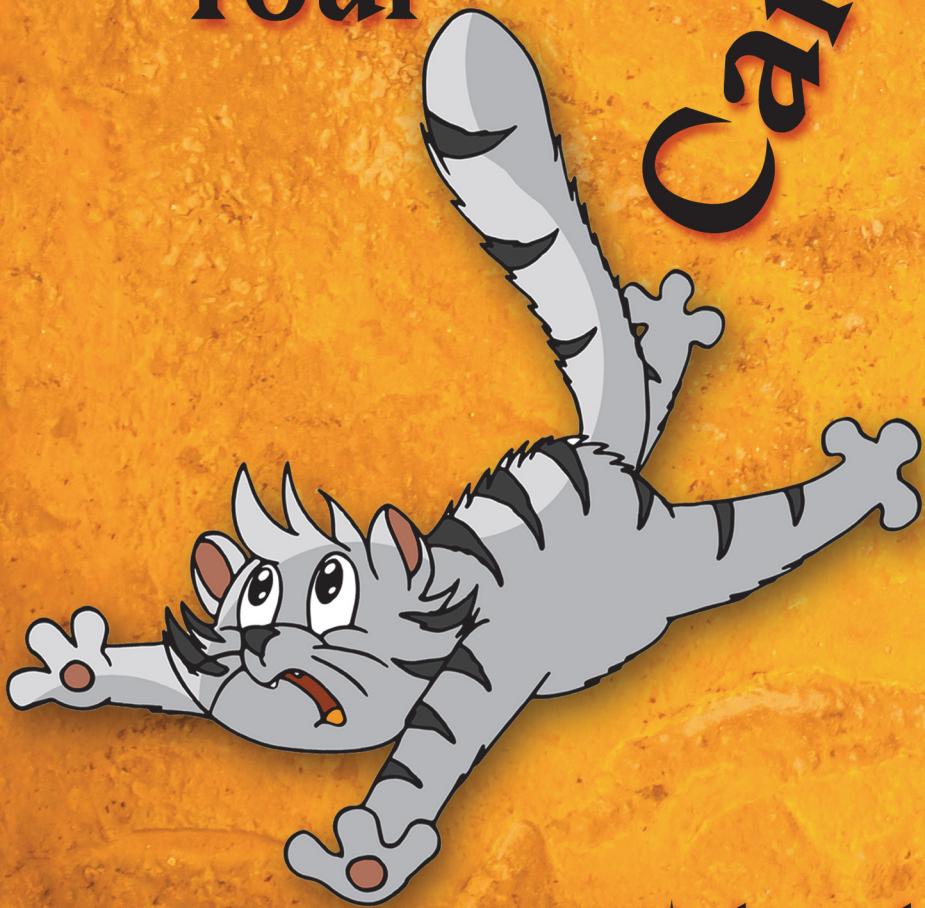


Tripping Over Your Cane



Jass Richards

Also by Jass Richards

fiction

(the Rev and Dylan series)

The ReGender App

License to Do That

The Blasphemy Tour

The Road Trip Dialogues

(the Brett series)

Dogs Just Wanna Have Fun

This Will Not Look Good on My Resume

A Philosopher, a Psychologist, and an Extraterrestrial

Walk into a Chocolate Bar

CottageEscape.zyx: Satan Takes Over

Turboletslams: Proof #29 of the Non-Existence of God

stageplays

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Two Women, Road Trip, Extraterrestrial

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Jane Smith's Translation Dictionary

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“If I were Siskel and Ebert I would give this book Two Thumbs Way Up. ... Yes, it is blasphemy toward organized religion but it gives you tons of Bible verses to back up its premises. And besides, it’s pure entertainment.” L.K. Killian

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“I am impressed by the range from stoned silliness to philosophical perspicuity, and I love your comic rhythm.” L. S.

