

Street News

Me and my gals

by M. Martin and Janet Elgie



Robert by his constant companions.

Blackie and Page go almost everywhere with Robert. He only leaves them at home if he has to attend an appointment where the dogs would not be allowed in.

If you see Robert, Blackie and Page, stop and say hello and give the dogs a little pat. It will brighten the day for all. ■



This trio is a familiar sight for anyone in the downtown area. This is Robert. His constant companions are Blackie and Page. The dogs are a mixed breed, mainly Yorkshire Terrier. Blackie is Page's mother and they are eleven

and six, respectively. Robert also had Blackie's mother, Zookie, and is hoping that Page can continue the family tree by providing a fourth generation pup.

Robert grew up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the middle child with a younger and older brother. He went to high school at Niagara District High School. While there, he learned to play the trumpet, something he would enjoy still doing if he had access to one. After high school, Robert held a variety of jobs in Niagara-on-the-Lake which included bartending, kitchen work, making window screens and maintenance at The Shaw Festival. He eventually moved to St. Catharines and got Zookie. Blackie followed a few years later.. About a year later, Page was born. She was named Page because she is the next "page" in her family life-line.

Robert lives near the downtown area with Blackie and Page. Blackie is pure black and Page is reddish-brown with a black chest. Both dogs are very friendly and love to receive a pat from passersby.

Robert says that Blackie and Page give him a purpose to live, and I am quite sure that Robert gives Blackie and Page a purpose to live as well. Robert absolutely loves his dogs and his feelings toward them are quite apparent when you see them together. You'll recognize

In Memoriam

THESE PEOPLE WILL BE MISSED THIS CHRISTMAS. THEY WERE SUPPORTERS AND FRIENDS. MAY THEY REST IN PEACE.

Ruth 'Ehl' Eckenswiller
"Jungle Patti"

Lorraine Proulx

Michael Young
Infant son of Rick and Crystal

James Wheaton

G. Samuel Fiander

Douglas Medagee

Matt White

Mike Kroon

Padro Bella

Fred Keller

Vi A. Chambers

David Abbey

Gerald McKinney

Richards Platts

Paul Patterson

Scotty Carpenter

Mary Jane Lastovic

Penny Loff

Mark Loff

Mark Bradley

Glen Brady

Peewee

Eddie Coles

Gerta Smith

Paul Wheeler Sr.

Larry Soleman

Edith Degutis

Laura Simpson

Michael Molnar



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Street News

A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

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Start Me Up Niagara

Working Together...Moving Forward

Working with individuals whose lives have been affected by mental illness, addictions, unemployment and homelessness to develop self sufficiency by providing opportunities to earn income, improve health and integrate into the community.



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Just before Christmas, my five year
old grandson, Jacob, said, Could you
put away all the decorations Dad?
I want Christmas to be over with"

"But why?"
asked his father.

"I'm just so tired
of being good."

- David Griffiths,
St. Catharines
Source,
Readers Digest



Ribbons & Bows & All That Jazz Tips to “De-stress” during the Holidays

by Janet Elgie

Thanks to Start Me Up Niagara for all the wonderful lunches and deserts down at the centre. Thanks to all the people who have made all this possible through their donations of food, time, support and encouragement.

“Wow, what a great group of people.”

“Thanks Tony! Thanks Susan!”

“Thanks to all the Staff & Volunteers”

This is THE HOLIDAY SEASON and all round us is the sound of celebration with layers and layers of stress. It is very important to have a plan of how to handle the stress that arrives with the celebration. I have collected a few ideas of things to do at this time of year that will cost you nothing at all or very little. Celebrate the Holidays the way that is best for you. I invite you to have fun with this list of stress reducers for the silly season. So let's write down on the back of this serviette a few ideas to make this Christmas/Holidays a special time for those of us who squeeze our loonies & toonies...

- √ Make a donation to THE FOOD BANK of one non perishable food item.
- √ Write a poem and give it to someone as a gift.
- √ Remember CHARLES DICKENS wrote with a quill pen.
- √ Join a “LAUGHTER CLUB” or better yet, create one.
- √ Keep reading the COMING EVENTS of activities offered in the community.
- √ Enjoy your VOLUNTEERING especially at this festive time of year.
- √ Sign a piece of ART... that you created.
- √ Listen to your FAVOURITE MUSIC.
- √ Go to A POETRY READING.
- √ Sing or hum a song and write your own lyrics.
- √ Write a thank you note & deliver it with A SMILE.
- √ Keep your schedule AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE!!!
- √ Remember to say “NO” when you believe it is the right thing to do.
- √ Get a pair of warm gloves & a scarf

for yourself.

