 27 to March 20, 10.15 am. Ages up to 12 months. Participation limit: 12. Join us for a wonderful introduction to rhymes, songs and stories. Learn rhymes and finger games and get to meet other babies.

The End Saturday, March 3, 2 pm. Ages 9-12. Participation limit: 20. This is possibly going to be the worst game ever. You should probably not sign up for this because it probably won't be much fun. It is the end of the Lemony Snicket series. Be very afraid.

ADULT PROGRAMS

Our Neighbourhood History Monday, February 5, 6:30 pm. Participation limit: 30. Learn

how this neighbourhood has grown and developed. Kathryn Ivany has been volunteering and working in historical and heritage organizations for almost 30 years in Edmonton. A founding member of the Historic Edmonton Week, Kathryn has worked with neighbourhood groups to capture their history and produced over 10 neighbourhood and cemetery walking tours.

Get The Blues Wednesdays, February 7-28, 6:30 pm. Participation limit: 24. Noted CKUA radio host, Cam Hayden, leads a blues music discovery and discussion session. Please note that the February 14 session is moved to February 13.

Which of These Costly Home-seller Mistakes Will You Make When You Sell Your Home?

EDMONTON - A new report has just been released which reveals 7 costly mistakes that most homeowners make when selling their home, and a 9 Step System that can help you sell your home fast and for the most amount of money.

This industry report shows clearly how the traditional ways of selling homes have become increasingly less and less effective in today's market. The fact of the matter is that fully three quarters of homesellers don't get what

they want for their home and become disillusioned and - worse - financially disadvantaged when they put their home on the market.

As this report uncovers, most homesellers make 7 deadly mistakes that cost them literally thousands of dollars. The good news is that each and every one of these mistakes is entirely preventable.

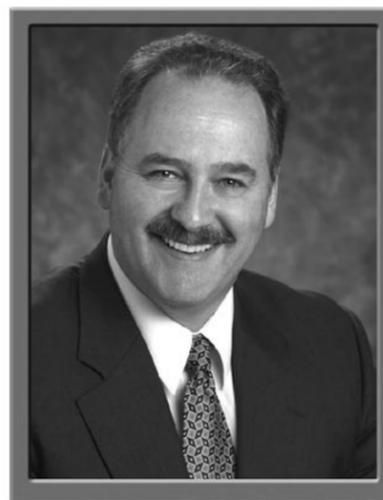
In answer to this issue, industry insiders have prepared a free special report entitled "The 9 Step System

to Get Your Home Sold Fast and For Top Dollar."

To hear a brief recorded message about how to order your free copy of this report, call 1-866-815-9646 and enter ID#4900. You can call anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call NOW to find out how you can get the most money for your home.

This report courtesy of Donna Straus, Royal LePage Arteam. Not intended to solicit properties already listed for sale.

Brian Mason, MLA
Edmonton Highlands-Norwood

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