“With a wicked sense of humor, *The Road Trip Dialogues* is an inherently engaging, fully entertaining, and impressively thought-provoking read.” Paul Vogel, *Midwest Book Review*

“Watched *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* last weekend. Could only think of Jass Richards and *The Road Trip Dialogues*.” May Arend, *Brazilian Bookworm*

Dogs Just Wanna Have Fun

“... terrifically funny and ingeniously acerbic ...” Dr. Patricia Bloom, *My Magic Dog*

This Will Not Look Good on My Resume

“Ya made me snort root beer out my nose!” Moriah Jovan, *The Proviso*

“The quick wit, the sharp tongue, the acid words and sarcasm ... I laughed so hard I cried in some places.” M. S., *My Chaotic Ramblings*

A Philosopher, a Psychologist, and an Extraterrestrial Walk into a Chocolate Bar

“I found myself caught between wanting to sit and read this all in one go and wanting to spread it out. I haven’t ever before laughed that hard and gotten to spend time with such unflinchingly tough ideas at the same time. ... [And] the brilliance of the Alices! ...” C. Osborne

CottageEscape.zyx: Satan Takes Over

“A hilarious take, based in reality. ... I laugh ... as much as I cry ...” Jennifer Jilks, mymuskoka.blogspot.com

Turbojetslams: Proof #29 of the Non-Existence of God

“We all very much enjoyed it—it’s funny and angry and heartfelt and told truly ... ” McSweeney’s

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Too Stupid to Visit

“ ... wretchedly funny ... ” Mike Rice

“Your material is fabulous! It reminds me so much of George Carlin.”
Gemini Rising

Substitute Teacher from Hell

“I enjoyed reading ‘Supply Teacher from Hell’ immensely and found myself bursting out laughing many, many times. It is extremely well-written, clever, and very intelligent in its observations.” Iris Turcott, dramaturge

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Magenta

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Magenta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "M" and "a" being particularly prominent.

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To my those who might say, “I didn’t know you were that old!”–

Yeah, well, neither did I.

(And believe me, I’m as surprised as you.)

So I was in the hardware store the other day and I dropped the receipt I was holding. I just kinda looked at it for a bit, wondering whether I actually needed it, when it occurred to me: the number of things you drop on the floor on any given day is directly proportional to how bad your arthritis is on that day.

The young guy who'd given me the receipt showed no response whatsoever to my delightful observation, which I'd expressed out loud, but both of the older guys nearby cracked up.

They knew what 'directly proportional' meant.

And became the reason for this ... script. Thank you.



So what happened was, a while ago, I was walking through the forest—I live in a cabin on a lake in the forest—hence, walking through the forest. Walking through the lake is too hard.

Anyway, I was walking through the forest in the middle of winter—during which walking through the lake is *especially* hard—and I accidentally stepped off the snow-packed path. For those of you of who have not had this experience, it's like there being one more step when you think you're at the bottom. Except that it wasn't an unexpected eight-inch drop. It was an unexpected eighteen-inch drop.

It hurt like hell, and by the time I got home, I'd lost almost all abduction in my right leg; that's the ability to swing your leg outwards to the side. You'd be surprised at how important abduction is. I certainly was. I had to cancel my interview for Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks.

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I figured I'd torn a muscle or a tendon, but it was during the pandemic and I wasn't about to go to my GP or even a physiotherapist just because of that. I'm an ex-runner. No stranger to torn muscles and tendons. I'd take it easy for a few days and do a bit of stretching.

But that hurt like hell too, so I thought maybe I'd torn a *ligament*, and the stretching was pulling it even further off the bone. So I did nothing. Let it heal on its own.

In retrospect, a thigh bone without a controlling ligament would have enabled me to ace that interview. ...

Regardless, two years later, I still had hardly any abduction, and my right quad seemed to have shortened, leaving me with a limp. I figured scar tissue from healing was preventing full extension, so I went to a sports specialist, hoping for a way to break down the scar tissue.

He took one look at my x-rays and said, "You've got moderate to severe arthritis in your right hip, and it's not a matter of *if* you need a hip replacement, but *when*."

