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Durham Region Community Publication

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Winter 2018

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From the Publisher

Christmas is almost here! Okay, depending on when you are reading my letter, it may be just around the corner, or have already passed. Assuming you are reading this letter before Christmas, then we've got two articles for you that are must-reads for the holidays. The first article has to do with gift cards. Are you a gift card giver, or do you avoid gift cards like the plague? Well, if you fall into the latter category, then flip over to page 24 and check out why you ought to give gift cards a chance this season. There are lots of reasons they make great gifts for your loved ones and I hope after reading Suffia Malik's article you're convinced too.

The other article that is a must-read is written by Catherine Davis. Catherine is a professional organizer in Durham Region and she shares her expert tips for dealing with an overload of toys in your house. I'm sure any parent can relate to the mountain of toys that slowly start to build up in their house over the years. This toy mountain will only get bigger once Christmas hits, so before that happens, consider reading and putting into practice some of Catherine's suggestions. You can check out her article, *Taming Toy Mountain* on page 13 of the magazine.

Now, if you happen to stumble across our magazine and Christmas has already passed, then Jeff Meiusi's article may be of interest. Jeff is a real estate agent who helps homeowners decide if they should renovate their house (or not) before they sell it. The decision to do so is not as clear cut as you may think as many factors come to into play. You can find his informative article, *To Renovate or Not to Renovate* on page 19.

In other news, we are still on the lookout for an ambitious and diligent young teen or tween to take over our teen column, so if anyone is interested in this amazing opportunity, please email our editor Wendy.

I hope you enjoy reading our Winter 2018 issue. Feel free to share your thoughts on it. You can connect with us through our website www.thelocalbizmagazine.ca and Facebook page. (P.S. Don't forget to also check out what our bloggers are up to online.)

Merry Christmas and All The Best for a Wonderful 2019!

Antoine Elhashem
Publisher

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From the Editor

The birth of a baby should be a joyous occasion. You've been waiting 40 weeks (give or take) for your little bundle of joy to make its entrance into the world and the day has finally arrived! Of course, that's how the typical course of events normally go. But when you have a preemie (premature) baby, the normal course of events don't apply, and life as you know it gets turned upside down.

In simplest terms, a preemie baby is a baby who is born before its estimated due date. However, there's different levels of prematurity. Extremely preterm babies are born at or before 25 weeks of pregnancy; very preterm babies are born at less than 32 weeks of pregnancy, moderately preterm are born between 32 and 34 weeks of pregnancy and late preterm are born between 34 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. The earlier a baby is born, the more risk there is of the baby having medical complications. The earlier a baby is born, also guarantees that the baby and their parents will be spending the first few days, weeks, and maybe even months of the baby's life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

My twins were born at 27 weeks gestation and spent the first 3 months of their lives in the NICU. They are now 1 year old and thriving, but if I rewind the clock to a year ago, it was a very different story. I remember vividly the moment I was told I was going into labour, dread not joy was my initial feeling. Every possible thing that I was told could go wrong with my babies entered my mind. It wasn't their time I thought, but apparently it was.

When I delivered them, they were whisked away from me, put in a plastic bag of sorts and wires seemed to protrude from every inch of them. It was not the sight I expected to see. When I laid eyes on them for the first time, I remember thinking that they weren't ready yet for this world; they needed more time in me, more time to develop and get strong.

The long months following their birth were spent within the walls of the NICU. Every little milestone was HUGE. IV removed? Breathing without the help of a machine? After many, many setbacks, finally, yes! Feeding tube moved from mouth to nose? Check! Breastfeeding? We're finally allowed to attempt it! The list goes on. Things that I took for granted with my first born, term baby, were monumental. My twins journey though in the NICU was uneventful for the most part, and that's a good thing. You don't want drama in the NICU.

In honor of World Premature Day, we've asked a few preemie parents to share their stories with you. It's compelling, it's honest, it's raw; it's what goes on within the walls of the NICU...through a parent's eyes.

Wendy Chivalon
Editor-in-Chief

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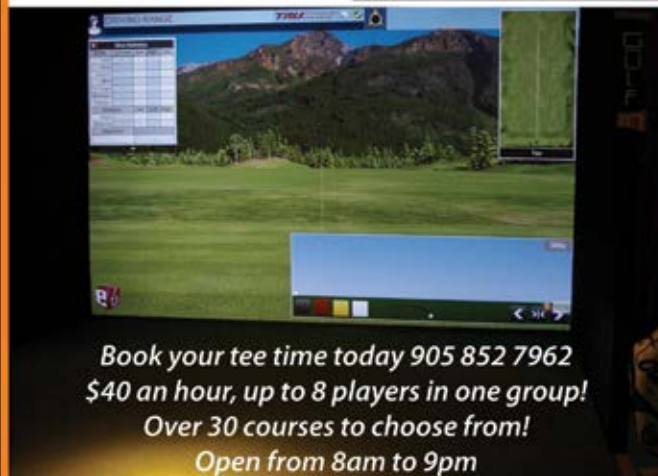
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Inside the Walls of the NICU... ...Through a Parent's Eyes

HOPE

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Sydni Rose Pacan – 26 weeks

It took us nearly 6 years to make a baby. At 23 weeks pregnant, I was told she may die.

I had an incompetent cervix and was dilating. Rushed by ambulance to Sunnybrook Hospital and eventually put on bedrest; we lasted three precious weeks. When contractions started, I asked my nurse how to prepare for the NICU. Her response: you can't.

When my 1-pound 12-ounce daughter was born at 26 weeks, the outside world became irrelevant. When I met her for the first time, I had to sign for a blood transfusion. Routine paperwork in the NICU, but a very rude introduction to motherhood and the next 82 days of our lives.

The suffocating guilt of failing your child was inescapable. I was forced to rely on technology to grow my child; it's an imperfect process, not without risk. Nevertheless, you endure through the tears and panic and rely on the support of medical staff and other NICU moms. Becoming clinical helped us deal with her mountain of medical hurdles. Celebrating each milestone allowed us to appreciate time and space in a new dimension. This was temporary.

NICU life is the worst job you never signed up for. The hours sucked, there's no vacation and the boss is extremely demanding. Between commuting, pumping, dealing with medical stakeholders, and

maintaining your own health, it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. A continuous state of emotional exhaustion became as normal as your morning coffee. At least I could drink coffee again.

Seeing your baby breathe without machines is magical.

After 63 days, we were transferred to our local hospital. Reality sunk in quickly. Preparing the nursery was an exciting frenzy. Our days were filled with feedings, snuggles, baths, impatience, and lots of extra time to practice diaper changes. She pooped on me. Twice.

On a rainy autumn afternoon, we finally brought our daughter home. Having had the best (and most expensive) babysitting service, it was now our turn. The panic we felt was not dissimilar to being chased by a bear, but you learned to embrace it. Knowing your child was well enough to be home was comfort in itself.

We are grateful to everyone who supported us along our NICU journey. Keeping perspective was key; everything in life is only for now. A year later, she is reaching her milestones and smiling through life. And she won't remember a thing.

Written by Rita Pacan

“It’s coming.”

Those are words that make most men’s hearts leap with nervous energy – somewhere between excitement and fear. Not me. Those words stripped my breath away like I was plunged into ice water.

I couldn’t think. Everything was happening so fast. I followed the nurse, hurriedly pushing my wife’s wheelchair down the halls toward the delivery room. I haven’t slept in the five days we’ve been here trying to postpone what began as a trickle of clear fluid. All I know is this is bad news.

There is a swarm of activity in the delivery room. Doctors are putting on robes while nurses surround my wife with equipment. Another doctor pulls me back and commences with his obligatory disclosure speech – a laundry list of everything that will be wrong with my 25-week-old baby. Cerebral palsy; check. Paralysis; check. Blindness and deafness; check. Developmental issues; check. Did we cover everything no parent wants to hear about their baby? Check.

Somewhere during all this I feel resentment. I feel a wave of anger wash over me. I’m angry that my wife and I are in the midst of being robbed of the overwhelming joy couples are supposed to feel at the birth of their child.

My attention shifts back to the drone filling my left ear. I wonder why he has nothing encouraging to say, and if I should punch him in the face. Then I notice something nobody else hears – It’s my wife; she said the baby’s coming. “Excuse me I...” I mutter to the doctor next to me but he’s in a full ecstatic trance now reciting his speech like an incantation. The others are standing around chatting.

I look at my wife again and see the baby’s head is already out. I dive at her and catch the baby’s head but I’m not in time to catch her body as it spurts out onto the table. The baby makes a tiny resentful sound, and its face contorts with anger. Before I can process what’s happening hands descend on the baby from all sides, clamping, snipping and whisking her away from my outstretched hand.

Suddenly we’re alone. My wife is sobbing and I’m filled with bottomless hopelessness.

A few minutes later a nurse comes to me and asks if I want to see the baby. I dunno, do I? I made a sound that could be interpreted as agreement and she led me to another room with some kind of stand with a warming light overtop. On the stand was what could pass for Tupperware with a tiny doll. It had a stocking cap, a tensor band around its torso and legs and two tongue depressors broken in half taped to its arms. Hoses and wires emanated from its nose and umbilical – it didn’t look human. Indescribable dread filled me.