- √ Browse through a Holiday Magazine at the library.
- √ Window shop so to enjoy the arts and it will not cost you a dime.
- √ Read up on how to care for a poinsettia & be in the know.
- √ SLOW DOWN when the rest of the world is in a rush.
- √ Turn the lights down in the evening and listen to the snow falling.
- √ Get on the bus one night and see all the gorgeous Holiday lights.
- √ Be silly once in a while, it is good for the spirit.
- √ Just be you. We like you just the way you are. ■



**Relax
Unwind
Slow down
Take it easy
Put your feet up
Here comes Christmas
!!!!**

Merry Christmas Around the World and Peace to All

Merry Christmas – *English*
Joyeux Noël – *French*
Buon Natale – *Italian*
Fröhliche Weihnachten- *German*
Feliz Navidad – *Spanish*
Mitho Makosi Kesikansi – *Cree*
Kuvianak Inovia – *Inuktitut*
Nollaig shona duit – *Irish Gaelic*
Nollaig chridheil – *Scottish Gaelic*
Naddig llawen – *Welsh Gaelic*
God jul – *Norwegian & Swedish*
Gledileg jol – *Icelandic*
Bonen Kristnaskon – *Esperanto*
Natale hilare – *Latin*
Mele Kalikimaka – *Hawaiian*
Kala Christovhena – *Greek*
Qismas Dativvaj – *Klingon*



Where have all the Doctors Gone

by Paul Shtogryn

During the city election campaign only one candidate that I know of was seeking new recruitments for new doctors in the city. I, myself, just lost my family doctor of 31 years and was very fortunate enough to get a new doctor in five minutes.

There was a walk-in clinic in St. Catharines that closed simply because not enough doctors could be found to work there. Many homeless persons in this city do not have a family doctor. There is not even a street nurse.

Did you know that millions of Canadians don't have a family doctor? There is no adolescent mental health facility in the Niagara Region so our youth have to travel to Chedoke, in Hamilton, to get service.

If what happened at Dawson College in Montreal, Tabor, Alberta, or Columbine was to happen here they would be caught with their pants down because they don't even have enough mental health counsellors to treat kids and that would be the first thing that they would need. They would have to import mental health workers from Burlington, Oakville and maybe even Mississauga, in order to treat traumatized kids.

Peter Kormos has wanted an adolescent centre in Niagara since three teenagers committed suicide in Welland. There was no facility in the Niagara Region. Politicians think that if Hamilton has it, this area is automatically covered. Since when has Hamilton been part of this community?

Yet, on the radar screen, our most vulnerable citizens and the mentally ill are affected by this and are ignored. Health care is still the number one issue for Canadians. You are going to see even more family doctors retire in the future and no new ones are coming along to replace them.

It doesn't seem that people running this city are up to the times. They are forgetting about the homeless, many of whom suffer from mental health issues.

City officials need to continue to find more family doctors, provide medical outreach services for the homeless and adequate mental health support for adolescents. ■

**Always laugh
when you can.
It is cheap
medicine...
Lord Byron**



Looking for a Family Physician?

The following Doctors are accepting new patients November, 2008

St. Catharines

Dr. Wong 905-937-0000

Dr. K. Atkins 905-323-9765

Thorold

Dr. Sadek 905-680-9703

Welland

Dr. Kundi 905-735-1121

Niagara Falls

Urgent Care Clinic 905-371-1881

You can also get an up-to-date

listing by calling

905 684-7271 ext. 44773

Bi-Polar Disorder

by Paul Shtogryn

Over the May weekend, I met someone who seemed familiar. As it turns out, I once went to school with his uncle and knew his family. "John" (not his real name) is a Métis (French/Aboriginal mix). He had a troubled youth that included drugs, jail time, and a brief marriage that resulted in two children.

John suspected that he had a mental health issue, but didn't know to what extent. He is very familiar with Homewood Health Centre, in Guelph, St. Joe's, in Hamilton, and Club 16 here (similar to A.A.) Having personal experience with mental illness, I showed him one of my articles. He was grateful to meet a "survivor".

After 10 years of unofficial diagnoses, John has finally been officially diagnosed as bi-polar. He may be entitled to a \$30,000 compensation package, but does not believe that he is capable of handling it in his present state. John is on ODSP, receiving \$1,200 a month.

I visited John's apartment and met his kitten. John is familiar with Tony and the Start Me Up Niagara program. John is highly creative and artistic and there is artwork in his apartment that would have been perfect for the former Work Action Centre. He has a computer, and wants to enrol in a course at Start Me Up Niagara.

John is 40 this year and is in good physical shape. You would never know that he had a mental health issue.

Bi-polar is incurable, but it is treatable. Many people have many mental and/or physical disorders, yet lead productive and normal lives. Bi-polar is just one of them.

Between his course, his art, a proper diagnosis and his compensation package, I am hoping for good things for John – and for all who suffer from mental and/or physical disorders, but still have the courage to carry on in daily life. ■

The Great Outdoors: Part II - From Tics to Bedbugs

By Robert and Tonya

We went from the peacefulness of the woods to the chaos of the city. It was a big change.

We now realize how much we took for granted, the serenity that we had found rough'n it. When Bobby and I realized that summer was coming to an end, (the nights were starting to get chilly.) we realized it was time to make a move.

