

BEST COLUMN WRITING

This was a difficult category to judge due to the caliber of the writing and the many different types of columns entered. Keep up the good work.

ROSS MURRAY

The Record

Reading Ross Murray's columns transported me fully into the world he was describing, be it his dream bookstore, the front seat of his car or the building of a tin can telephone. His work was thoughtful, funny and evocative without being contrived or forced. Excellent job.

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The Record | newsroom@sherbrookejournal.com

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COLUMNIST

With high school comes the end of childhood, the excitement of can phones replaced by the drama of cell phones. It's also the end of the primacy of parents.

Can you hear me? Can you hear me now?



ROSS MURRAY

It's the seasonal doldrums, with summer sort of over, fall not quite begun. I'm home for lunch, and Abby is bored, a feeling she expresses by hovering. Standing in the way, to be precise. It's like one of the cats hoping I'll fill its dish, except with less likelihood of her tripping me on the stairs.

I'm washing the lunch dishes, Abby lurking at my side. "Don't throw those out," she says. "They're for my phone."

Two tin cans, washed and de-lidded - a maple syrup tin and a can of tomatoes - sit by the edge of the sink.

"They're different sizes," I say. "Will that matter?" As if I know.

"It'll work," Abby says confidently. As if she knows. "But how will we get the string through?"

"With a nail," I say, drying my hands and grabbing the tins. "Make a hole here, push the string through. Then you take a match" - I get a match from the

box behind the stove - "and you tie the string to the end of the match to hold it in place."

"Cool!" says Abby. "Why does it have to be a match?"

"Well... it doesn't. It's just what we always used," I say. "Hang on..."

I run down to the basement to find a hammer and nail. Dishes? What dishes? This is Abby's second attempt at a string phone. The first wasn't especially successful: two plastic juice cups, duct tape and a three-foot shoelace. "Can you hear me?" Well, of course I can hear you, you're standing right there.

"It works a little," I told her, "but I think you need to use cans. And real string."

"Do we have any cans? Can you save them for me?"

As I punch a hole in the tins, part of me wonders: did tin can telephones ever really work? Or do I just think I remember them working? Maybe they're like hearing the ocean in a seashell, something that allegedly works but is bunkum, like reiki or Trickle Down Theory.

I'm certain I remember my brother Andrew rigging up a tin can telephone between our second-floor bedroom and his friend Chris's house about five houses up and an entire street over. How this feat was accomplished through trees and across multiple backyards without the assistance of professional linemen, I don't know. I sometimes won-

der if it happened at all.

Yes, I'm sure it did, and I'm sure the phone actually functioned, and I'm pretty sure every conversation on that phone went something like this:

"Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you. Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you. This is cool."

"What?"

"THIS IS COOL!"

Long pause.

"Are you talking?"

"What?"

"We should say 'over' when we're finished. Over."

"What?"

That's more or less how my conversation with Abby goes once we assemble our tins, matches and butcher twine and stretch our phones from one corner of the backyard to the other. Damn right it works!

"Let's make it longer!" I say.

"Yeah!" says Abby, all excited now.

We disassemble the phone and tie our twine to a longer piece. Abby runs to the far corner of the field behind our house, steadily shrinking as she hops over the grass. The string spools out behind her. We stretch the cord taut and lift our cans to our faces.

"Can you hear me?"

"I cmmmm eeee ooooo!"

"I can barely hear you!"

"Aah?"

After we run out of things to say - which, quite frankly, doesn't take long

on a tin can phone standing in a field - I reel in our string as Abby scampers back.

"How does it work?" she wonders.

I explain about sound vibrations through solids versus air, throwing in facts about guitar strings, transmitters, receivers and some other stuff I pretend to know.

"You have a science fair later in the year," I say. "You could do something like this."

"Yeah!" she says.

Abby, you see, is days away from entering high school, and I have been thinking - mildly fretting, actually - about how she'll manage the workload, the social pressures, the avalanche of facts that's about to pour down on her. She has her specific health and learning burdens too. But mostly with high school comes the end of childhood, the excitement of can phones replaced by the drama of cell phones. It's also the end of the primacy of parents.

Abby and I walk back to the house. I've blown my lunch hour, but it's time well wasted. "You could do an experiment about whether it works better with thin string or thick string," I say.

Abby pauses. "Probably thin because it vibrates easier," she says, hypothesizing, extrapolating, moving forward, getting fainter and fainter, but still and always connected by a thin, vibrating string.



THE SOAPBOX CARMEN MARIE FABIO

The King and I

I stole my first Stephen King book.

No, I'm not proud of this fact and the only defense I can offer is that I was so intrigued by what I'd heard about *The Shining* that as a broke skinny kid carefully meting out lunch money on selected vices, little remained for luxuries like brand new books, leading me to cave into temptation at a book fair.

I like to think I redeemed myself by purchasing virtually everything else penned by King and I know that some sort of karmic balance was achieved by the sheer terror that *The Shining* imparted on my preadolescent brain extending well into adulthood.

As someone who, from a very young age, was only comfortable with black and white facts, King's works were the first to open my mind to the notion that writing did not necessarily have to adhere to grammatical rules, and that the printed word could possess the same elasticity as human thought. King managed to capture the incoherent ramblings of a brain trying to process the disjointed paroxysms of panic, replicating on the page, in run-on punctuation-free italicized paragraphs, the oxygen-choked, heart-racing rantings of the straining voice in your head that tries to remain calm whilst in the grips of the cold logic of terror. And I delighted in every skipped heartbeat.