The thing in the dish looked primordial; unfinished. The face looked stretched and swollen but the body was so gaunt and emaciated. And the flesh looked like it was made from a boiled hot dog.

“She really put up a fight. I needed two other nurses to hold her down so I could prep her,” the nurse said with a smile. I looked back at the baby, and as the doctor’s litany of ailments echoed in my mind, a thought came to me that will forever be my greatest shame.

I don’t know if the nurse could read my expression, but she asked if I would do everything it would take to help this baby. I bristled at the question. It snapped me out of that dark place and made me angry and at once puzzled as to its directness. “Of course!” I replied measuring my indignation. “Good”, she said and smiled as she lead me back into the hallway. “Has anyone ever said ‘no’?” I asked. She turned back toward the door to catch it before it closed and paused, staring at me expressionless for a few moments, then went back in without answering.

As I stared at the floor in the hallway a male nurse breezed past me to the room I just exited. He stopped before going in and smiled. “Is this your baby?”

I nodded.

“Are you going to do everything it takes to help her?”, he asked.

“Yeah. Yes, I am. Whatever it takes.”

He disappeared into the room and I returned to my wife galvanized

Written by George Yianakakos



Petra Panagiota Yianakakos – 25 weeks



Scarlett Rene Lew – 25.5 weeks

Complications developed during my wife's pregnancy at 25 weeks gestation.

We went to Markham Stouffville Hospital (MSH). The on-call pediatrician that night just happened to be on his very last shift at the hospital before retiring to his private practice full time. He takes me aside while they prep my wife and the operating room for delivery. With a stern look, he goes over every complication that could potentially arise after birth and beyond. He says I need to know and it's his duty to inform.

I could see his mouth moving and hear the words as they were spoken but it didn't register because it was like a bad dream. He said things like bleeding in and around the brain cavity, hearing problems or even being deaf, vision issues like ROP (retinopathy of prematurity) or blindness, breathing or lung function problems, motor function problems or even Cerebral Palsy, ADD or learning disabilities, and of course death. He said the chances of one or more of these issues occurring is 50/50. Toss of a coin.

It was like a punch to my midsection, my legs went wobbly and I remember my eyes scanning the room for a chair, but I had to stay strong for my wife. I don't remember her being within earshot and don't remember her hearing any part of the conversation.

Our daughter was delivered inside the amniotic sac whole, and the nurses were quickly trying to rip it open. I was standing there by my wife watching this take place when one of the nurses finally grabbed a pair of surgical scissors and cut it open. The doctor and a nurse quickly wheeled it into an adjacent operating room to intubate. We

didn't know what was happening and it seemed like it was taking forever. After 15 minutes the doctor came back and said he was successful and we shall be able to see our daughter a little later when the Sick Kids Acute Care Transport Service (ACTS) arrives.

MSH is only a Level 2 NICU (32 weeks and older) and our baby was being transferred to a Level 3 NICU at Sunnybrook Hospital. She spent 3 months at Sunnybrook before being transferred back to MSH when she was more stable. From the moment of birth till discharge at MSH, to say it was nerve-wracking is akin to telling a cancer patient waiting for treatment they'll be okay. It is constant staring of the monitors (heartbeat) and listening to the pumping of the machine that keeps the baby breathing. Sudden drops on the monitor to flatlining were frequent and I don't know how anyone of weak mental fortitude could be in that situation.

I remember one time while at work, my wife texted me that the power and lights went out at Sunnybrook during a storm. I froze and instantly thought about the monitors and machines. What about our daughter, and all the other babies in the NICU? Stupid me, I completely forgot that hospitals have back up generators. (At the time I was even working for a company that had a line of diesel back up generators and Sunnybrook was our customer.) It goes to show you how you forget about everything else when in this situation, and just think of what is truly important in your life.

Written by Rick Lew



Juliette Rose Lacroix – 27 weeks

Shock.

One word to describe our first two weeks in the NICU. A mere 2 hours after going into the hospital at 27 weeks and 4 days, I had delivered a 2 pound 7 oz baby girl. For two weeks I was in shock, living each day moment by moment, on autopilot not fully comprehending everything around me, only knowing my baby girl required more than her mother to survive. The day our new reality hit me was hard, but as I looked around at what was our new “home” I realized I needed to be strong, I needed to breathe, I needed to understand and accept the ups and the downs. A big saying in the NICU is “one step forward, two steps back” and that is exactly how it feels.

But then you begin to create your new routine. You step out of your isolated room and gently smile at the other mothers in the pump room at 3 in the morning. You calculate exactly how long you have to step outside for fresh air in between pumping/feeds/kangaroo care, while also fitting in food and a bathroom break. You realize just how much the nurses love and care for each and every baby, how as much as you wish you were all she needed, she also needs them. You start to understand the medical language, ask to do the things weeks’ prior you were afraid of.

Your baby starts to grow; you celebrate every milestone- 2-kilo club! First bath! First time in clothes- while also dreaming of your

first coffee with your baby in your arms, of rocking her to sleep in her own room, of holding her without wires and tubes. In our case, we were later transferred to a level 2 hospital, and while it is well known that this is a step towards discharge, it is still not home. It is a new norm, a new reality to figure out, new nurses to meet, new procedures to follow. They warn you of the difficulty, they attempt to prepare you, but until you experience that transfer you don’t know how hard it truly is, saying goodbye to the life you never asked for, to the people who literally saved your baby’s life. After you get settled, you hear the words you have been dreaming of- discharge! Finally, after days, weeks, months of waiting, you can take your baby home. But your journey isn’t over; it has just changed yet again, however this time we are starting where we assumed we would be- home.

Our NICU journey will always bring back feelings of guilt, anger, pain and sadness; but it will also bring feelings of joy, pride, respect and appreciation. My daughters fight taught me how to be strong, how to never give up and how precious life truly is, while also shining a light on a world I never knew existed, a NICU world full of strength, love and hope.

Written by Alexandra Rostetter

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Taming Toy Mountain



by Catherine Davis

There are two truths about becoming a parent:

- 1. You are going to lose some sleep.*
- 2. Your home becomes a warehouse of kids' toys.*

Lots and lots of toys.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the barrage of new toys arriving steadily from grandparents, family, and friends. Each birthday, holiday, and a trip to the dollar store can result in new toys being added to your child's collection. And with Christmas just around the corner, now is a great time to take stock of your child's existing toys and plan an exit strategy for any unused or outgrown toys. By following a few proven steps used routinely by professional organizers, you'll have that toy mountain tamed in no time.

Corral Toys in One Place

First, gather all the toys to one location in your home. Pick a

spot that is large enough to accommodate all the toys and ideally still leave you some extra space. If you have a large number of toys consider using the basement or an under-utilized room on the main floor, such as a formal dining room. If the thought of gathering up toys seems overwhelming, don't be afraid to elicit help from your spouse, a relative, or best friend. Assign each helper a room and an empty laundry basket or plastic bin with instructions to fill their baskets with toys and dump the toys in the room you have chosen to centralize them. Think of this step as a stealth attack. The idea is to gather up all the toys as quickly as possible, not worrying about sorting them at this stage in the process.

Pair Like with Like

Once all the toys are gathered in one room, you may feel a little overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it, but don't despair. The next step will be easier with all the toys in one spot. Begin by sorting each toy into piles grouped by category: stuffed animals, Legos, arts and crafts, cars, dolls, games and puzzles, costumes, video games, tools, balls, etc. Create one pile for any unidentified toy pieces and one pile for broken or damaged toys. Continue sorting until all the toys are grouped into piles. Depending on how much stuff you have you may find it useful to further divide the piles into sub-categories, for example, the doll pile could be further divided into piles of Barbies, Barbie accessories, and larger baby dolls.

Trim It Down

Now that everything is divided into piles of similar toys, you can easily see exactly what your child has and has too much of. Time to look at each pile and attack each one individually.

First to toss out is all the stuff that is easy to let go of—junky toys. This includes toys that are broken or missing too many pieces, party favours, Happy Meal toys, the assortment of unidentified toy pieces, and bald Barbies. Put them directly into a black garbage bag.

Next, when looking at each pile think, does my child play with it? Does your child have Thomas trains but outgrew them years ago? Does your child have tons of DVDs but prefers to play Fortnite on your cell phone? Is your child searching YouTube but still hanging on to primary ABCs books? Think of what your child realistically uses and decide if there is anything you could donate or pass along to family members without your child really missing it. Create a new pile for items you can donate. And if you are saving it for a younger child consider boxing it up and moving it to a location in the house that children don't use.

When looking at the remaining piles do you see multiples of the same toy? Consider the following: does your child really need fifty stuffies? Does your child play with 20 Barbie dolls, or do they only use the newest one? Does your child have three different sets of Memory and multiple packs of UNO? Multiples of the same toy take up valuable space in your home. Now is the time to be ruthless in your decision making. Keep only the best of any multiple toys, move the "ok" ones to the donation pile, and dispose of any that are not appropriate to donate.

