

Lady with the blue dress

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

Worried that, for the first time in 21 years I wouldn't be able to file a Christmas column for this paper, I decided to take a nap this afternoon in an attempt to clear my head.

But just as I was about to doze off I was awakened by the combination of an itchy leg and the nagging thought in my head that I should, really should, know the name of Archie Bunker's grandson.

You know, Mike and Gloria's kid? from "All in the Family"?

Now I'm not sure what prompted my mind to start asking me questions about the cast and characters of an old TV sitcom from a long, long time ago.

Nor do I know why my leg was itching. Could've had something to do, I suppose, with this dry winter air, coupled with the fact I've been wearing my long underwears since, like, October.

Fine, you don't want to picture me in my underwear. I get that, but don't go blaming me the next time you flub a speech.

So I'll make this brief, and write to you, this Christmas, not about Edith and Archie but Rodney and Teresa instead.

Stars of an old picture, who were joined in the cast by my Uncle Jimmy on the right and a lady in a blue dress, blue dress on the left who has me scratching my head.

Not because I've been wearing long underwears (clean ones) on my scalp since, like, the end of September, but because her name, like that of Archie Bunker's grandson, escapes me.

The old picture I'm referring to never made it into syndication like "All in the Family", but it is a family picture nonetheless.

Rodney and Teresa's wedding picture.

And just like Archie and Edith those weren't their real names, of course.

Their real names were Mom and Dad.

They just didn't know that yet, for this is their wedding picture. Sent to me out of the clear blue sky that is the Internet just the other day by one of my cousins.

Understand, won't you, that there were something like 14 kids in my Dad's family and 12 in my Mom's.

So it stands to reason I've got a lot of cousins living 'round these parts.

So many cousins, in fact, that prior to getting married I insisted on getting blood tests before going out on dates.

I went out with some of those girls anyway, mind you, even if the lab results showed we were related.

Sometimes there's not a lot to choose from in a small town, and I just made sure we both wore long underwears over our heads when we went to the theatre for to see a picture show.

Didn't make for a great viewing experience, I'll grant you, but at least we got to hold hands and remark at how similar they were.

I digress.

The man on the right is my Uncle Jimmy. Mom's big brother, Dad's good friend and best man.

And I mean big brother in every sense of that word, for Uncle Jimmy used to shadow

Mom on her dates and scared off most of her suitors as a result.

My Dad, on the other hand, wasn't scared of much, except for my Mom sometimes.

You wouldn't know that from the shy little Indian girl, though, looking all demure in the picture taken May 2 on the Wylie-Bronson Road a long, long time ago.

The blackflies must have been horrendous at that place, at that time of year.

I remember Dad telling me that Uncle Jimmy rolled his car on the Wylie Hill that same evening and I wonder now whether swarms of blackflies caused the accident or Uncle Jimmy was simply driving around with long underwears on over his head, which was a common safety feature back in the day before seatbelts became mandatory.

I digress.

The lady on the left, wearing a blue dress, my mother's maid of honour, her name escapes me.

I don't know who you are, lady with the blue dress, blue dress on, lady with the blue dress

on.

I've been scratching my head so much over who you are that holes are starting to appear in my long underwears.

I'm no longer incognito but it is a good thing I'm not picking up dates at family reunions anymore like what used to happen back in the day before seatbelts became mandatory.

I've written a lot of crappy things about my Mom and Dad in recent years.

Don't mistake those words I wrote for anger at the way they raised me, but rather malicious self-pity at the fact that they died, and sometimes there are times like time when I ask them who is the lady with the blue dress, blue dress on, lady with the blue dress on, but my question goes unanswered.

My questions go unanswered.

Truth be told I never wanted for anything when I was growing up, especially at Christmas, for my parents treated me like gold, frankincense and myrrh every silent night.

And I inherited not just their love but also the best of both worlds in terms of their German and Indian genetics – save for the one failing that sometimes I get the urge to invade small countries but lack all ambition to carry through with my plans for world domination.

My questions go unanswered and at times like that I'll rise from a nap, hold my wife's hand tightly and she'll hug me close, wipe the tears from my eyes and give me a warm, gentle hug while softly, so softly whispering in my ear.

"Take off those damn fool long underwears, you damn fool. You're missing the wedding picture!!"

Taking off the blinders now, I realize I've been missing out on the bigger picture that was Rodney and Teresa back in that day, before seatbelts became mandatory.

They married poor, went on to form a very successful local business, which at one time employed more than 50 people, made a lot of money at it, spent a lot of that money on me, lost all their money and died poor, but prideful, and rightly so.