Well. That was a surprise and a half. As far as I know, a hip replacement would create more scar tissue; it wouldn't break down existing scar tissue. Furthermore, although I didn't doubt the x-rays, arthritis didn't fit my experience: it develops gradually, right?

So, he continued, scanning my history and basically ignoring my questions on those two points, "No more high-impact stuff and no heavy lifting."

Well, I'd already stopped running, but-

"What about when the dock needs to be re-leveled in the spring?"

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He finally looked at me. Stared at me, actually. “You’ve been lifting your dock?”

“Well, it’s not going to lift itself,” I said, stating the obvious.

Then added, a little defensively, “Only with my left side. I need the hand on my right side to loosen then retighten the bolts.”

“Hire someone.”

Right. “They’ll charge a hundred bucks just to drive out to my place, then they’ll get all wimpy and take off the decking first, and given what’s left, just the aluminum frame, it’s no longer a matter of heavy lifting, is it.”

To be honest, the logic of that response escapes me now, but it made sense at the time.

Anyway. I’ve got arthritis in my right hip, as well as my left hip, my lower back, and my right knee. Probably my left knee too; it just hasn’t been x-rayed yet. Same for both ankles.

And I’ve still got whatever happened when I fell off the path.

This is a normal body. [Hold up a jointed model of the human body, squirt some WD-40 everywhere, then move all the parts easy-peasy.]

This is a body with arthritis. [Hold up the same jointed model, but this one’s all rusted, and it’s damn near impossible to move any of the parts.] [Unless you bang it on the table a few times. Which you do.]

And here’s the thing. The day you get arthritis is the exact same day your muscles start losing strength. It’s true: old people actually *do* get weaker. Not only because they move around less, because it’s harder,

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because we have less flexibility, but also because old bodies produce less protein *and* they process what little they produce less effectively. So not only is it harder to move [wave the rusted model in the air], we have less strength with which to do so.

So even though we're doing *half* the shit we used to, we're *twice* as tired.

If life were fair, we'd get *stronger* as we age. To compensate for shit like this. [Wave the rusted model in the air again.]

And here's another thing. You start to lose is your coordination. Not because you've suddenly become clumsy—well, you have, but you become clumsy because of that loss in flexibility. The exact same step that used to land your foot *there* [hover your foot in the air, then point your toe], now lands your foot god-knows-where [waver your foot]. And so you fall.

Or, in my case, you trip over your cane the first and last time you try to use it.

When I imagine using a walker, I have flashbacks to when I tried to put a shirt on a hanger. When I was stoned. Matching the positive corners of the hanger with the negative corners of the shirt, well, it was just ... fascinating. (You thought I was going to say 'too much', didn't you. Surprised ya.)

So if I tried to use a walker and I was stoned at the time, I'd be stationary for a very long time. Absolutely fascinated. And completely defeating the purpose.

When I was growing up, my parents would often ask me to go get something, "Quick like a bunny!" I realize now that they must've been

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in their 30s at the time. Because I suspect no one over 60 can say “Quick like a bunny” without bursting into sobs.

And by the way, “Don’t run with scissors”? If you’re old, don’t walk with a fork.

But back to the receipt that had fallen onto the floor, I finally got one of those long-handled claw things, for home use, because, well, it takes so damn long to reach the floor, to pick something up. And if I just leave it there—believe me, that’s always Plan A—I invariably trip over it. And then it takes longer to get myself back up than it would’ve to have just picked up the damn thing in the first place.

Unfortunately, wouldn’t you know it, the first time I needed the claw thing, it had fallen onto the floor from where I’d leaned it against the wall. I needed a claw thing to pick up the claw thing. And isn’t *that* fascinating ...

You know what I’m going to do? I’m going to sew my socks onto my pants bottoms. That’ll solve *that* problem.

The nice thing about arthritis is that unlike a hundred other things that can happen to you when you get old, it isn’t life-threatening.

Unless, of course, you’re just halfway across the crosswalk when the light turns green. The other light.