Unfortunately we moved to a big hotel downtown into a small room with bed bugs. The hotel was full of addicts and drugs. We went from ticks to bed bugs and the drugs came knocking at our door as we relapsed.

It was a roof over our heads but it was as they say in AA, people, places and things.

Being in the environment almost killed



us both. In recovery Bobby and I seldom even disagree.

Through the help of Kyle at Start Me Up Niagara, we learned about Discretionary Benefits.

If your living conditions are very bad, Ontario Works will cut you a cheque the same day you find a new apartment.

Bobby and I found a really nice apartment almost immediately, and at the same time

we plunged head first into recovery. At the same time we got a phone call, that his daughter Dawn was coming to live with us. She is recovering from open heart surgery due to drug abuse as well. She is doing miraculously well.

All three of us are clean and sober and loving it. One day at a time.

But for the grace of God, we will all continue on this wonderful journey of sobriety.

We upgraded to a really nice 2 bedroom apartment and the three of us have formed a nice tight little family.

We watch a lot of movies, do art, read and Bobby's starting his wood-working again.

I feel that we're all going to make it. God Bless! Part III next issue.

Appreciation Dinner October 29th, 2008

Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) held its First Annual Donor Appreciation Dinner, Wednesday, October 29th at SMUN's Drop-In Action Centre at 95 Church Street in St. Catharines.

Dinner was donated and prepared by volunteer chef, Angus Stubbart.

Among invited guests attending was Mayor Brian McMullan, who offered grace at dinner.

Start Me Up Niagara works with people who are marginalized and assists them to improve their quality of life. 'Working Together...Moving Forward'.

Supporters of SMUN include local

businesses and individuals as well as funding agencies and representatives from three levels of government.

Everyone at this dinner contributes in some way to supporting the goals and philosophy of Start Me Up Niagara whether its donating the bread and food served at the Drop In Centre to the funds required to support the wide variety of programs offered.

Start Me Up Niagara is grateful to everyone for their support.

Photos, counter-clockwise from bottom left: Angus, Donna and Faye; Tony and Lara; Kim and Jopie; Barney, Cheryl, Liz, Melissa, Ken, Lil and John; Mayor McMullan; Catharine and Ellen: Susan



And the Poetry

Congratulations to the Winners and everyone who participated in the Start Me Up Niagara Street Poetry Contest. You are all winners. We look forward to publishing the submissions that will appear in the SMUN Poetry Anthology. The Street Poetry Project was generously supported through the United Way of St. Catharines Innovation Fund.

First Place

Rainbow for Single Daisy

Second Place

Janet Elgie for Lake Erie

Third Place

Sheldon Reddy for On the Street
and
MIDC for dragon me down

Best Humorous Poem

Chris Taylor for An Ode to A Village Gossip
and
A Man with No Gumption

Runner up to the best Humorous Poem

Ken Robertson for The Street

Best Historic Poem

Elena Reyes for Irish Mary

Honourable Mentions

Paul Shtogryn for Homeless and Alone
Athena Opa for Shelter Please
Brian Lawrence for Pride
Eugene Price for Sometimes the Hills
Martine Sinclair for Wings of Hope
Nicole Webster for Hard Pills

Single Daisy

By Rainbow

Single daisy, fully blown
this is the way that it has grown
no other plant but grass grows here
there are no other daisies near
and yet, it flourishes alone
single daisy
profound the lesson it has shown
my inner self to be made known
I will no longer nourish fear
but from the daisy take my tone
the Trickster Gift is mine to own
for this depression's much too drear
I choose to set my face to cheer
to rainbow's glow from monotone
single daisy

Lake Erie

By Janet Elgie

Mist in the cleavage of the horizon
Waves crashing up onto the shore

Glossy wet playful pebbles
Cousins of the sand
Glossy one moment
Matte in time.

Mist in the closet of the horizon
Waves crashing up into the shore

Freedom embracing our spirit
Each unique in our own way
Ripples of silk glass...
To the beat of the drum.

Mist in the sunset
Waves crashing up off the shore

Winners are...

dragon me down

by MIDC

from Sun up 2 sundown
the weight I carry
like a two ton pound
boundaries stretching
losing ground.
must carry on
for my night
is at its apex
the dragon,
it is stalking me
no where to hide
till I slay this dragon
I can never be me.
2-4-6-8 points
what has become of me.
2-4-6-8 years
running out of time.
where will I be
if the dragon catches me

On the Street

by Sheldon Reddy

I'm on the street early
Very early
Dawn just kissed dusk goodbye
Is slowly approaching
Hiding behind some bushes
Curious rays of sunshine
Tickle and chase down
The street awakens

It's so still and quiet
No telephones ringing
no car horns blowing
No dogs barking
Bonding with nature

Notice the black cat
Sitting on the curb
Like a statue
Black coat shining
Amber eyes glistening

I know
I'm not alone

An Afternoon at the Blue Moon

Thank you to Irene Motz at the Blue Moon at 385 St. Paul Street, for hosting our Poetry Reading event on September 30th. This beautiful and somewhat bohemian venue was perfect for our first ever performance. We were happy to have over 20 people in attendance to enjoy the readings of our poets. We were especially pleased to have Nancy and Mariea in attendance, representing United Way of St. Catharines. If you wish to book the Blue Moon for an event just call Irene at 905-685-5402. She'll take good care of you.