Donating Used Toys

Here are some organizations you can donate used toys to:

- **Value Village**
- **Salvation Army Donor Welcome Centres**
- **Durham Region Reuse Days** – Check Durham Region's Events Calendar for a Reuse Day in your municipality. <https://calendar.durham.ca>
- **Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores**
www.missionthriftstore.com
- **Art With a Heart Inc.** – Art With A Heart Inc. is a registered Canadian charity located in the Durham Region, dedicated to using the talents and resources of like-minded, creative individuals to assist and empower people from local community special interest groups. For example autism, Alzheimer's, brain injury, behavioural issues, mental health, physically disabled, poverty, substance abuse, seniors, etc.) Accepts art supplies such as paint, markers, paper, and glue.
www.artwithaheart.ca
- **Diabetes Canada** <https://declutter.diabetes.ca/pickup>



Selling Toys

If you would like to sell your gently used kid stuff, a few brick and mortar stores offer cash on the spot.

- **Once Upon a Child**

Pays cash on the spot for costumes, toys, books, electronics, bikes, kitchen sets, ride-ons, and name brand kid clothes.

www.onceuponachild.com

- **Déjà vu Discs**

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Online Selling

In addition to Facebook Marketplace, VarageSale, and Letgo, there are various Facebook groups in Durham region dedicated to selling kid stuff. You will need to open a Facebook account if you don't have one and request to join each group. Typically, each group has its own rules that you must read and agree to abide to become a member of the group. If you are selling toys, it is best to offer a great deal by grouping like items together and to sell them at a bargain price (i.e., instead of selling one Barbie for \$3, sell six Barbie dolls and their carrying case for \$20.) Remember, this is stuff you want out of your house.

- Oshawa/Whitby Mom's Buy/Swap
- Durham Region's Buy, Sell and Trade Group
- Durham Canada Buy&sell
- Pickering/Ajax/Whitby/Oshawa & GTA Buy & Sell
- Ajax/Clarington/Oshawa/Whitby Buy & Sell Group

If you are nervous about opening your door to a total stranger, you can arrange for what is commonly called a "porch pick up"—you leave the item for sale outside your front door, and the buyer leaves cash between your doors or in a spot you specify. Porch pickups are only suitable for smaller cash transactions as there is the risk that someone could take your item and not leave their payment. Other options for pick up include meeting at a public place such as a local library or coffee shop.

Toy Swap

A toy swap is also a great idea if you have access to a large space, such as a community centre or church hall. Parents can drop off used toys and exchange them for other used toys. The simplest swap assumes all toys have the same value so that if you bring one toy, you can swap it for one toy. This works for smaller toys but is not practical if someone wants to swap a more expensive toy, such as a bike. If your swap is going to accept expensive toys, you will need volunteers to assign values to all the toys so that swaps remain equitable. Ensure you have enough volunteers to pack up any remaining toys and take them to charity.

Suggest Toy Alternatives

Providing a shopping list to relatives at Christmas can help stem a toy overload. Consider asking for creative alternatives to toys such as gift certificates to local attractions, such as the movies or your family's favourite ice cream parlour. A nice idea is to have your child tell the gift giver about your outing and how much they enjoyed it.

Organizing Your Space After Christmas

Now that your child has new toys you'll need to figure out where to put them in your home. Toys will be used regularly if your child has easy access to them. Consider setting up themed play stations so your child will be sure to use all their toys. For example, a kitchen set and food toys could be placed near your kitchen to encourage a child to pretend cook while watching you prepare a meal. An art station with markers, paper, and stickers could be stored in a cupboard closest to your kitchen table. Legos could be relegated to an under-utilized guest bedroom to encourage creative play away from the TV and to keep the Legos out from underfoot. Books can be stored in a bookshelf near a favourite comfy chair or beside the bed to encourage bedtime reading. Costumes get more use when they are stored on a hanging rack near a full-length mirror. A mesh container for balls, sidewalk chalk, and outdoor toys can be stored in the garage for easy access when heading outdoors.

Storage of toys should take in several factors: your available space, ease of access, and ease of tidying up. Since many toys come with plastic packaging which must be destroyed to free the toy, you often end up with a toy and a lot of loose pieces that have no storage container. Clear bins with lids are a great option because they can be purchased in a variety of shapes to fit shelves, under beds, or the space under a coffee table. If your child has no shelves in their bedroom, look for a plastic tower with several clear drawers to take advantage of vertical space, or purchase stackable clear bins with hinged lids. Help younger children sort toys into the correct bins by taping a photo of the toy to the outside of the bin.

Other good toy storage alternatives include: inexpensive mesh hangers suspended from the ceiling to keep toys off the floor, purchasing a bed frame with built in drawers, covering a full wall with storage cubes, hanging storage nets in the corner of a room, purchasing a bench with storage cubbies underneath the seat, or placing toys in an over-the-door hanging shoe holder.

Toy Rotation

Still too many toys after Christmas? Consider implementing a toy rotation. Start by placing all your child's toys in large storage bin containers and number each one. Start the rotation by giving your child Bin #1. Place all the other bins



in a location your child does not have access to. When your child starts to get bored of the toys in Bin #1, pack up those toys, move Bin #1 to the location with the other bins, and give your child Bin #2. Continue this method until all the toys are rotated through. The rotation keeps your child's interest and limits the number of toys that need to be tidied up.

Not sure when to rotate your child's toys? Watch for clues from your child and rotate a new bin when they seem to lose interest in the current bin's toys. Worried that your child may not want to rotate certain favourite toys? Leave any toys that are favourites and used on a regular basis out of the rotation, such as Legos. Don't be so strict with your rotation system that there isn't any room for flexibility.

Why Less is More

According to a study published in the journal *Infant Behaviour and Development*, toddlers have not mastered higher level control over attention. Their attention, and therefore their play may be disrupted by factors in their environment that present distraction. The result of the study suggest that an abundance of toys may create such a distraction and that when provided with fewer toys, toddlers engage in longer periods of play with a single toy, allowing better focus to explore and play more creatively.

Author, Joshua Becker, also agrees. In his book, *Clutterfree with Kids*, Becker argues that fewer toys are better for children because sparse playrooms encourage creativity, help develop attention spans, and teach youngsters about taking care of their possessions.

In my own experience I have found that children with organized rooms are proud of their space and enjoy showing and sharing their rooms with friends.

Final words

If your child receives an excessive number of toys at Christmas, count your blessings and be grateful for generous friends and family. And if some of those new toys do happen to remain unopened, you can always donate them to a toy drive next year.

Catherine Davis is a mother of two and a member of the Professional Organizers in Canada. Her company, Organized by Catherine, serves Durham Region and specializes in customized solutions for residential and commercial organization. When Catherine is not busy organizing she dabbles in stained glass art, embroidery, painting, and Netflix. Follow Organized by Catherine on Facebook and Instagram.

Winter Events Calendar

November 23, 2018 to December 16, 2018

100 Small Paintings Show & Sale

Exhibition runs from November 23 - December 16, 2018. Closed on Mondays, please visit their website for gallery hours. Clarington
www.vac.ca

November 23, 2018 & December 7, 2018

5-Pin Bowling - For Adults with Autism + Their Families

Bi-weekly Bowling: Every other Friday September 14 through December 7 @ 3:00PM in Newcastle @ Newcastle Town Hall (5-pin). Join them in the Fall through Spring for 5-Pin Bowling. Newcastle
www.homebasedurham.com

November 27, 2018

Concordia Pops Orchestra

The Concordia Pops Orchestra invites amateur musicians from the community to join them for the 2018-2019 season. The orchestra performs 15 concerts for the senior citizens of Durham Region. Rehearsals are Tuesday evenings from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Anderson Collegiate
Whitby

November 29, 2018

An Owl Whisperer Presents: Exploring the Birds of Ontario

Examine everything from small backyard visitors to some of the largest birds like Great Blue Herons. Discover rare visitors to the area like the Painted Bunting through stunning images and videos. Watch an owl family grow up and leave the nest! Whitby Public Library
Whitby

November 30, 2018

Whitby's Annual Christmas Tree Lighting

Kick off the Christmas season at the annual Tree Lighting in Downtown Whitby. On Nov. 30, bundle up the family and watch as they light up Celebration Square. Enjoy an evening of local entertainment, hot chocolate and cookies, and a visit from Santa. Whitby
www.events@whitby.ca

Saturday, December 01, 2018

The Court at Brooklin Bazaar

Are you ready for Christmas? Are you looking for that last minute gift that has a personal touch? Drop in to the Court at Brooklin bazaar on Saturday Dec. 1. Enjoy a selection of crafts, baking, door prizes and much, much, more! Brooklin