Last summer, I suddenly had a lot of ‘mobility issues’—that’s ‘shit speak’ for ‘can’t move without excruciating pain’—and I thought maybe all of whatever cartilage was left in my hip had disintegrated overnight and it was now completely bone-on-bone.

Because I’d carried my groceries to and from my car the day before.

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Turned out it was a pinched nerve. I know this because after two months of pain, I started laying on my desk and dangling my leg over the edge. Initially, by accident ... but then, by design. And doing that for just a few minutes several times a day fixed it. Who knew?

Not my GP, apparently.

Speaking of which, a young radiologist once told me that reading x-rays is a little like interpreting Rorschach images. So maybe I don't have severe arthritis after all. Maybe I have a mutant cockroach lodged in my hip.

Regardless, I decided it was time to get a grab bar for my tub slash shower, because, you know, 'Help, I've fallen and I can't get up!' (Well you should've thought of that possibility *before* you got out of bed this morning.)

I didn't want one of those stainless steel grab bars with the cross-hatched grip—you know, the ones that *scream* 'I'm an elderly fuck in a nursing home'—

By the way, why does everyone think that as soon as you turn 70, you suddenly want to play bingo, participate in sing-alongs, and talk to other people?

And have you noticed that it's the old people with dementia who are always the most ambulatory? Though maybe that's a good thing. I mean, wouldn't you kinda *want* them to run off somewhere? And forget where they live?

But you know, if assisted living is allowed, they should also allow assisted dying. Or at least provide a reliable 'Take one with ice cream' tablet. I am not looking forward to the day I wrestle with a cup full of sleeping pills, a bottle of vodka, and a razor blade.

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Which I'll surely drop on the floor. All of it.

And by the time I manage to pick up every last pill, I'll be dead.

Or so jubilant about my success that I'll change my mind.

What was I saying? Oh yeah. The walls around my tub are pine, stained and urethaned to a lovely golden hue, so I got a pine hand rail and stained and urethaned it to match. It was gorgeous. But the first time I wrapped my hand around it, I realized that it was exactly like a ballet barre. It's not so bad starting each day with a bit of irony ...

The guy who installed the barre asked if I also wanted one by my bed. Hm. When he saw my bed—the mattress is directly on the floor—he suggested a series of barres: one at mattress level to get my feet under me, one about a foot-and-a-half higher to get me into a crouch, and a third to grab onto to get fully vertical.

Oh hell, I said, let's just install a crane.

I have discovered, by the way, that it's easier to get out of my bed backwards. Don't know why. Same thing for going down stairs. However, do *not*, under any circumstance, attempt going *up* stairs backwards. Nothing good can come of that.

When you go *up* stairs, hang on to both hand rails, left and right, and take one step at a time, always leading with your good leg. You'll feel like a two-year-old, but that's okay. You'll look like one too.

Sometimes I play “Start Me Up” to help me get out of bed in the morning, but I use my old 45 and I play it on 33.

When I'm in a mood—because geez loueez Mick can still move and Keith is still *a/ive*—I play it on 78.

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And there's another one that will go right over the young ones' heads.
45? 33? 78?

I'm calling it payback. For all the times they call us old and say we don't know fuck.

Well, we *don't* know fuck. But only because we're too tired to keep up, what with getting out of bed in the morning ...

And here's a case in point. I rented a house for a couple weeks over on Georgian Bay during what was blackfly season back home, and couldn't for the life of me figure out how to turn on the tv. I looked on the front, the back, then along the top, the bottom, and the side edges. No button, no switch, nada. I tried clapping my hands. (I'm old. I think we've established that.) Nothing. I said "TV, ON!" No response. At all. (Did I mention it was one of those 'smart' tvs?)

Then I saw a flat rectangular object on the table in front of the tv. It had a shiny black surface. Looked like a miniature version of the monolith in *2001: Space Odyssey*. Right there in the living room of the house I was renting. Cool.