Clockwise from top left; Rainbow, group shot, Janet and Marie, Nancy and Mariea (United Way), Chris., Bill, Terrance and SMUN Poets, Sheldon and Paul

Mary's Journey

as told to Janet Elgie



Mary comes from Nova Scotia. She lived in Sudbury for 17 years and where she met her husband, Allan in a local pub.

In 1984, Mary arrived in St. Catharines. She remembers selling her gold chain at a pawn shop in order to have cash for a room.

Mary moved often, saying she had to deal with the worst landlords imaginable. She went on to say in some there were no laundry facilities, in one the bathroom was condemned. Apparently one landlord was supposed to supply a new toilet – which he left sitting in her living room. Then there was the house next door that went up in flames at 3:00 a.m. Suddenly, Mary found herself homeless through no fault of her own. A home one day, and homeless the next. It can happen to anyone.

Mary walked the streets for three months

at one point, and is still grateful to the soup kitchen that fed her.

On September 13, 2006, Mary collapsed and became paralyzed. Already aware of how quickly one's life can change, she was terrified. Mary told me she was diagnosed with a muscle virus so rare that only five people in Ontario – including Mary – had it.

Mary knows hospitals. She was in the General for two months and the Shaver for eight. She spent day after day wondering what the future would bring.

Today, Mary has progressed to a wheelchair and electric scooter. She lives in an accessible building with a laundry facility on the same floor. She keeps busy caring for her dog, Dudley, and investigating new restaurants and businesses.

“I enjoyed bringing Mary to the Start Me Up Drop In Centre at 95 Church St. where we are now working on a better access ramp.”

Mary takes delight in knowing what is going on in the city – and if it is wheelchair accessible. She has also been a member of the Legion Badge 24 for eighteen years.

Mary says that “everyone has a handicap; they just don't know what it is.” She points out that no one who has not been on the streets themselves could possibly know what it feels like, or what a homeless person has to go through.

Mary has come a long way. She has an

energy and enthusiasm for life that is revealed by a grin that lights up the sky.

Mary is enrolled in the Skills of Success program that offers thirty hours of life skills training to women, giving them a base for achieving self-sufficiency. This is offered through Bethlehem Housing Projects and is held in the common room of Genesis Court on James Street. The email is lisabethlehem@cogeco.net.

Mary is a survivor. It is a pleasure to know her.

In loving memory of Allan Brand

Who passed away October 22, 2005

by Janet Elgie

Angels glide
With the silky breeze
Perched in peace

&

Tranquility
On the white gates of memory
Remembering
Our time shared together

I miss you

It is as simple as that.

You & I

We found our greatest treasure.

Together forever

In the palm of a sunset

Love letters on the rocky beach

In the hands of prayer

God needed a rebel

He got the best.

As angels glide.

Loving you always

Mary and Dudley

Both Sides of the Fence

by Anonymous

I had to leave my apartment September 18, 2006. I went to the YWCA September 20, 2006. I found an apartment with another girl from the “Y” and then after one month she refused to pay anymore.

There I go again, furniture into storage and then the fun began. I found myself sleeping on church floors as a homeless person. I never thought it would happen to me, but it did. I remember my first night going to the church for supper

and to sleep. I don't scare easily but I was scared that first night. But I found some really good people there and they helped me stay away from some of the people that I really should stay away from. Most of the people in “Out of the Cold” aren't bad people. Some choose that way of life but I didn't.

I had quite a few “run ins” with well meaning people who thought they were helping me. They wanted me to get rid of my car to supposedly help pay for rent. I told them, in no uncertain terms, that that was not going to happen. I still have my car today. Just as “Out of the Cold” was ending, the person who told me to get rid of my car put me into the “Y” in the Falls. I found out I couldn't stay there because of my stay in the

other “Y”. I ended up in a group home for the mentally challenged and stayed there for three months until my Niagara Regional Housing came through. In the meantime, I found out about Start Me Up Niagara's computer course.

That was two years ago.

After all I went through, I now know both sides of the fence. I will tell anyone who will listen that if not for “Out of The Cold”, Susan Venditti, Start Me Up Niagara and Dave the computer guy, I would have been lost. Those two programmes do an awful lot for a lot of people who are in need.

We could do with a lot more of these types of programmes in this country, and more funding for them.

I will always be grateful. ■

Ooooh! The Flu!

By Rainbow

My voice comes out more like a wheeze,
I'm stopping frequently to sneeze,
I stamp my feet before they freeze,
I think I have the Flu!