It dawned on me not long ago that my teenager was much older than I when I first sat down to become acquainted with the author so I casually suggested he ease into King's world via *The Green Mile*. Spellbinding and not too terrifying.

He handed it back to me a week later saying, "That was great. Got another one?"

My son has now worked his way through about half of my King collection, describing the reading experience akin to slipping on a comfortable pair of old shoes. The fact that this particular child of mine was born on a Friday the 13th under a full moon with a caul over his face, as any avid King fan will recognize, leaves me with a disconcerted twitch but I digress.

Knowing his fondness for other-worldliness opened the door for me to offer him *The Tommyknockers* and in our ensuing conversations about King's writing, he and I agreed on the point that childhood fears, like hurts, don't always lose their edge as we age. They can remain as sharp and potent as their initial inception forging the path for what will forever hurt and frighten us.

It's with this in mind I'm reminded that even now, as a full-fledged adult, I still will not sleep with a foot sticking out from under the blankets or my hand dangling over the edge of the bed.

Childhood memories, coupled with a healthy respect for all things that go 'bump' in the night, prevail.

Happy Halloween.

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CARMEN MARIE FABIO

Your Local Journal

Carmen Marie Fabio's columns were a great mix of funny and poignant that made me both laugh and think. The writing was tight and deft which added greatly to the readability of the columns.

CYNTHIA GUNN

Quebec Farmers' Advocate

Cynthia Gunn's light, engaging style is very readable and her personal anecdotes go a long way to broaden the appeal of her column beyond budding chefs.

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Cookin' with the Advocate

Veggies and cake make for a great party!

Cynthia Gunn
Advocate Food Writer

When I was a child, a vegetable at a birthday party was unthinkable. The less the party treats resembled real food, the better. For those of you who read last month's column, please forgive me. I'm speaking of 40 or so years ago. A homemade cake was good—what cake wasn't. Lemonade was good—people then didn't offer juice to kids every five minutes. A & W root beer and a store bought cake, however, were the pinnacle of party success. And the more fake icing in the shape of gigantic roses, the better. If you had these at your party it meant that you had pestered your mom, and won.

No mother would have dreamed of embarrassing their little darling and served vegetables at a birthday party. Being sent to your room for bad behaviour would have been less demoralizing. Times have certainly changed, at least in my neck of the woods. I sense it might have something to do with the fact that many four- and five-year-olds around here attended a preschool where raw vegetables accompanied every lunch. Nine wee beings sat side by side and ate them with pleasure. But I think the trend might extend slightly beyond my little world.

A few weeks ago my soon-to-be eight-year-old sat down to write out a list of what food she wanted at her birthday party. After 'cake (same as last year)', she wrote 'ranch dip, red peppers, cucumbers and carrots'. This was followed by 'lemonade' and 'popcorn'. I added the Cheesies, but other than that, I duly followed the list.

Everything was going magnificently well until we noticed the cake had been, not just a bit, but a lot. Always follow your instinct, I silently chided myself. In my haste I had pulled it from the oven probably five minutes early. Angel food cake does not forgive for undercooking. We debated making another one, but with four hours to go, not enough eggs, lots still to do, and a husband working until show time, this seemed like a path rife with folly. I'll make a quick batch of back-up cupcakes, I soothed. And no one will notice the fallen cake once the whipped cream goes on and the meringues are arranged around it, I said with conviction, while I secretly worried about it still being gooey inside.

Turns out the cake looked and tasted delicious—maybe not quite as nice as last year, but there was a happy gaggle of little girls with mouths full of cream and sweetness. We didn't even bring out the back-up cupcakes. And the veggies? Not a stick left.

Angel Food Cake



This recipe originates from *Bon Appétit* magazine (April 2009). It has a fancy topping as part of the original recipe but I simply use slightly sweetened whipping cream and decorate with little meringues, which are of course optional. Fresh strawberries or raspberries in season would be lovely.

1 ¼ cups powdered sugar	1 ½ tsp. cream of tartar
1 cup cake flour	1 cup fine sugar
¼ tsp. salt	2 tsp. grated orange peel
1 1/3 cups egg whites	1 ½ tsp. vanilla

(about 9)

In a medium bowl sift powdered sugar, flour, and salt three times. Beat egg whites in large bowl until light and frothy. Add cream of tartar and beat until whites are opaque and soft peaks form. Gradually add fine sugar, beating until whites are thick and shiny. Add orange peel and vanilla. Beat just until blended. Sift 1/4 of flour mixture over whites. Using large rubber spatula, gently fold flour mixture into whites. Repeat with remaining flour mixture in 3 more additions. Transfer batter to ungreased 10-inch-diameter angel food cake pan with removable bottom.

Bake at 350°F until golden and springy to touch, about 50 minutes. Immediately invert pan onto work surface if pan has feet, or invert centre tube of pan onto neck of bottle or funnel. Cool cake completely. Transfer to platter.

Honourable Mention:

BERYL WAJSMAN, The Suburban City Edition

Beryl Wajsmann's political columns were hard-hitting and showed great knowledge of his subjects and the history surrounding them.

Judge: Gordon Cameron, Group Managing Editor, Hamilton Community News, Stoney Creek, ON • Number of entries in the Best Column Writing category: 18

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