Saturday, December 01, 2018

Annual Lamplight Tour

The Lamplight tour is a time-honoured tradition at the Oshawa Museum. Their signature event allows visitors young and old to tour through the Museum homes that they decorate to reflect a Victorian Christmas. Oil lamps provide the only light in Henry House and looks just as the Henry family would have lit their home back in the 1800s. Victorian style is everywhere -- clothing, music, food, and gift ideas! Tickets are \$5 and can be purchased through Eventbrite. Oshawa
www.oshawamuseum.org

Saturday, December 01, 2018

Church of the Ascension's Old Fashioned Christmas Bazaar

Festive handmade home decor and gift items homemade baking and preserves mystery raffle lunch room 11:30 - 1:30. Port Perry
www.ascensionportperry.com

Saturday, December 01, 2018

Holiday Bazaar & Bake Sale

Variety of vendors, crafts, hand made gifts and \$2 chili lunch available. 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM 905-697-9992 - Sonia or Laura Seasons Clarington, 65 Clarington Blvd, Clarington

Saturday, December 01, 2018

Music4Life Ensemble Presents A Winter Classic

Drop in for a spectacular afternoon of seasonal live music, refreshments and silent auction. Doors Open at 3:30 pm. Performance @ 4 p.m. Enjoy refreshments and a silent auction after the live show! 905-427-5443 Forest Brook Community Church, 60 Kearney Drive (at Elizabeth) Ajax

Sunday, December 02, 2018

Breakfast with Santa & Friends

Annual Breakfast with Santa and Friends includes a delicious pancake breakfast for all ages, photos with Santa, a children's colouring and letters to Santa table, book and bake sale as well as the always popular silent auction. \$5 for an Elf Plate and \$10 for a Santa Plate. Blackstock Recreation Centre 3440 Church St., Scugog

Sunday, December 02, 2018

Christmas in the Village, Winter in the Woods

Visit with the inhabitants of the pioneer village as they share their holiday customs. Enjoy Scottish Hogmanay, Welsh traditions, Victorian English Christmas celebrations, Squire Jonathan's Christmas Ball, and a walk in the woods to see how Pickering's first settlers struggled in the wilderness. Backwoods Players presents the Duffins Creek Sunday School Pageant free with admission. Pickering

Tuesday, December 04, 2018

Whitby Blood Donor Clinic

You can give life by donating blood at the Whitby blood donor clinic. If you are 17 years of age and older you are encouraged to book an appointment and review your eligibility online by visiting www.blood.ca. Whitby

Tuesday, December 04, 2018

WoN "Work on Now"

Teen mental health support group drop in for ages 13 to 17. Parents are welcome. Meetings take place the first Tuesday of each month except in July and August. Enter through the back entrance, in the lounge. Whitby Baptist Church, Whitby

Thursday, December 06, 2018

Clarington Public Library--Author Encounters

Richard Scarsbrook loves working with developing writers and students, and discussing the creative process. An award-winning author and poet, he has served as Writer in Residence for the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Public Library. Clarington
www.clarington-library.on.ca

Thursday, December 06, 2018

Free Film Night: A Street Cat Named Bob

Based on the international bestselling book. The true feel-good story of how a busker and recovering drug addict had his life transformed when he met a stray ginger cat. Closed captions. Not rated by the Ontario Film Board. Whitby Public Library

Friday, December 07, 2018

55+ Active Adults--Christmas Breakfast

Rise & Shine at the Courtice Community Complex. Enjoy a hot breakfast, great company and a Christmas sing-a-long with Adele and the Ukulele group. \$6, register with code 11083

Saturday, December 08, 2018

Children's Old Fashioned Christmas

The Scugog Shores Museum Village will be holding the Children's Old-Fashioned Christmas. Step back in time and tour through the historic village, traditionally decorated for the holidays with evergreen boughs, bright ribbons and berries. \$5/adults, \$4/students, \$2.50/seniors. Children 12 & under/\$2

Saturday, December 08, 2018

Holiday Hopes Toy Drive & Breakfast

Join them for the 2nd Annual Holiday Hope Toy Drive Rockfest, in support of the Durham Children's Aid Foundation. Live music all night with The Emerson Ireland Band, Contests and Prizes! Please bring a new toy for a boy or girl. The General Pub and Grill 21 Celina Street, Oshawa ON, L1H 1A8 (905) 240-1979

Sunday, December 09, 2018

Carols By Candlelight

Take a break from the Christmas bustle and bring the family to sing carols at Peace Lutheran Church. Carol service starts at 6:30 p.m. Free refreshments to follow. Pickering

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Christmas Victorian Teas

Spend the afternoon at the lake and relax while their friendly Visitor Hosts serve a light luncheon at the Christmas-themed Victorian Afternoon Tea. They provide friendly service and smiling faces to relieve any holiday season stress! Oshawa Museum, Oshawa

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Guys Night Out--For Adults with Autism & Their Families

Kick back and enjoy a monthly night out with the guys. On the 3rd Tuesday of every month these guys meet to enjoy a couple rounds of pool and a laugh at the local pub. For adults with Autism and their families. Newcastle
www.homebasedurham.com

For events that may have been added after the publication date and other ideas to plan your perfect day in Durham Region, visit www.durhamtourism.ca.

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To Renovate or Not to Renovate?

by Jeff Meiusi

If you have ever thought about selling your home, you have probably also pondered the following: should I renovate my house first, or should I sell my house as is?

The most common reason people contemplate renovating their house before selling it is because they think it will fetch them a higher price. After all, if a house has been fixed up and upgraded it should sell for more, right? Not necessarily. When it comes to renovations, there are many factors to take into consideration when deciding what's best for you and your home.

Budget

One of the first things that anyone considering a renovation for their home needs to do is to create a realistic budget. What is your budget? How much would a particular renovation project cost? Do you have enough funds to cover the reno? This step is critical when deciding whether to move forward with work on an existing home, or to just sell as is. Get quotes from contractors on the renovation project so you have an idea of what the project will cost. When you have an idea of how much it will cost, you can then determine whether you have enough funds to pay for it. Renovations can be expensive, especially if they are large scale renovations like remodeling an entire kitchen or bathroom. Keep in mind too, that unforeseen issues can arise during a reno that may require additional work at an additional cost. Always allocate extra funds towards a project in case something was to come up.

If you are a contractor with a toolkit of skills, you may be able to save a lot of money by DIY. But don't be a jack of all trades or a YouTube handy man as it will be noticeable when it comes to the final touches; sometimes it pays to have a professional come in and do it right the first time.

Types of Reno

Doing renovations before you sell your home can be good, but only if you stick to renos that will improve the esthetics, the layout, or create more curb appeal for the home. This will pay off and give you as the current owner a greater chance that you will get your money back. It all depends on the house, but by doing things that appeal to new potential buyers like putting in a new kitchen, bathroom or new flooring can have a big impact on the selling price. Doing more "behind the scenes" renos like, roofing, electrical, plumbing and so on may not provide an immediate return.

Consider improving the street view appearance (aka curb appeal) of your house. It is an important and a worthwhile investment as most buyers tend to decide on a potential house within 5 minutes of arriving.



Over Improving

If you do decide to move forward with a renovation, you may run the chance that you will over improve your home compared to others on the block. Don't be fooled into thinking this will always pay off. An over improved home won't sell for as much in its location as it would in a neighborhood with similar houses. So, if you're thinking of adding a large addition or doing an extensive renovation take into consideration the neighbourhood. If there are a lot of smaller homes on the street and yours is the only larger one, then you may not get the price you are looking for to cover any costs that you have put in. Similarly, if all the houses on your street have aluminum siding and you decide to put stucco, you may not get the price a stucco home would fetch in an all-stucco neighbourhood. Keeping the renovation simple can provide the greatest add value to the sale of the home. Your best bet is to play it safe and appeal to the average buyer.

Personal Taste

It's also important to remember that renovations like a kitchen or bathroom remodel reflect your personal taste and style. And it should go without saying that your taste may not necessarily suit a buyer's taste. This is not to say that renovating a dilapidated kitchen or bathrooms isn't going to be an asset to a buyer – it is. However, keep in mind that the style you choose to renovate these rooms in is a matter of taste. A potential buyer may want to change things up when they move in, which will cost them money too, so the money you spent on the reno may not be taken at full value. If you do choose to undertake a reno, consider renovating in a style that will appeal to majority of buyers. Check out sites like Pinterest and Houzz for inspiration.

Amount of time

What many people tend to overlook when embarking on a renovation project is the fact that doing renovations involve a serious, commitment in time and energy – time being the first and foremost factor. They have to get their head around the process from

start to finish. A bathroom remodel can require two to three months. In the case of a kitchen remodel from top to bottom involving new countertops, cabinets, appliances and floors, the job can stretch anywhere from three to six months. If when doing the remodel, the ductwork, plumbing or wiring need be addressed, the job could take even longer (not to mention cost more)! These are things that you can't often predict in advance and may come up in the midst of the reno that delay the finish date. Even though you can't account for things like this, you need to anticipate the process can get delayed due to unforeseen factors. Timing of a particular reno becomes even more crucial if you need to sell your home as soon as possible, or are trying to time your sale during a particular market.