I hate this grey, I hate this snow,
I hate these chilly winds that blow,
these icicles that slowly grow,
I don't know what to do!

I see the frost when someone talks,
I fall on slippery sidey-walks,
my best friend is my kleenex box
I want a sky that's blue!

I'm sorry if I'm sounding mean,
I just want out of this whole scene,
I'm longing for a place that's green-
at least I still have you...ka-choo!



**Blessed
are those
who can
laugh at
themselves,
for they
shall never
cease to be
amused...
Anonymous**



The Shop-Keepers Tree

by Janet Elgie

Glittering silver satin angel
Tip of the top of the tree
Woven white wicker ornaments
Flickering indigo lanterns of mini
Dented red kettles on the edge of eve
Bold burgundy bows bent brilliantly
Frosted leather lace sapphire harps
On the wings of each bouncing branch
Cascading milky-white frosted lace
Velvet peacocks in uniform with cape
Cuffed in generous
Logs of lumber-jack garland
His whiskers gone wild into bushy beard
Iridescent in the core of time
Celebrating with you
My unique friends
Reindeer Renaissance Christmas

A joke is a very serious thing... *Winston Churchill*

PRIDE

by B. Lawrence

I have sacrificed a lot in my life
Family, friends, my dignity
All for one simple reason
Why? My Pride

I've seen more than anyone should
ever have to,
I've been there for more people than
should need to,
I've tried to be someone to talk to and
give support.
Why? Our Pride

I have left jobs, shelters and refused
help
because there are so many who need
it more
Why? My Pride

Now, I've given in and I'm receiving
help
I have new friends, I try to give back to
the community
and I still have My Pride. But I Cry...

Mother's Lament

He says things are falling apart
Work, health, friends.
it's everyone else's fault.

I feel he's creating his own mess
Booze, drugs: its making big holes
in his energy field
Letting in so much junk.
People and their addictions
So much time and energy seems
to be stolen from the people
around them.
Life goes on...



A New Day

by Sheldon Reddy

The streetlights shine like candles
With all the rain that's pouring down
And throughout the early hours
There's not a soul to roam this town
As the store are closed like shutters
Each sidewalk rolled up and put away
Till the early opening hours
When they present the coming day
As then, each face will carry happiness
Like all the stars that fill the sky
And the doors will welcome sunshine
To light the hearts
That pass them by
Leaving street denizens entirely alone
Overlooked by one and all, entirely invisible
Undesirable by a society that supposedly cares
Shunned by elected officials supposed to represent
But in the end, facing the brunt of resentment
Just another lonely day upon the streets
Searching for more than just one's self
For reality's harshness shines way too bright
Just biding the time to seek a solitary shelter
Away from humanity, being tucked away in darkness
Praying to survive another cold and lonely night
To begin the cycle again, as a new day dawns...

GMC and United Way Van Goes Camping

Early September, Tony organized a camping trip to Grundy Lake. All returned tanned and renewed. Contrary to rumours, the fish remained in Grundy Lake.

Happy Campers from left to right; Rob, Mark, Tony, Eugene, Corey and Brian



**Growing old is
mandatory;
growing up
is optional...**
*Barbara
Johnson*

Sometimes the holidays are not all they are cracked up to be. Need to talk? Call the Distress Centre 905 688-3711. Every day 24 hours.



SUBMIT



Do you have a story to tell?
Do you want to contribute to
your community paper?
Contact Start Me Up Niagara
for more details
288 St. Paul Street, 3rd Floor
905-984-5310
Or, better yet, come to the
meetings, Mondays, 12:30

Personal Hygiene & Food Safety Tips

by Chris Taylor

Recently, I participated in a “Food Safety Training Certificate Course”. It changed the way I think about food and its proper handling and storage.

This is important, as the young, the elderly, and those with a compromised immune system face special risks.

Hand washing is the simplest, most consistent method of preventing cross contamination between foods, and the transfer of disease from one person to another. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with hot water and soap and use hand sanitizers occasionally as well.

Store your raw foods under cooked foods to prevent cross contamination, and your dry foods at least 6 inches off the floor.

Cook hot foods to the proper internal temperature, which is usually at least 60°C/140°F. This is very important, as improper temperature causes most food-based blood poisonings.

Do not keep raw meat, poultry or seafood at room temperature for more than 1 hour, and prepare small batches of food at a time.

