

Why you shouldn't call your mom on Mother's Day

Moms are the best but we don't always appreciate that fact, writes James Culic

Next weekend is Mother's Day, and I'm here to tell you why you shouldn't call your mom that day. But first I'm going to tell you about Zack.

I met 13-year-old Zack last week while I was taking some photos at Prom Project, where students can get fitted for some free formal attire to get all done up for their little graduation ceremony dances and whatnot.

While he was getting ready for the photo, I snapped a quick pic of Zack and his mom doing that thing moms do where they fuss over their son's outfit, fixing his hair and sleeves, making minute adjustments to his collar. I dunno what it is about moms and their son's collars but they've always gotta be fiddling and fussing with them. You could have that collar creased to mathematical perfection and your mom will still come over to give it a little straighten and an adjustive tug before you left the house.

After we finished our little photo shoot, Zack asked if I would use the photo of him in his suit looking all cool and Clooney-esque, not the one where his mom was doing her mom thing



JAMES CULIC
Column

with his collar. I said sure, and left the event thinking about how much young men take their moms for granted.

We all do this as young men, and I don't know why. We hate having mom fuss over our outfit, especially on a big day like prom where she goes over everything you're wearing with a fine-toothed comb.

But then one day rolls around, a big day like your wedding, and suddenly your mom isn't there to fuss over your outfit and you start freaking out, wondering if your collar is messed up, and right then you would give anything to have your mom there for just one minute to straighten this blasted bow tie.

My point is that moms are awesome, but as young men we often fail to realize just how immensely awesome our moms really are. By the time we're old



James Culic/Metroland

My mom died a few years ago, and Mother's Day is now a painful annual reminder of her absence.

enough to truly appreciate our moms, we've grown up and moved out and forget to call as much as we should.

You should call your mom every weekend. No matter what, no exceptions. That should be a rule, like you should have to pay a fine or something if you forget to call.

My mom died a couple years ago, and one of the things that still stings after all this time is the inability to just pick up a phone and talk to my mom. We're biologically predisposed to find our mother's voice

soothing, and you'd be shocked how much you miss it when it's gone.

My mom, Judith, was awesome. She juggled raising three kids while also single-handedly managing almost every aspect of my parents' law firm. My dad liked to joke that my mom only needed him for his signature.

My mom was a superhero, and somehow against all the odds, I managed to win the mom lottery twice, because I now have the most wonderful mother-in-law you could possibly ask

for. Few things bring me as much joy as the weekly Sunday lunches at my mother-in-law's place. Except for one Sunday a year: Mother's Day.

I still get bummed out around Mother's Day, thinking about my mom. I do that weird thing we all do when someone dies unexpectedly; I think about the last time we ever spoke, and the last thing I said.

"Bye mom, love you, I'll see you soon," I said before hanging up. I didn't get to see her again, but I was planning to soon. It was al-

most April and Mother's Day was only a few weeks away, and I always went home for Mother's Day to see her.

And you should too if you have a mom. Don't just call your mom that day. Go home and give that woman a hug and let her fuss over your collar.

— James Culic is Niagara This Week's regular weekly columnist and he should have called his mom more often. You can email him at jculic@niagarathis-week.com or yell at him on Twitter @jamesculic.



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NIAGARA'S WORST TOURIST ATTRACTION IS THIS LUDICROUS LIGHTHOUSE

PUBLIC MONEY SHOULDN'T BE SPENT TO BEAUTIFY THE LAKEFRONT VIEW FOR A PRIVATE COMMUNITY, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES
CULIC
Column

The Point Abino Lighthouse is an architecturally beautiful piece of history, sitting along a picturesque peninsula along Niagara's sunny southern coast. It is publicly owned, and more than a million dollars of taxpayer money has been spent to fix it up.

But, you are not allowed to go see it. That privilege is reserved for a select set of very wealthy American homeowners, who live in a private, gated community surrounding the lighthouse.

The decision by the Town of Fort Erie to use public money to purchase and restore a lighthouse that sits inside an upscale American community which doesn't let the general public in, has got to be one of the most baffling things I've ever seen.

The town does operate a set of extremely limited bus tours out to the lighthouse, but the more you dig into that, the more ridicu-

lous it gets.

Twice a month, for just four months during the summer, the bus tour makes two trips to the lighthouse. Each tour is strictly limited to 25 people, which means over the course of the year, only 400 people can take the lighthouse tour. For the right to operate those eight bus tour days, the town pays the homeowner's association \$4,000 annually. Before we go any further, it's worth reiterating what exactly is happening here: Every year the town takes \$4,000 from its hard working public taxpayers, and gives it to a handful of very rich American seasonal cottagers.

Let's assume the tour sells out every single time (which it doesn't, I've taken it twice and both times the bus was half empty) and 25 people are on every bus. That means the town is actually paying \$10 each time someone takes the tour. Think about that for a second: The town is paying people to go see their tourist attraction.

None of that money is being recouped anywhere

along the line either. There is no gift shop, there is no coffee shop, there is nothing but a tourism attraction, which the town's own tourism department has admitted is a money losing operation.

I've pointed out the absurdity of this situation a few times over the years, and when I do, people are always quick to note that the contract does also allow people to walk or bike to the lighthouse, however, that's not really a viable option. The non-bus site visits are only allowed between June 21 and Labour Day (so you're out of luck until next year) and the schedule is very tight. During weekdays there is only a two hour window (3 p.m. to 5 p.m.) and on weekends you can go between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

I decided to see for myself just how impractical this system really is, and the results were even more disappointing than I could have imagined.