You won't see them in syndication on Saturday night, but Mom and Dad's show did have two spin-offs in terms of my brother and I.

Now my big brother and I haven't been on speaking terms for the past few months, on account of differences that sometimes come between brothers after their parents pass away.

If Mom and Dad could see us now, they'd make my brother and I sport long underwears on our heads the whole year 'round.

Mom and Dad can see me now, I know, from their wedding picture

that was taken May 2 on the Wylie-Bronson Road a long, long time ago, back before seatbelts became mandatory.

Maybe my cousin sent my brother the same Internet. That would be nice for Christmas.

That and the name of the lady with the blue dress, blue dress on. Lady with the blue dress on.

If you could throw some new long underwears into the mix too, Santa, that would be great.

Seatbelts on your sleigh, remember, are now mandatory safety features.

HO, HO, HOLD THE PRESS - IT'S CHRISTMAS!

The NRT will not be published
December 27

NRT Holiday Office Hours

Friday, December 22
.... closed at noon
closed Dec 23 - 27
open Dec 28 & 29 11am - 4pm

open Tuesday, January 2
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email & voice mail
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NORTH RENFREW TIMES

nrt@magma.ca

Finally listening to a good man's smart advice

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

I'm still not quite sure what shinola is, but I'm sure it doesn't taste as good as the dinners Bill's wife Iris made for me in their nice old Victorian house.

And at their cottage too.

Yes, I was that cute and endearing.

So why, after nearly 30 years did I reach out to Bill?

I think it must have been something my dad used to try drilling into my head that didn't quite take until just recently.

Dad used to tell me I should keep in contact with people like Bill and Iris, people who saw something in me when I was younger that I couldn't see for myself.

Naturally I ignored my dad's advice, because that's what sons do while their fathers are still alive.

I really only started listening to dad when he was dead.

And I realized he had a lot to say, so I got in touch with Bill.

I emailed Bill and told him most of what I'd been up to over the past three decades, leaving out the gory details of course, and mentioned with particular pride that I was now part-owner of a live and well newspaper of all things.

Bill, who is a widower now since Iris passed away a couple years back, was quite happy to hear from me, and he filled me in on his family happenings over the last 30-something years.

"You were sure Iris' favourite," Bill wrote back to me from the seniors community he now calls home.

"She thought a lot of you and often wondered how you were doing.

"We were very fortunate to have a lot of wonderful and dedicated employees over the years. The newspaper industry was good to us and our family."

Accompanying my message to Bill, I had attached some recent digital editions of the NRT for his perusal, and Bill wrote back to say

how impressed he was with the editorial content and layout.

No small praise, that, coming from an old newspaperman like Bill.

"There are very few good newspapers left today," Bill wrote. "The chains have destroyed all the small town papers and are doing a hell of a poor job on the ones they do produce."

Indeed, it was just such a chain which destroyed the paper that Bill and Iris and their dedicated employees had worked so hard to produce.

And on this, the first anniversary more or less of me becoming part-owner of a live and well newspaper of all things, I'd like to point out that the problem with the big chains is they have many missing links.

The main one being to the communities they ostensibly serve.

They're only in it for the profit margins and once those dry up they're gone like a puff of smoke.

I'm glad linked up again with Bill.

He gave me his phone number and I called him later that day and we had a grand old chat about this and that and the other.

I told Bill I'd keep in touch with him, and after I got off the phone the wife she remarked about the tear running down my cheek.

"Nonsense, it was just an eye-toke," I told her, and set about to rolling another puff because, like I said, Little Jackie Paper left out the gory details.

A dragon lives forever, but not so little boys.

Painted wings and giant rings make way for other toys.



Sorry I haven't written in a while. It's not for lack of trying.

I did churn out a Blue Skies a few weeks ago, but it was so liberally peppered throughout with the word s%*t as to be downright scatological.

To my credit, I was able to use the "s" word as a noun, verb, adjective and adverb, but realized after I'd finished the piece that it would hardly be suitable for our younger readers, let alone the middle-aged.

It was a crappy column. I was having a crappy day. I consigned it to the dustbin of history

And resolved to start anew.

Oh, don't get me wrong, I'm still having a crappy day.

At the time of this writing it's been winter for three years.

I've been feeling like Puff the Magic Dragon.

Not in his halcyon days but right after Little Jackie Paper called off their relationship in the blink of a reptilian eye.

His head was bent in sorrow, green scales fell like rain.

Puff no longer went to play along the cherry lane. Without his life-long friend, Puff could not be brave, So Puff that might dragon sadly slipped into his cave.