Anyway, I picked it up and looked on the front, the back, then along the top, the bottom ... you get the picture. Nada. I tried clapping. Because, well, you never know, maybe the aliens ... never mind. I tried telling it to turn itself on. Then I tried telling it to go fuck itself.

Then I got creative. I started tapping the thing. I tapped on every square centimeter of the shiny black surface. I tried short taps. I tried long taps, that were more like presses. I tried three short taps, followed by three long taps, then three short taps. Because, well, you never know ...

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I tried banging it on the table. I tried throwing it at the wall. I tried throwing it through the window.

Was there an owner's manual anywhere? Of course not.

No great loss, though. Because have you *seen* the user manuals these days?

Note, first, the change from *owner's* manual to *user* manual. That's because young people today—you knew that was coming—but did you see how long I held off?

And that's another thing. Young people today have no self-discipline. 'Course, most old people don't either. Boomers. The world.

I, however, have a great deal of self-discipline, developed over the *years* it took to become an accomplished pianist. And a decent marathoner.

Excuse me for a minute while I burst into sobs.

But the first thing, the thing before the other thing, that I was going to say, is that young people don't actually *own* shit. Probably because they've never had to pay with actual cash. Using credit cards is, by definition, paying *on credit*. Paying with *someone else's* money. Hence, not “*Owner's Manual*”.

The other thing I was going to say is that they don't know how to use apostrophes. Hence “*User Manual*” instead of “*User's Manual*”.

But perhaps more to the point is that young people today don't know how to write. It's true! It's *literally* true. (They don't understand what 'literally' means either, but that's another issue.) Schools don't teach writing anymore.

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But that's no excuse, not being able to write. It's an explanation. For the "User Manual" that is nothing but a bunch of supremely unhelpful pictograms.

Because they could just *print* it. Understandably, that would take a while. It would be probably be faster to tap it out on their keyboards. But since they'd probably use just two fingers ... You know what? They should tap it out on their phones. Because have you seen how fast their thumbs can fly?

That's why I never text. I mean, look: my left fifth finger, for example, knows exactly where the letters 'a', 'q' and 'z' are. *Exactly*. Even with my eyes closed. My thumb? Has no fucking idea.

Which is why the first and only text I ever sent, using just my thumbs, contained nothing but spaces.

And accessing voice messages—because I can never get to the phone in time to answer it, and I'm sure as hell not going to carry it with me everywhere— Accessing voice messages requires way too many tiny teeny key taps, and god help you if you get one wrong ...

Cellphones work remarkably well as routers though, which is why I'd bought one in the first place. So mine is now sitting, permanently, on a carefully-positioned stand in the study. All's well that ends well.

Except that it makes a bunch of weird sounds at odd hours that I assume are passive-aggressive complaints about not getting out much.

But I digress.

"How do I work the remote for the tv?" I called the owner of the rental. Using the phone that was conveniently attached to the wall.

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And having assumed the thing *was* the remote, and not a miniature monolith.

He said “Swipe it.”

What? “How would stealing it make it work?”

“No, swipe *it!*” he said.

“Through what?” I looked around for some sort of card reader into which a miniature monolith would fit.

“Run your finger across the surface from left to right,” he said, in that voice you use for idiots. And old people.

Well. That’s intuitive, isn’t it. I mean, seriously. Only a 20-year-old working at Apple who still lives in the basement of his parents’ house would think of smearing his finger across a surface. For any reason.

Certainly no woman would have thought of that. Because it means that every time you try to wipe off the fingerprints, you either reset the damn thing to factory defaults, deleting a year’s worth of effort to make it ‘user’-friendly, or you end up watching porn.

But you know what? I’ll bet that’s what Dave was supposed to do with the monolith. Swipe it. If he had, he might not have gone insane. “It’s full of stars,” my ass. The thing was probably an cellphone. For really big aliens. Who are probably laughing their heads off.

Well, maybe not literally.

Anyway, an hour later, I couldn’t figure out how to turn *off* the damn tv. Swiping the remote in the reverse direction didn’t work. Of course not. So I just unplugged it from the wall. *That* worked.