To begin with, there's the fact that the lighthouse is located at the farthest and most isolated corner of Fort Erie, so when people say "you can walk or bike there" it's not exactly as easy as it sounds. I set out to bike there from my house in Fort Erie, and the round trip was more than

50 kilometres and took about three hours. I'm in relatively good shape, and I was completely knackered when I got home, so the idea of an elderly person making the 50 kilometre trek out there is fanciful at best.

But I did make it there, only to get stopped at the gate by a very surly man who began screaming at me that I couldn't go in yet. When I got to the gate of the private road leading to the lighthouse, it was about 2:45 p.m. and access to the site was closed until 3 p.m. when the tour bus came back. I asked why, and the guy shouted at me that he didn't have to tell me why. I pointed out the time and said it was almost 3 p.m. and he said he didn't care if it was 2:59 p.m., he still wouldn't let me in.

So I waited till 3 p.m. at which point I thought I would be allowed through the gate and on to the lighthouse, but of course it still wasn't that easy. First I had to sign a long waiver full of legalese and strange rules (I wasn't allowed to take pictures of anything except the lighthouse) and then I had to submit to a search of all my stuff, and let the man at the gate rifle through my backpack. He insisted all this was clearly stated on the town's web-



Torstar File Photo

You can legally access the lighthouse by bike, but it ain't easy.

site (it is not) but I had biked all this way so I reluctantly allowed him to sift through all my stuff.

Once that was done, he handed me a badge I had to wear at all times while inside the gated community (so the rich folks know I'm part of the great unwashed public) and I was on my way, but not before he hollered at me one more time.

"You know," he sneered as I biked past, "you people are lucky we even let you in at all."

Ah yes, "you people," the

plebes, the regular folks who don't own million-dollar lakefront cottages. The hard working people whose tax dollars were stolen to pay for the lighthouse. I can tell you this, I felt a lot of things when he said that, but "lucky" was not one of them.

James Culic is Niagara This Week's regular weekly columnist and he is very bad at taking selfies. Email him at jclic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic.

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It's easier to walk into Mordor than build a condo tower in Niagara

After numerous failed projects, Niagara is fast becoming a place where condo developments go to die, writes James Culic



JAMES CULIC
Column

Hark, the witching hour is nigh, soon, the inky-black shade of night will forever swallow Grimsby. Sunshine will cease to exist as an eternal darkness spreads across the formerly green hills; roaming packs of wolves will reclaim the land for their own and flashlights will become the new currency of a makeshift post-light hell-scape.

What dark forces could bring about such calamity? What possible evil could plunge an otherwise quaint village into the depths of villainy and torment?

An eight-storey condo tower, obviously.

I am of course kidding, but the residents of Grimsby are, unbelievably, not joking around. According

to them, if an eight-storey condo tower is permitted to be built there, it will effectively plunge the town into some kinda Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome situation.

"It will literally block out the sun," said one resident at a recent town hall meeting about the condo. Literally. She literally said that it would "literally block out the sun." That is, literally, the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

Another resident described the condo as "a monolithic wall." The Great Wall of China is 21,000 kilometres and it kept the Mongol hordes at bay for centuries; that's a monolithic wall. This condo tower is gonna be like, 80 feet high and barely occupies three-quarters of an acre. That's not very monolithic. If Gandalf the Grey and the armies of Man and Elves tried to make this condo tower their last

stand, the Orks would overrun them in minutes.

But if an eight-storey condo tower is going to "block out the sun" in Grimsby, then I'm seriously concerned about Fort Erie, where residents are in their own battle over a (brace yourself) 10-storey condo. Presumably, at a titanic 10-storeys high, the sun, stars, and most of the lower stratosphere will be entirely blocked out by this colossal mega tower.

While I've yet to hear any absurd claims about the sun ceasing to exist in Fort Erie, residents there are certainly making their own hyperbolic statements. According to environmental activists in Fort Erie, 15 per cent of all the birds in the area are going to die, because they will fly into the side of the building. I guess that means in downtown Toronto, where they have 100-storey condo towers, birds must be dropping dead from the sky by the billions.

Except they aren't. Because that's not how birds work.

All of this is a bunch of malarkey because none of it is about birds, or blocking out the sun - it's about change. It's about some people who want things to stay exactly how they are



Richard Hutton/Metroland

According to Grimsby residents, building a four-storey condo tower is perfectly acceptable, but eight-storeys will lead to abject chaos.

because they don't want anything to change.

The mayor of Fort Erie, Wayne Redekop, has been having a tough time with the condo tower approval there. The town needs to show that it's open for business, especially after the Bay Beach condo fiasco a few years ago when council made life so difficult for that condo developer that they aborted the entire project at the last minute and walked away. It tarnished the town's reputation and sent a bad signal to the development community that Fort Erie was willing to kill an already approved development, just because a small number of residents didn't like it.

Faced with yet another unpopular condo decision, Redekop voted in favour of allowing the project to proceed, but has remained

sympathetic to the tree huggers who want to preserve the waterfront forest.

"Some people embrace change, and some will always resist it," he said, summing up the entire situation rather succinctly.

And in some ways, I get it. When things change, it can be annoying. I hate when I have to update my cellphone because it moves things around and changes the way things work, and I like how the things on my phone work now. I've clicked "remind me about this update later" on my phone so many times it's ridiculous. I usually put off installing the update on my phone until it stops working and I'm absolutely forced to do it.

And that's where we are at here in Niagara. We have to update our cellphone be-

cause things aren't working anymore. Property taxes are climbing at an unsustainable rate, and we need to grow our tax-base and bring in more residents to spread that tax load around.

Some of you may not like the idea of Toronto-style condo towers dotting our pristine Niagara waterfronts.

But we need growth. And I can assure, even if we build a thousand condo towers, just like Annie said, the sun will come out tomorrow.

— James Culic is Niagara This Week's regular columnist and he probably makes too many Lord of the Rings references. You can email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or find him on twitter @jamesculic.

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