Just as I was about to cave into this winter of our discontent, an email arrived from a bygone era.

The email came from an old gentleman named Bill.

He and his wife used to publish the weekly paper in this small town in southwestern Ontario where I first got my start.

Bill was also the chief of the volunteer fire department. It was that kind of a small town.

I had reached out to Bill recently because he and wife took a shine to this cute little Indian boy back in the day when I was just starting out in this business and didn't know shine from shinola.

Bill Walker

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Following a number of trips to investigate the merits of the "west," Bill and his wife Mary sold their Deep River house and departed for Calgary on March 31, 1993.

Birding did not end with the departure from Deep River, of course, and Bill continued to be quite active in Calgary and area, as well as several birding (and other) trips abroad.

Bill was predeceased by his wife Mary (2015) and two sisters.

He is survived by a younger sister, Shirley McHattie, in Toronto and by five children: Paul (Patricia) in Nelson BC, Brian in Ibiza Spain, Kathy (Bill) in Calgary, Alan (Patty) in Vancouver, and Susan in Windsor NS. He is also survived by six grandchildren and six great grand-children.

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FEATURE PHOTO

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This week's photo: "Ottawa River vista," by Jean Johnston



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NORTH RENFREW TIMES

The things he said don't bear repeating

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

I worshipped the ground my father walked on. He taught me how to read at an early age and instilled in me a life-long love of reading. As I grew older he was patient with my mistakes, let me learn from them, and was always there to bail me out of trouble when I couldn't. He let me follow my dreams. All that being said, if my dear old dad was still alive today I'd punch him right in the nose. Because of the things he said to my mother. Because of the things he wrote to my mother, I should say, or should write like I now have just done.

Now while it's true that over the years I've written some fantastical stuff in this column pertaining to both the joys of sex and the absence thereof, some of the stuff dad wrote to my mom made Blue Skies pale in comparison.

The stuff dad wrote to my mom is contained in 46 letters while he was working as a land surveyor on job sites in the mountains of British Columbia.

Mom kept every single one of those letters dad penned to her back in the early 1960s.

I know because I recently came upon them in an old black, battered briefcase while going through some of their things which I've had in storage.

This old briefcase also contains every wedding card my parents received when they got married on May 2, 1964.

Some of the envelopes the cards came in had written on them the name of the accompanying wedding presents.

So I'd like to thank my Uncle Henry and Aunt Vivian right here and now on my parents behalf for the gift of an electric blanket.

A big shout-out as well to the late Roy Sullivan for the woollen comforter.

Now where was I? Oh, right, I was going to punch dear old dad in the nose.

Electric blankets and woollen comforters were the last thing the old man needed when he was writing those letters in the cold Canadian Rockies, judging from the contents of some of his missives to mom.

My father, my dear patrician father, the staunch Conservative who liked to sing "Amazing Grace" at funeral services (sometimes unprompted) actually used the word "sperm" in a sentence and not in a scientific manner.

Well, I almost spit my beer out all over my computer here at work when I read that, and my keyboard's sticky enough as it is.

I'll spare you the grisly details of all the smutty sentiments contained in the letters my dad wrote to my mom in Vancouver from a work camp outside of Revelstoke in the fall and winter of 1964.

For it came as enough of a surprise to me that my parents had feelings like that for each other.

All this time I've been going around telling people I was an immaculate conception.

Still, the 46 letters mom saved from dad contained more than just porn.

"It's getting quite cold here now, honey," he wrote to mom in on Monday,

October 19.

"The snow is just about 600-feet up in the mountains so I bought a pair of long johns and coveralls so I'm ready to go for those 12 hour days and like it. I'm going to bed now, Teresa. I've just had a smoke and I'm in love."

I never saw my dad smoke in his life.

"It's 10:30 am," he wrote on Wednesday, October 28.

"I just got up and it's snowing to beat hell. It's beautiful, honey. So soft and clean. So silent and peaceful."

"I hope it snows a lot, honey, then I'll be home as soon as the tunnel is finished, maybe by next Satur-



SWISHA HAPPENINGS

Tonight, Wednesday, July 11, at 7 pm, "BLINGO" is happening at the municipal hall, 48 Rue de l'Eglise, Rapides des Joachims.

What is "BLINGO," you ask? It is Bingo all "blinged out"!

Have a little extra fun with your Bingo fix and jazz yourself up, add all your Vegas bling and come to Swisha for 10 games of "BLINGO."

There are cash prizes for all the games, and a prize for the Best BlingBling Costume. Hope to see you here!

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CROSSWORD

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