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Have you ever tried plugging something *into* those new tamper-resistant outlets? Yes, I was pushing the big prong into the big opening. Yes, I tried pushing with all of my meager strength. Turns out—I had to go online to discover this—they have spring-loaded shutters and you have to be sure to keep the prongs super straight going in. Which is impossible to do when the outlet is behind the tv console.

And yes, I tried moving the console out of the way. You know how that went.

So apparently people with arthritis should stay active, exercise, work out. Which makes sense. A body with arthritis is like a cement truck. Once the barrel thing stops moving, stops going around and around, you just ... solidify.

The problem for me is that none of my usual work-out things are possible now. Running, playing basketball, riverdancing— Yes, it's true. I even set up a large screen tv so I could dance along with the company. I wasn't always doing the exact same steps, but honestly, who'd know?

I think my motorcycling days are over too. I can't throw my leg over. Not that I could ever do that easily. Like everything else, motorcycles are made for men. Who are a good six inches taller than me. Well, seven inches. Now.

I could use a milk crate to get on. But then I'd have to fall *off*. Because once I was on my bike, I wouldn't be able to reach down far enough to grab the crate, to take it with me. Even if I could, I probably wouldn't be able to twist around to attach the crate to the back of my bike. And how the hell am I going to kick the kick stand?

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When you get old, life gets complicated in ways you don't anticipate, doesn't it?

Anyway. Once I would've fallen off, I most *certainly* wouldn't've been able to get up. Because there'd be a motorcycle on top of me.

Unfortunately, my driving days are almost over too. I can still drive, but what's the value of that if you can't get into your car? I can tuck my head to clear the roof or I can lift my knees to swing my legs in, but I cannot do both at the same time. Most days.

I can, however, still get in and out of my kayak. Though I have to say it's becoming a bit iffy. The water level changes, so the distance of the drop into it from the dock changes, but so far I haven't landed in the lake while trying to get in. For getting out, I thought maybe I could rig up one of those jetski pulley things, but then I'd have to get out of my kayak to turn it on, so it could pull my kayak onto shore so I could get out of it.

Unless, of course, it came with a remote control. One with a user manual.

While I was over on Georgian Bay, I saw an old guy, a guy older than me, get out of a kayak: he just rolled it and fell out. And I totally got it. And that works on a sandy beach when you're wearing a wetsuit. On rocks and slime in your ordinary clothes, not so much.

Another downside to living on a small lake—the acoustics. All those idyllic videos of cottage life, with loons calling in the distance? The real soundtrack is full of power tools, boat motors, and screaming kids. Because first, sound travels remarkably well across a small body of water. And second, it gets amplified when it bounces off the surrounding wall of forest. Sometimes it's all so loud, I can hardly hear myself think. Apparently that's not a problem for my neighbours.

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So I'm actually kinda looking forward to losing my hearing. I'll just get hearing aids. They can be turned off. I've always thought that the absence of earlids deals a fatal blow to the argument by design.

In the meantime, I just use earplugs. People think I'm rude when, in the middle of a conversation, I put them in, but people are so easily offended these days, aren't they?

Have you noticed that as people become more and more deaf, they speak more and more loudly?

At first I couldn't make sense of that: they want others to speak more loudly, so they themselves speak more loudly. Because, what, they're such outstanding role models, others will imitate them?

What they *should* do is speak more *softly*. Whenever I start whispering, the other person starts shouting. "WHAT?!" Works like a charm.

Unless, of course, the hard of hearing person is speaking loudly because they like to hear *themselves* talk. In which case, what they should do is just shut the fuck up.

About staying active, though, do not use your nine-foot stepladder to clean your picture windows. That's actually an easy one for me, because I haven't even been able to get the nine-footer out of the shed for years. Last time I *was* able to do that, I was too tired to carry it to the windows. I couldn't get it back into the shed either. So I painted it orange, and red, and gold ... Looks a bit like a pile of pretty autumn leaves now. Before I put my glasses on.