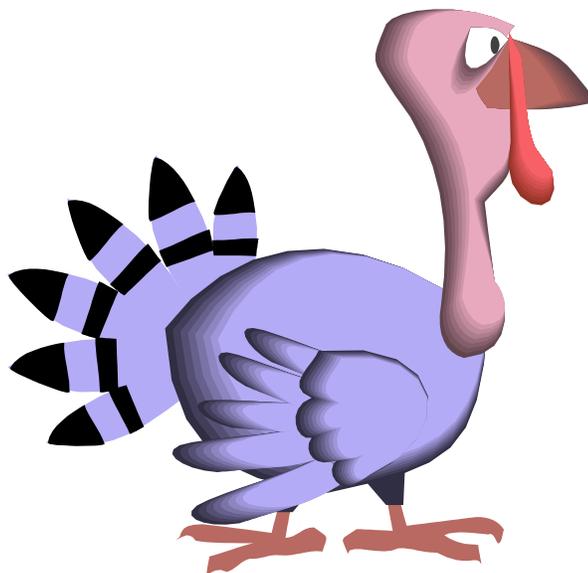
Defrost in fridge, under continuous running water or in microwave defrost cycle. Refreeze only if ice crystals are still present. Use the item within 2 days.

Cross contamination can transfer from food to food, from an infected person to food, from contaminated equipment to food, and from using the same cutting board for raw meat and other foods without washing it thoroughly with soap and water between foods.

Food safety is important because your health is important. Use a metal stem probe thermometer to check internal heat – they aren't that expensive and one might just save your life. Simply washing your hands will help.

Easy Turkey or Chicken Pot Pie

How to dispose of left over turkey and chicken in a tasty fashion.



Ingredients

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 2/3 cup frozen mixed veggies, thawed | 1 cup chopped cooked potatoes, optional. |
| 1 cup cooked turkey or chicken | 1 cup bisquick |
| 1 -10 oz can condensed cream of chicken soup | 1/2 cup milk |
| | 1 egg |
- Salt and pepper from the mill to taste

Preheat oven 400 degrees, stir vegetables and soup together. Spoon into ungreased 9” pie plate. Stir remaining ingredients until blended. Pour Bisquick mixture over turkey and vegetables in pie plate. Bake 30 minutes or until golden brown.

You can even use pork, ham, roast beef. What ever you have on hand. Use other cream soups like cream of celery, mushroom, asparagus, for different tastes. Let your imagination be you guide. Serves 6.

Start Me Up Niagara

288 St. Paul Street 3rd. Floor
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Is Access to Housing a Human Right?

By Angela L. Browne

Tenants are primarily protected by two pieces of legislation in Ontario. One is the Residential Tenancies Act, R. S. 2006, c. 17, and the Human Rights Code, R. S. O. 1990, c. 19 (as amended in 2007). First, the Residential Tenancies Act sets out the rules on how landlords and tenants interact, how much a landlord can raise rent on an annual basis, what each party's rights and obligations are to one another and what steps a party can take if they feel the other has breached their obligations. Disputes of this nature are heard before the Landlord and Tenant Board, which is a specialized tribunal that hears these types of cases. Decisions arising from this tribunal are equal to that of a court and can only be appealed on law or mixed law and fact to the Ontario Divisional Court if the tribunal makes an unfair decision.

The Human Rights Code is a different type of legislation. It is often referred to as being quasi-constitutional, because it has primacy (or an over-riding interest) over most legislation governing services, employment, contracts, housing, union or association membership, among other areas. That means when the Landlord and Tenant Board makes a decision about a tenant's tenancy, the Human Rights Code must be taken into consideration. The adjudicator (which is like a judge at this tribunal) can decide to delay or deny an eviction in certain cases if he or she feels that although under normal circumstances the eviction would have been granted, in these circumstances procedural fairness and the Code are factors.

For example, in *Walmer Developments v Wolch* [2003] O. J. No. 3435, 67 O. R. (3d) 246 (Div. Ct.), the tenant disturbed other residents in her building when she went off her medication. However,

after several notices to terminate were served on her by her landlord, her family intervened. The landlord obtained an order to evict; however, the tenant appealed the matter to Divisional Court. The Court stated the adjudicator had the obligation to consider the Code in any circumstances involving a potential eviction. The duty only extends to undue hardship, as shown in the case of *Canadian Mental Health Association v Warren* [2004] O.J. No. 2487 (Div. Ct.), where a tenant tried to appeal an eviction based on the *Wolch* case above, citing that consideration should have been made with respect to his disability; however, it was determined at the court level that accommodations have been made for the tenant's disability and the eviction for impairment of safety stood.

How about getting an apartment? What rights do prospective tenants have? First, s. 2 (1) of the Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination with respect to occupancy of accommodation ... because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability or the receipt of public assistance. A landlord cannot deny a tenant housing solely because they are receiving ODSP or because of a disability. Sometimes this type of discrimination is subtle, such as a landlord only agreeing to rent to you if you get ODSP to pay him or her directly.

Sometimes a policy may exist that may appear not to discriminate deliberately, but in practice, it harms a protected group of people, such as persons with disabilities or persons receiving public assistance. A landlord, for example, may have a policy that the rent they are charging must not exceed 30% of the prospective tenant's income. In *Kearney v Bramalea Ltd.* [1998] O. H. R. B. I. D. No. 21 (Ont. Bd. Inquiry), the Commission's then Board of Enquiry ruled that it was illegal to have such a policy. The Ontario Government passed a regulation in 1998 that now permits landlords to conduct credit, rental history

and reference checks on prospective tenants, as a part of the application process.