Also, do you plan on living in the house during the renovation, or are you planning to move out and allow full access to the house at all times so the renovations can be completed quicker? If you decide to stay in the house during the renovation you have to be ready to be very patient. It's very difficult to live in a house that is being renovated; there will be lots of dust and noise along with the loss of space while everything is going on.

Return on Investment (ROI)

In order to get a renovation started, you will be required to put down a deposit for the job. Depending on the type of job this could be anywhere from a couple of hundred dollars to a few thousands. After the reno is complete, you would have paid the remainder of the costs. What this means is that you would have put down a substantial amount of capital in total for your reno project before you see any gains in the future sale of the house. So before opting in to remodel or sell, you need to try to determine what return on investment (ROI) you'll see. Speaking to a real estate agent can give you a good idea of where best to invest your time and money as they will be able to advise you on what renovations other homes have done and what kind of increase in value they received because of it.

Many home upgrades do not pay for themselves even if the home sells for a higher price when finished. Some renovations can



recoup 80-90% of their costs, while others barely cover half. Whether or not you get your investment back when you sell will depend on a lot of circumstances.

Market Conditions

One important factor that can't be ignored is the condition of the market. It is very important to take into consideration what the market conditions of your local real estate market are before attempting to increase the value of your home through renovations. By looking at homes that are selling and ones that aren't, you can easily see if renovating your home will fetch you a higher selling price.

Mortgage rates also play a key role in the housing market and sale, so it is a good idea to keep an eye out on what the mortgage rates are. The lower they are, the more money buyers have access to when purchasing a home. As the interest rates rise, the less they have access to. Over the last year the mortgage rates have risen three times while The Bank of Canada kept its trend-setting interest rate steady at 1.5 per cent. Recently in October of 2018 however, the central bank approved a quarter-point rate increase bringing the interest rate up to 1.75 per cent.

Other factors like timing can also affect the price of the sale of your home. The spring market and fall market tend to be the busiest times in real estate. Spring market starts in March usually and end in June; the fall market runs from September through to mid-November. During these peak periods, there is increased competition as more homes are posted for sale. During the winter months there is less competition as less houses are put up for sale and less buyers. Something to consider: if your house needs some work and you don't want to fix it up, less competition could fetch you a faster sale.

Is there a simpler alternative?

Decluttering & Organizing

Let's start with the biggest bang for the least (or even zero bucks!)—

creating more usable space in your house. You can do this by simply clearing out the clutter and junk around your house and organizing your space. Donate, sell, recycle or throw away stuff you don't need that is just sitting around collecting dust, not to mention taking up precious real estate space in your house. For every box of clutter you remove from your home, you uncover valuable unused square footage and help potentially increase the equity of your home. All it takes is a little time and effort.

Staging

Have you considered staging your home? Don't knock it until you've tried it. Staging is a very clever way to attract the right buyer to your home without having to spend a lot of money. If you've got a knack for this, you can spruce up your own home (look online on sites like Pinterest or Houzz for inspiration). If not, look into hiring a professional person / staging company to do the job right! (Your real estate agent often has stagers they work with or can recommend to you.) Staged homes tend to attract more buyers and sell faster... often at the asking price or higher!

As you can see, there are a lot of variables to consider when deciding whether to renovate your home or sell it in as is condition. These variables aren't always clear cut and deciding what to do can be challenging as there's no right answer for everyone. When in doubt, get the advice of an experienced and knowledgeable realtor to ensure your home sells as fast as possible for the best possible price.

Jeff Meiusi is a sales representative at Keller Williams Realty Solutions who has been in the industry for 10 years. Using his wealth of knowledge and expertise he can guide his clients through the buying and selling process in an effective and timely manner. His goal is to help his clients realize they're real estate dreams and help them make the right moves to increase their overall net worth in the shortest amount of time using real market data and proven results.

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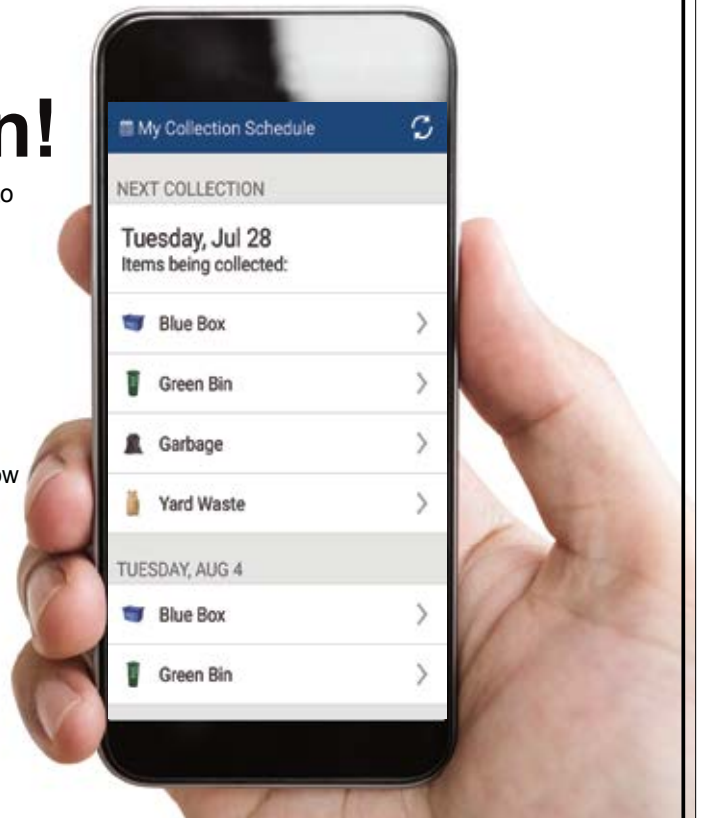


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Give Gift Cards A Chance This Christmas Season!

by Suffia Malik

It's the most wonderful time of the year, but it's no surprise that it can also be the most stressful. With so many wonderful people in your life, you want to appreciate and celebrate this holiday season the best way you can.

It's no surprise that gifts are an important part of that sharing. This year, why not consider gift cards for your friends and family? ...Don't run away just yet! Gift cards can be just as personal and heartfelt as something you buy yourself. And they give the best gift of all – choice!

What's so great about gift cards?

Gift cards make great presents for lots of different reasons. They are easy to use, can be highly personalized and are the most versatile gifts to give. Gift cards give your loved ones choice, and make sure the gifts you give are truly meaningful to them. They remove the uncertainty of whether someone will love their present – it makes sure they do.

Are gift cards too impersonal?

Gift cards are not as impersonal as they seem. Giving a thoughtful gift card shows you know the interests of your loved one while giving them the room to get something they will truly appreciate. Whether your loved one is a bookworm with a favourite bookstore or an athlete with a favourite athleisure brand, each person will appreciate a gift that highlights their passions while also letting them choose what they want. With so many choices and niche interests, there is a gift card out there for everyone.

What about expiry dates?

In Ontario, the Consumer Protection Act prevents gift cards from expiring except in very particular cases. Cards for specific services (like massage) or charity gift cards can expire. To make sure your gift is disappointment-free, read any fine print before buying a card. See the Ontario Consumer Protection Act for more details.

The perfect gift (card candidate)

Gift cards are great in that they can take care of the tricky decisions in our gift giving list. If you have a person on your list who doesn't know what they want for Christmas, or is very particular about brands of items, or who has a particular food palette, gift cards can be the perfect gift to give. It takes the guess work out, and leaves the choice (and indecision) to the recipient.

1 card - many options

If you can't decide what specific gift card to get your loved one, consider getting a gift card that offers options for more than just a specific store or restaurant. Some gift cards can be used at multiple locations such as restaurants and fashion stores under the same companies. One of the most versatile types of gift cards are ones that apply to entire shopping complexes or retail streets where the options end only when the shops do. A word of advice though: some malls charge activation fees for mall-wide gift cards so make sure to read the terms and conditions before buying. Look out for cards that bundle multiple places to give your giftee the most value out of their gift!

Prepaid, please!

Visa or Mastercard prepaid gift cards are the ultimate gift for choice and especially useful if you normally give cash as a present. Prepaid cards can be used at a store or online, opening gift giving options even more. For young children, prepaid cards can be their first experiences with online shopping and getting a gift highly specialized to their wishes. It is important to note however that most prepaid cards come with activation and other fees that can creep up in any part of the card-using process. Prepaid cards also have expiry dates, so any money still remaining after the card expires, may require a fee to get it back to you.

Specialty shop gift cards

Specialty shops, especially local ones, are great gift card sources. Gifting a card from one of these shops can be a great way to introduce a loved one to a local staple or a hidden Durham gem, as well as help promote local business. For instance, if your loved one has a special interest like knitting, you can capitalize on their passion by getting them a gift card to a knitting or yarn specialty shop. If you are not sure if a certain specialty shop offers gift cards, ask. Some specialty shops may not publicly advertise that they do, but may offer it if requested.

Gift an experience

Gift cards are not limited to items; they can be used to gift experiences too! Look around for what kind of adventures your loved one would love to explore or revisit. Give them the gift of a museum membership, theatre admission, a day at a spa, park admission and more. You can also get a ticket for yourself and plan a day-trip together. Just another way to make the magic of Christmas extend year-round!

Gift a helping hand

Gift cards can be sent on behalf of charities for the gift that keeps on giving. Once you donate an amount of money, your recipient gets to choose which charity the money goes to, or, if from a specific charity, what program the money goes to help. These gift cards are a wonderful way to celebrate the true spirit of the holidays.

Great for the environment

eGift cards are a great way to capitalize on the freedom of online shopping while saving you from the worry of losing your card! Best of all, you add one less bit of plastic to the landfill. You can also give a reloadable card that can be refilled after it's used up. There are a seemingly infinite number of online stores and many have online gift card options. An eGift card is therefore a great way to brighten someone's holiday and do your part in making the world a cleaner place!

Personalizing the Impersonal

You can always add a personal touch to your gift cards. A lovely personal card with a note can make any gift much more meaningful. To bring some of your own creative flair into your gifts, here are some ideas:

1. Put a gift card into the front sleeve of a nice journal. Bonus points if the card is for a stationary store!
2. Put a gift card on the inside of a wooden box filled with treats!
3. Make a gift card bouquet with multiple gift cards
4. Make a gift card holder with candy canes!
5. Stick multiple smaller-value gift cards around a potted indoor plant
6. Put a gift card along with other treats inside a pair of warm slippers

This holiday season, take advantage of gift cards as presents for your loved ones. They can be personal tokens of appreciation that celebrate your close bond, and have just as warm of an impact as any handpicked gift. Best of all, gift cards make sure your giftee loves what they receive.

Suffia Malik is a second-year honours Health Sciences student at McMaster University. When she is not volunteering, researching, and writing, she is out practicing with her varsity fencing team, drawing and voraciously reading about politics and current events.

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by Stephanie Herrera

AT THE BOX OFFICE



Fun for the whole family

Marvel fans are ready for *Spider-man: Into the Spider-Verse* on December 14th. This amazing animation introduces us to Miles Morales, a young teen who discovers, not only that there is more than one Spider-man, but that he is in fact, one of them. A positive message that anyone can wear the mask and that heroes are not defined by gender, class, or race.

After major loss and a hopeless ending in store for adults Michael and Jane, at 17 Cherry Tree Lane, the winds turn with the arrival of *Mary Poppins Returns* on December 19th. Emily Blunt takes on the title role as the famous nanny, returning to bring laughter and joy to the Banks household once again. Cameos include: Meryl Streep, Colin Firth, Angela Lansbury and Dick Van Dyke. The whole family will be treated to the magical world and wit of this iconic character all over again.

Particular tastes

Anna and the Apocalypse is a zombie movie like we've never seen before. In Little Haven, a small town in Wales, we meet Anna, a teen living an average life until the apocalypse hits. What makes this movie different than other genre films is the hilarious dark comedy as Anna and her friends crush and slash zombies while singing and dancing in this Christmas musical. Get ready to be grossed out as you tap your foot to the beat of this original musical score, on December 7th.

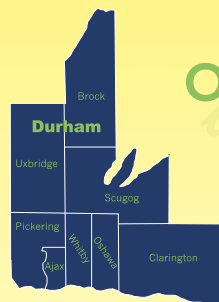
Action and Thrillers

Fans of M. Night Shyamalan have been anticipating the third installment of his exceptional films, *Unbreakable* and *Split*, with *Glass* on January 18th. Bruce Willis returns as "David Dunn", as do Samuel L. Jackson as "Mr. Glass" and James McAvoy as "Kevin Wendle Crumb". The three worlds collide as Mr. Glass orchestrates his strongest ally in Crumb's "Beast" and Dunn fights to stop him. But, as Shyamalan is known for, this is a character and relationship heavy clash. The three men struggle against each other in a world that will not accept that superheroes exist and yet their fight is real.

Visually stunning and action packed, *Alita Battle Angel*, hits theatres on February 14th. Based on a series of graphic novels by Japanese artist Kishiro, Alita is a story, set centuries in the future, entered on an abandoned cyborg with no memory. When this robot is found in a junkyard and regenerated by a kind cyber-doctor, Alita has no memory of her past and begins to develop deep friendships until a threat uncovers her extraordinary fighting abilities and the mystery of her origins. Alita goes from being a lost and shy innocent to a young woman who has the power to change her corrupt world and save the ones she loves.

Stephanie Herrera is a Canadian Comedy Award nominee and the founder of the Not-for-profit: Durham Improv Collective Inc. She specializes in hosting, corporate training, and has a keynote speaker series. She is an actor, director, producer, voice over artist, writer for stage, TV, and film, and teaches acting and improv across North America. Check out her book: "The Ten Commandments...of Improvising!" on her personal website.

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Soul Searching



Welcome to winter in Ontario- known for snow, holidays, and more snow!

Unfortunately there is not much we can do about the weather, but we can use all of our indoor time spent sitting by the fireplace to practice self-care and reflect upon our year.

You don't have to be diagnosed with a mental illness to experience the winter blues. Many people feel stressed out by the holidays. This is ironic because holidays are supposed to be a time of celebration, but between the stress of picking perfect gifts, the lack of funds to buy these perfect gifts, and the relatives who we love but dislike being around for an extended period of time, we often end up feeling plain burnt out!

This winter, make a pledge to yourself that, in spite all of the stressors that come along with the holidays, you are going to spend time taking care of YOU! Some might ask, what does this even look like? After all, the kids need to get to skating lessons and then there's the icy commute to think of. But you can easily incorporate wellness tools into your daily life. Wellness tools are the things that you enjoy doing and the things that contribute to you staying as well as possible. Some examples of potential wellness tools include: exercise, getting into nature (don't forget your winter boots!), meditating, watching Netflix, relaxing with a delicious hot beverage, regular conversations with friends and family who keep you sane, expressing yourself creatively (like building a snowman with the kids!), hobbies, etc.

Another added stressor this time of year is making the so-called perfect New Year's Resolution. You know, the ones that you feel you "should" do (PTA mom, anyone?). However, if you're basing your resolutions on "should" as opposed to what you need and want, it's a) unlikely that you will follow through successfully, and b) more likely that you will feel burnt out and miserable. If you're making a resolution it needs to actually resonate within you. Instead of claiming that you are going to revamp yourself completely in 2019, take some time to simply reflect on the past year first. What happened this year? How did you feel? What wellness tools did you use and which ones can you incorporate this year? What were your accomplishments? This is an especially important question because so often we discount our accomplishments as "not enough" but in reality, they are truly worth noting! You worked hard and you deserve accolades- even if only from yourself. Can't remember the entire year? Maybe a resolution this year is to keep an on-going accomplishment list and add to it weekly.

Finally, plan for the upcoming year. What does 2019 have on the horizon for you and your family? Given that most New Year's resolutions fail, is it worth it to make one? That's up to you to decide but remember to set SMART goals. (Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely.)

Although it's the busiest time of the year, taking some time to take care of yourself and reflecting on the past year will help prepare you for the upcoming year.

Happy holidays and cheers to a magnificent 2019!

Tara is a wellness blogger for The Local Biz Magazine who hopes to publish her memoir on finding hope and meaning while living with a mental illness.

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by Bianca Schaefer

Get Fit: Inside & Out

Start Your New Year's Diet Before January



Last Fall, I made a decision that changed my life. After suffering from a couple of painful years due to inflammation, I decided to heal my body holistically through an elimination diet. My family and friends thought I was crazy for starting a diet right before Christmas – and I have to admit, the task seemed quite daunting. I wasn't quite sure how I was going to get through the holidays without having dairy, gluten, caffeine, alcohol and refined sugar. But glowing skin, boundless energy and a 30lb weight loss made it all worth the sacrifices I made pre and post holiday season. Thankfully, come January 1st, I didn't have to struggle with a post-holiday detox, or feel guilty for gaining weight. In fact, my energy was better than ever and best of all, my pain finally started to disappear! So this year, why not make that resolution before January 1st? The benefits to starting now could be exactly what you need to live your best year yet! Here's how.

Set the right goal and be specific about your intentions.

Since healing my body and living pain-free was the main motivation for my goal, I knew it would take some time to get me to where I wanted to be health-wise. I outlined specifically, what I could and could not eat, and made a three-month plan. Since my goal was not based on losing a certain amount of weight per week, I focused on eating foods that healed my body and learned which foods my body could better do without.

Decide to stick to your diet - unconditionally.


If you've ever gone on a diet, you know how hard it can be when temptation arises. There's always a reason you can rationalize how having just one little treat won't hurt you – and that may be true. But if you know that having that treat will derail you from reaching your goal – avoid it! Focus on your long-term goal every time you're tempted to indulge in a few moments of temporary bliss.


Own up to your goal! Kind-fully respect others.



The decision to diet during the holidays can be very difficult for family and friends to accept – especially when you're invited over for dinner and you can't eat their meals. The best way to handle this is to be open and lovingly honest ahead of time. Explain that this diet is your own personal journey and that you don't judge their way of eating, nor do you expect them to make special meals just for you. Offer to bring your own food and/or share your meals with them. You'd be surprised how your healthy and delicious dishes could be an inspiration to others.