Only with this above information can a landlord ask the tenant for income information and use it to determine collectively, with all other information, as to their suitability as a tenant. However, if all of this information is requested and only income information can be provided (for example, if there is no credit history or prior landlord), then income information can be used to determine the person's suitability as a tenant. However, a landlord cannot deny the unit solely because the tenant receives public assistance (see O. Reg. 290/98). A landlord can also ask the tenant to obtain a guarantor for the rent, meaning they may ask you to get a friend or relative to co-sign for the apartment in the event there is a failure to pay rent.

In the case of public assistance, if a tenant gets a landlord to sign an Intent to Rent Form and the welfare worker later phones the landlord to learn that the landlord is expecting first and last month's rent, but welfare will only cover the first month, the landlord cannot arbitrarily deny the unit to that tenant. Even though it is legal for a landlord to ask for first and last month's rent, this policy can disproportionately affect welfare recipients (see *Garbett v Fisher* – 1996 – No. 12 – Ont. Bd. Inquiry). Fortunately today, most people can access some help for this from Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB).

Please note the rules are different for social housing, which is governed by the Social Housing Reform Act where rents are set in accordance to your income. In one case, *Innes v Caroline Cooperative Homes Inc.* 2006 CarswellOnt 9316, 2006 HRTO 19, 57 C. H. H. R. D/1 (Ont. Human Rights Trib.), it was decided that housing co-operatives must treat the income of its members in the same way, whether they get their income from social assistance or working. They also must be treated the same way, regardless of the source of their subsidy. For example, a co-operative administrator cannot charge



The New Guy

Start Me Up Niagara has a new staff member, Kyle Kuzyk. If you've been homeless and are housed and need some help to stay housed call Kyle 905-984-5310 x 20. Breaking the cycle is possible.

Access to Housing continued

a working person only 30% of their net income for a rent-geared-to-income unit, then bill a person on ODSP the full \$445 per month of their shelter benefit, as this is not equal treatment.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission recently published a consultation report on Human Rights and Housing, which is an attempt to update its policies on accommodation issues. This report can be found at: [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/housingconsultationreportontheCommission's website](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/discussion_consultation/housingconsultationreportontheCommission's%20website).

Angela Browne is a licensed paralegal with a specialization in landlord and tenant, human rights, disability, labour and benefits tribunal law. She can be reached at (905) 688-5598, or by e-mail at ceo@legaladvocacy.ca.

This article in itself cannot be construed to be legal advice. For specific situations, it is best to contact a legal professional for an opinion that applies specifically to you. ■

Buddy the Cat

by Maria Sider

We got Buddy the cat when his name was still Tiny. Now Buddy is over a year old. He hasn't changed much, except that I got him fixed. Now he's lazy and fat. He even lays down to eat instead of standing!

Buddy knows how to turn the lights on and off. He gives kisses when he wants treats. He sits on the desk to watch the television. He even turns the clocks ahead, so I'll never be late for anything! He has a mouse he plays with. He even has a cat bed – but he never sleeps in it anymore. Buddy prefers the floor, where its cool, or the bed, or chair. Maybe the other cat will use the bed; her name is Baby.

Everybody who visits loves Buddy. They say he is cute. But they don't have to live with him!

I've taken pictures of Buddy, trying to find a good one for the Street News – and (see picture) here he is!

I got a babysitter one night. Buddy kept them up all night – he turned the converter on with his paws and decided to watch T.V.! ■

Heeeeeeeeeere's Buddy!



"All of my family is big boned"

That's My Poor Cat Ben

by Chris Taylor

I have paper and pen in hand
To rebuke the remarks made about Ben
They say he's so large and looks like a barge
That's my poor cat Ben

People giggle and stare
And say he looks like a pear
He takes all the blows
With his confidence low
That's my poor cat Ben

I will admit he has a slight waddle
When down the hall he toddles
He makes for a peculiar sight
With his hips swinging left and right
That's my poor cat Ben

Oh look at him so fat and stout
Lord knows how the poor thing gets about
His corset's so snugly tight
He looks like a duchess not a tomcat with might
That's my poor cat Ben

Now folks there has been many great men
When I think about my cat Ben
Sir Winston Churchill comes to mind
With his stomach and portly behind
That's my poor cat Ben.

(I still love you Ben!)