Finally, if your reasons for wanting to change your lifestyle will make you healthier and happier, why put it off just because of a special occasion? Don't wait to start living your best life now. You will never regret being healthier and happier.

Bianca Schaefer is a 360 Holistic Health Coach who inspires a global community to take charge of their health through nourishing their body, mind and soul with delicious foods, an active lifestyle and a mindset that believes anything is possible. Find out more about Bianca Schaefer on her personal website, Bianca Schaefer.





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by Wendy Chiavalon

Tweens, Teens & In-Between



Studying hard and getting good grades is very important. But you know what is just as important? Getting on-the-job experience. Don't underestimate the value of work experience (or real-world experience) while still in school. You can learn a lot of valuable skills while on the job or in a volunteer position; and these are skills that can't be taught in the classroom.

Ideally, try to get a job in a field you are interested in, so you can get a sense of what it may be like to work in that field. If you are interested in becoming a writer, get experience writing and/or blogging for different publications.

For more information on how you may gain experience writing our Tweens, Teens & In-Between Column please email me at editor@thelocalbizmagazine.ca

Wendy Chiavalon is the Editor-in-Chief of The Local Biz Magazine.

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Family Matters

by Leshanne Mori



I really should know what to do with my son's birthday this December.

My dad was born in December, on a date that was close enough to Christmas that we knew we ought to buy him one big gift rather than two small ones every year. Dad wasn't much of a birthday party person, so forgoing a big celebration was normal for us. He assured us that all the Christmas decorations were enough to make his day feel special, so long as we were there to enjoy his day with him.

I adore the frivolity of birthday celebrations, so the birthday celebrations I enjoy with my kids are the glorious opposite of what I experienced growing up. We fill rooms full of upbeat music, cover every inch of rooms with decorations and serve tables full of homemade food to make our carefully selected guests feel special. I love to make birthdays a big event to show my kids how loved they are.

A child's birthday close to Christmas poses a variety of challenges for any parent that loves to celebrate. The pool of potential guests shrinks faster than a snowsuit drying too close to an electric heater because of the sheer number of events and other commitments that happen in the lead up to Christmas. If you're an optimist, it means a smaller, more flexible guest list that can open you up to venues that might not have been possible before. A smaller guest list also means less cooking / baking / catering for your party, saving you money (and sanity) from sweating over food and drinks.

Your venue choice can also be limited because of the number of events happening at this time of year. That can mean one of two things. Be prepared to host your party in your home, or it's time to get creative. As an Australian-turned-Canadian it wouldn't feel natural to suggest it, but perhaps an outdoor birthday party might work. Might. If I ever feel desperate enough to try it, I'll report back and let you know how it goes.

The trouble with gifts is not if you should buy one – it's how much to spend and what to buy knowing another gift-giving event is just around the corner. All gift-giving protocols disappear for December kids and the stage is set to be the wild west of gift-giving. Many people are eager to share their rules for December birthdays. Some believe one big gift covers both Christmas and the birthday and others adhere the two-events-two-gifts rule. As the parent, you'll be expected to set the parameters for what's reasonable and what's unreasonable.

These are only a few of my challenges so far, in my limited experience as a mom to a child born in December all of two years. I want to stay true to our family tradition of big goofy birthday parties, while making sure both my kids (one with a non-December birthday) feel like birthdays are their own, special day. For now, I'll settle for calling it the Great December Birthday Challenge. It's a work in progress.

Leshanne Mori writes for The Motherhood Scene a blog about the best events, businesses, and child care centres in Durham, Ontario. Follow her blog to get the inside scoop on navigating life as a new mom in our community.

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INGREDIENTS

3 cups flour
 ½ tsp. salt
 1 cup sugar
 4 tsp baking powder
 1½ cups milk
 2 eggs
 4 tsp. vanilla
 1 stick of butter, melted


1 cup brown sugar
 1 tbsp cinnamon
 3 cups powdered sugar
 1 tsp vanilla
 1-2 tbsp water

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set oven to preheat at 350 degrees.
2. Mix flour, salt, sugar and baking powder with a whisk.
3. In a separate bowl mix the milk, eggs and vanilla.
4. Mix the wet and dry together, then add in the melted butter. Mix until well combined.
5. Use some baking spray to spray a rectangular cake pan, 9x13, then pour the batter evenly into the pan.
6. Mix brown sugar and cinnamon together and spread evenly on the cake. Use a knife or fork to swirl the sugar and cinnamon into the batter.
7. Bake for 35 minutes, let cool completely.
8. Mix the powdered sugar, 1 tsp vanilla and water until it is a consistency like syrup.
9. Pour over the cake and it will set into a harder glaze.

Protein:	5.8 g
Carbs:	75 g
Fat:	3 g


Wendy is a food blogger, food photographer, writer, lifestyle strategist, self-taught chef and lover of animals. While living in Paris, she mastered the art of a perfect crepe and French cuisine, and also discovered the world of fabulous wines and champagne! Her passion to find healthy alternatives to popular dishes stems from her desire to live a fit and healthy lifestyle while still enjoying food!



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Holiday Budgeting 101

Having a plan for spending during the holidays will help you and your family avoid a lot of stress and unwanted bills in the New Year! Here are a few tips on prioritizing spending this holiday season without jeopardizing the fun and family time!

Creating a budget during the holidays should not only include gift giving, but also other additional costs you may incur; including shipping costs for gifts, food, entertainment, or even gas and car maintenance if you are planning to travel out of town to visit family. Knowing how much you are comfortable with spending will help you from getting into potentially overwhelming debt.

Managing your gift giving shopping list will prevent you from over spending. Create a checklist with a budget for each person, and make sure that you cross the name off the list once you've purchased each a present. Not doing so may lead to additional and impulsive gift giving. Try to buy items when on sale, or take advantage of holiday shopping bundles often offered by stores. If possible, use cash instead of credit or debit card when you pay, as you are more likely to be mindful of how much something costs.

If your list includes a friends circle, suggest a "Secret Santa" game. Friends can draw a random name out of a hat and will be responsible for purchasing a gift, within a set budget, for only the person whose name they've chosen. Gift giving this way can be really fun and will lower your January bills significantly.

Creating a holiday Food Spending budget is also an important tool in avoiding overspending, especially if you are planning to host a party or dinner. Consider organizing a potluck dinner where each person can choose an item to bring. This option brings family closer together as everyone feels like they have added to the festive feast, making it a more meaningful and special event.

Don't forget about your entertainment budget! If you plan on taking trips out with the kids while they are home for the holidays, planning ahead will save your family a lot of money. Look for coupons online and pre-plan your outings. Check out free events around your city. There are plenty of ways to celebrate and spend time with family on a small budget. From skating to festivals, community events can create lasting memories that won't break the bank.

In the end, rest assured that your family will never remember the money you've spent on gifts, but they will definitely remember the laughs and good times. Holidays don't have to keep you up at night come January when the bills roll in. Being honest with yourself and your family will help set a healthy expectation and will allow you to be confident, disciplined and start off your New Year financially stronger!

I wish you a happy, healthy and stress-free holiday with your loved ones.

Karolina Szymanska is a financial literacy advocate and advisor who organizes financial literacy workshops in the GTA and beyond. Her passion is helping others realize positive possibilities in their own financial situations. Along with her team, Karolina helps educate families about the basic fundamentals of money and provides useful resources to help families achieve their goals.

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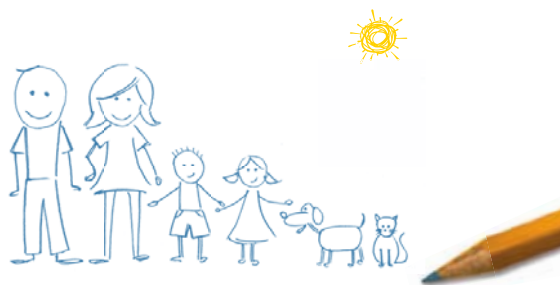
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Ask
Sue-Ann



Dear Sue-Ann:

I am stuck. I feel depressed all the time and don't want to admit it to my friends and family. Nothing seems to go my way anymore. My kids have grown and left home. There is stress in their lives but it's normal stuff. I don't know what to do about my career. I just don't enjoy it like I used to. My husband and I co-exist with each other. We have been married for several years and it has just gotten silent between us. I don't know how to move forward. Can you help?

Signed: Stuck

A. There are several things going on here and not all can be addressed in this article, so you should come and see me. In the meantime, let's get you started on the road back to yourself. When you spend a lifetime identifying your life by everybody else (and that is called being a wife and mother), and all the business of that slows down, you become aware of you again. We lose a sense of ourselves. Our needs, wants, what we define ourselves by. We lose texture in our lives and it just becomes day-to-day. The first thing I suggest you do is look for something that you can be passionate about. It's on that list that exists within. All the times you said, "One day I would like to....(finish that sentence)". Really, that could be anything; read that book, join that class, learn that skill. It's about opening yourself up to what's around you and listening to what you need. That opens you up to a sense of joy within and will reignite your passion for living. I hope that helps get you started and when you need me I am here.

Affirmation:

With each breath that I take I open up to the possibilities that exist around me and I become able to see them and embrace them in my life.

Sue-Ann is a mother of 3 and resides in the Oshawa area. She chooses to utilize her undeniable psychic ability to assist you in resolving all of life's issues. Host and Community Producer of Divine Lane on Rogers Cable 10, Tuesdays at 9 pm. You can find out more and forward your submissions to Sue-Ann at www.divinelane.com

The COACH Corner

by Malachi Brown



Renovate

To restore to a former or better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding), to restore to life, vigor, or activity.

Recently, we took possession of an older condo. The space was really dated, therefore needed to be renovated. The excitement quickly built as the reality of the project started to manifest itself. As an individual who loves to transform old things into new and better things, this was really exciting for me. As the plans were made and the different trades people were contacted, I was having a great old time.

The idea of making this space new and better than its former state was exhilarating. Then reality quickly started rearing its head. Quotes varied widely, degree of professionalism and knowledge (or lack thereof) became quite evident. The amount of time required to source suppliers, choosing colours, coordinating deliveries and working within the confines of condo rules and regulations was taking more time than originally planned.

Trades people had to continually be monitored, changes were happening on a regular basis. As we moved past the early stages, things were starting to take shape. There was light at the end of the tunnel; the project will conclude after all.

As we were making really good progress, I had a personal setback, a very close family member passed away.

Everything was put on hold. The excitement suddenly stopped, priorities changed. After dealing with this great loss, life had to continue.

Renovate--To restore to a former or better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding) to restore to life, vigor, or activity.

There is so much a renovation project can teach us about life. A new job, a promotion, winning the lottery, getting married, having a baby. There are so many new things in life we get to experience, a chance to move from our old selves and create a new life, better than our current reality.

In this new reality, so many things can happen to cause us to become overwhelmed, lose our way or want to give up. We can't afford to, because this is your life.

As we embrace the things that happen along the way, life will get better, as long as we never give up.

Is it always easy? Absolutely not. As we overcome obstacles and setbacks, we keep getting chances to renovate, to build to a better place. As the condo project neared its completion, it started looking fantastic. As we continued working, in spite of the setbacks and overcoming unforeseen situations, our joy increased daily. The project was finally finished and the pleasure of enjoying the finished project was both satisfying and rewarding.

Renovate your life; get rid of things that no longer serve you. Start those new projects. Set new goals. There will be highs and lows, joy and pain.

However, as you keep moving forward, you will enjoy the finished project, meeting your new goals and enjoying the fruits of your labour.

Don't stop, keep on renovating, restore life, vigour and activity.

It's worth it.

Malachi Brown, life coach, applies his passion in helping others unlock their full potential, enabling them to live the abundant lives they were created to have.



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by Linda Calder

The Golden Years



Christmas Gift Giving

As Christmas approaches, gift giving is one of the things on our minds. Along with a perfect Christmas, we want to give the perfect gifts to our loved ones. We want them to tear off the gift wrap, or open the gift bag and say, "Thank you! This is perfect! It's just what I wanted!"

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we are inundated with advertisements showing us the perfect gift we should get for our loved ones. But are these items we really want to get them? Selecting a gift takes a lot of thought; sometimes it calls for a bit of ingenuity.

Homemade gifts, especially baked goods are very popular now. If you like to bake, but don't have a lot of time to do so, just keep it simple. A couple of things that you make well and that everyone likes would work. Presentation can make a difference. Put it in a pretty little box, with a pretty ribbon and you're done! (Mixing in a few chocolates with your baked treats is always a nice bonus!)

Gift cards make great gifts. I've bought my sister a gift card from a local garden centre as she often buys a large number of plants each spring. I know this is a gift she can really use. Gift cards are also great if you have young grandkids. You can get them gift cards from the dollar store. This gives them the choice to pick out whatever they want from the store.

My grandson is fourteen. At his age, he's a bit challenging to buy a gift for. There isn't always a lot I can find to buy for him, but he does like sushi. So this year, I plan to take him to a couple of his favourite sushi restaurants. One of these restaurants along with its regular menu also has a Teppanyaki menu. With this, you sit at a table with a large grill in the middle and order various dishes and they are cooked right in front of you. It costs more than ordering from the regular menu but I don't mind. He also likes going to sushi restaurants where you order food using tablets. You begin by ordering a few items. While you are eating those, you keep looking and order more items. What I like about this kind of gift for my grandson is that it gives me a chance to spend time with my grandson.

A gift that I have always enjoyed receiving is pictures of my grandson. They are scattered around my walls and on the mantle in all sorts of beautiful frames. That's one gift that I don't mind a bit of dust gathering! However you celebrate Christmas, I hope the season wraps you in a wonderful feeling of warmth.

**Off topic, but I wanted to share a bit of extra information with those sixty-five to seventy years old. You are eligible for a free shingles vaccine. Also, this year there is a high dose flu shot available for those over sixty-five. Speak to your doctor for more information."*

Linda Calder is a retired teacher. She likes to write and enjoys spending time with her family. She also enjoys going on cruises, taking pictures and scrapbooking.

Winter Horoscope

December 2018 to February 2019

by Julie Antoinette



Aries (March 21 – April 20)

The heavens are teaching you about the true meaning of abundance. The means to accomplish your goals are always at your disposal. Beware of thinking of abundance in terms of money only, as it also can appear disguised in many unlikely resources. One definition of abundance is, "The ability to do what you need to do when you need to do it." The universe is fulfilling its desires through you.

Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

You've been exceptionally bored and in a mood to get into some mischief. Not necessarily bad mischief, just something to break up the daily monotony and to feel young again. A childhood friend you know is just the partner with which to carry out your mischievous endeavors. These are times you will reminisce on later.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

Conversations around you have become regurgitations of spewings from mass media. Nothing of quality is being provoked to discuss. What is needed are thinkers of the right questions to spark new ideas and thoughts. The questions you've been asking yourself lately want to be shared and they will spread ideas like wildfire. Bruce Springsteen says, "You can't start a fire without a spark."

Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

Something in your life is in dire need of an upgrade. A version 2.0 is needed to suit your current needs. You have many options before you so you must fully research each one to ensure your choice matches your current needs perfectly. Get ready for an overhaul of obsolete systems and an increase in productivity following this improvement.

Leo (July 23 – August 22)

You are part of a society of decision-makers in your career or family situation. Currently, an issue is on the table for discussion to decide the next best step to be taken in a project or issue. Your input will be immeasurable as part of this process. Prepare yourself to present your ideas clearly and calmly.

Virgo (August 23 – September 23)

A surge of new ideas and concepts flood your consciousness. You find this overwhelming – and so do the people in your life when you share these ideas with them. To avoid this, try writing them down for your own objective review rather than bouncing them off others who may not know how to handle them. Remember, the pen is patient, and mightier than the sword.

Libra (September 24 – October 23)

Librans are the sign of partnership and collaboration. Lately, you've been itching to be an integral collaborative component within a cause or group project. The subject of this group must be something that you're passionate about, or it won't soothe that itch! Select carefully. Try browsing through Meetup groups in your area. Trust that what you are seeking is also seeking you.

Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

Sometimes, you can get a bit obsessive, Scorpio. The brooding quality of the scorpion lends that to you. Something has entered your mind and won't leave! Most importantly, it won't leave you in peace. It is said that whatever costs you your peace is too expensive and not worth it. Call in the Truth Brigade to the rescue and send those pesky obsessions packing. The thoughts you've been entertaining have not been entertaining you!

Sagittarius (November 23 – December 21)

That one thing you've been wanting and desiring to have has not left your mind. You've thought that its unrealistic that you should have it, but true to the nature of desire, it will not relent. There is a way to make this happen for yourself. Besides, Christmas is coming!

Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Ever productive Capricorn, you feel that the year is almost over and so many projects left incomplete! It's so important that you get these done before the beginning of next year. There are timeline sensitivities and contingencies at stake! Take some time to re-order your schedule and employ some organizational tricks. You can make this happen and start 2019 off fresh!

Aquarius (January 20 – February 19)

You've always had a knack for connecting different groups of people with each other because you are very socially versatile. However, the time has come to connect yourself to a new group. You've become bored and have outgrown the one you're with! You'll handle this with flare, if you dare.

Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

You probably were a Bard in a past life, or have kissed the Blarney stone at least once in this life! If there's anyone who can weave a storyline and execute it with each word dripping intricacy and oozing suspense, it's you, Pisces. You have the ability to hold captive the attention of an entire room and lead them like the pied piper off into the forest. Have some fun entertaining your friends and loved ones this season.

Written by Julie Antoinette. Julie is a Sociology and Psychology graduate. In her free time, she is a crochet adventurer and musical muse. In this horoscope, she relays intuitive messages of guidance from the collective astrological archetypes. As above, so below.

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