SPECIAL HOLIDAY EVENTS – NO COST

DATE	TIME	EVENT	SPONSOR	ADDRESS	NOTES
Dec 4	7 pm	Dinner	AIDS Niagara	111 Church St	Members only
Dec 11	10 - 1	Luncheon	Women4Women	124 QueenstonSt	Women only
Dec 11	6 pm	Tea/party	Women4Women	124 Queenston St	Women only
Dec 13	10 am	Groceries	McFrugals	353 St. Paul St.	Ham, veggies
Dec 15	10 - 4	Open House	AIDS Niagara	111 Church St	Open House
Dec 18	3 - 5:30	Dinner	Salvation Army	Westminster Church	All
Dec 24	11 - 12	Lunch	Ozanam Centre	235 Church St	All
Dec 25	12 - 5	Dinner	Stella's Restaurant	45 James Street	All
Dec 25	4 - 6	Dinner	Joey's Only	318 Ontario St.	Taxi from Booth Centre
Dec 27	1 - 6	Dinner/party	C.A.W. Hall	124 Bunting Rd.	Continuous buses from Booth Centre & Comm. Care

Out of the Cold St. Catharines runs its regular schedule

Start Me Up Niagara Centre open regular hours ; Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays

Start Me Up Niagara Office closed December 24 - 26, December 31 to January 2, 2009

Salvation Army closed Dec 24- Jan 3. Van will run Dec 23 & 30, resume regular hours Jan 6, 2009.

Ozanam closed December 25 & 26 and January 1, 2009

CMHA, Community Care & Housing Help Centre close noon Dec. 24 & closed Dec 25,26 & Jan 1

Breakfast Club - St. George's Church will run its regular schedule

Hostels open regular hours

St. Catharines

OUT OF THE COLD

November 1 to March 31

6:00 p.m.

Hot Meal / Overnight Shelter

Sunday Night	First United Church	95 Church St.
Monday Night	Silver Spire United Church	366 St. Paul St.
Tuesday Night	Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Catherine	67 Church St.
Wednesday Night	First United Church	95 Church St.
Thursday Night	St. Alfred's Roman Catholic Church	272 Vine St.
Friday Night	Knox Presbyterian Church	53 Church St.
Saturday Night	Queen Street Baptist Church	57 Queen St.

Out of the Cold (905) 984-4223 or (905) 641-2249 Homelessness Outreach (905) 984-8649



Emergency Resources

Shelters Homeless outreach 905-984-8649 9a.m.-9p.m.

EMERGENCY SHELTERS	PHONE	ADDRESS	BEDS	HOURS	RESTRICTIONS (Age, sex, addiction, etc.)
Abbey House	905-684-9736	115 Dufferin Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 2A2	8	24hrs	females and females with children; 8 weeks clean
HOPE House	905-734-8492 905-734-8302	116 Division Street Welland, ON L3B 3Z9	21	24hrs	accommodate men, women & families; no alcohol or drugs
Nightlight Youth Shelter	905-358-3678	5207 Victoria Avenue, Niagara Falls, ON L2E 4E4	10	24hrs	males and females, ages 16 - 30; no alcohol or drugs
The RAFT	905-984-4365	17 Centre Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 3A6	16	24hrs	males and females, ages 16 - 24; no alcohol or drugs
Salvation Army Booth Centre	905-684-7813 905-684-7990	184 Church Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 3E7	22	24hrs	males only, ages 19 and older; no alcohol or drugs
Southridge	905-682-2477	201 Glenridge Avenue St. Catharines, ON L2R 3G8	35	24hrs	males and females; no alcohol or drugs
YWCA St. Catharines	905-988-3528	183 King Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 3G8	28	24hrs	females and females with children; no alcohol or drugs
YWCA Niagara Falls	904-357-9191	6135 Culp Street Niagara Falls, ON L2G 2B6	20	24hrs	females and females with children; no alcohol or drugs
SPECIALIZED SHELTERS	PHONE	ADDRESS	BEDS	HOURS	RESTRICTIONS (Age, sex, addiction, etc.)
CMHA Safe Beds	905-684-7271, ext. 43230	15 Wellington Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 5P7	7	24 hrs	must be referred from hospital's community crisis care or mental health agency; 3 to 5 day stay; ages 16 and up; no alcohol or drugs
Men's Detox	905-682-7211	10 Adams Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 2V8	18	24 hrs	men only; no alcohol, drugs or smoking
Women's Detox	905-687-9721	6 Adams Street St. Catharines, ON L2R 2V8	12	24 hrs	women only; no alcohol, drugs or smoking
Women's Place (St. Catharines & District)	905-684-8331	P.O. Box 1387, St. Catharines, ON L2R 7J8	24	24 hrs	females and females with children; at risk of violence, no alcohol or drugs

Meals

Salvation Army Booth Centre 184 Church Street	Daily 8:00am, 12:30pm, 5:15pm	\$2.50-\$3.00
St. George's Breakfast Program 83 Church Street	Daily 7:30am-8:30am	no cost
RAFT (ages 16-24) 172 Church Street	Daily 6:30pm-8:00pm	no cost
Ozanam Centre 235 Church Street	Monday-Friday 11:30am-1pm	\$1.00
Start Me Up Niagara 95 Church Street	Saturday, Sunday 11:15am-1:00pm	no cost
Out of the Cold	See schedule - 6:00p.m.	no cost

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THANK YOU. Please make cheques payable to:
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St. Catharines, ON L2R 3M9 (905) 984-5310



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