But that's not an age thing, my poor vision. I've worn glasses since I was a kid. Without glasses, I couldn't see what kinds of chocolate bars were available, on the shelves behind the counter at the tuck shop.

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Nor could I see the blackboard. Not whatever was written on the blackboard, for sure I couldn't see that, but I mean the blackboard itself.

Over the years, my vision has become more ... complicated, and I now have four pairs of glasses: reading glasses, computer glasses that are mid-to-near progressives, distance glasses, and out-and-about glasses that are full progressives—for driving, shopping, and, well, being out-and-about.

I haven't developed cataracts quite yet, nor macular degeneration, but, characteristic of people who are severely myopic, I have developed foveoschisis. Which means I have to go to Toronto once a year to see an ophthalmologist.

First time, I drove down. I used to live in Toronto, I knew my way around, and I figured that while I was there, I'd go to my favourite Greek bakeries to stock up. What can I say, it was hell. As soon as I got to Barrie, a two-hour drive, the congestion on the 400 was like rush hour in Toronto. And once I actually got to Toronto, another two hours, I discovered it was quicker to go across on Eglinton than on the 401. And then getting from Pape and Danforth to Bond Street took another hour. I could've run it in half that time! Well, not now. But ...

And *then*, the underground parking lot for St. Michael's Hospital was full. Something I discovered only after I had driven down and down and down and down. My first clue was the car ahead of me, now backing up into me. My second clue, fast on the heels of the first, was the inability of either of us to actually turn around. So, there we were, two cars, then three, including the car behind me, backing up and up and up and up, like a giant centipede with brain damage.

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I discovered that old people can't twist around to see behind them for very long. And that using only the side- and rear-view mirrors for tight backing up turns is tricky. Especially in a garage that even young people would call 'dimly lit'. And your car's headlights are on the wrong end.

After congratulating myself for dinging only seven parked cars on my way out— And no, I didn't leave any notes. Do you honestly think that after five hours in the car, I could get out and back in seven times in a row? *Before* the driver ahead of me, who was now behind me—oh, isn't that fascinating ... Before that driver plowed me into one of the oversized concrete pillars? Seven times?

Once I was finally out, I started driving around, looking for another place to park. The police officer I asked, who was just standing there on the sidewalk, I don't know why, was not helpful at all. I told him so.

Eventually, I finally found another parking lot, at the corner of Dundas and Yonge, which was close enough to the hospital, but then I couldn't find the damn entrance. To the hospital. It wasn't on Bond Street. Which was blocked off because of construction. It wasn't on Shuter Street. I'd passed an entrance there, but it was very clearly marked for ambulances only. It wasn't on Victoria Street. I had to walk around the entire building, pain shooting down my leg with each step I took—this was when I had that pinched nerve thing going on and hadn't yet figured it out ...

Yes, I had thought to put my cane into the car, but I forgot to take it with me once I'd parked the car and gotten out. Probably just as well. Because, well, you know.

And *then, after* the appointment with the ophthalmologist, I discovered that the drops they'd put into my eyes left me unable to read not only the signs directing me out of the deep underground

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parking lot—I did manage to find the parking lot again, *and* my car—but also the signs directing me to the Gardiner Expressway and back onto the 400.

Second time, I drove to Barrie, then took the GO train the rest of the way. Fifteen-minute walk from Union Station to the hospital. Piece of cake. Well, manageable. Especially without the pinched nerve.

The ophthalmologist's office is like an assembly line. First, I get an OCT scan. The two chin rests confused me, because I have only one chin, but then I realized I was supposed to put my chin on the left rest for the left eye scan and on the right rest for the right eye scan. I'm smart that way.

Then I get a vision test, during which the technician is horrified that I can't read *any* of the letters.

And then I get an examination, during which the ophthalmologist shines a really bright light into my defenceless eyes. Defenceless because the drops the technician put into my eyes dilated my pupils. Like the rest of me, my pupils are old. They don't recover as quickly as they used to. So the ophthalmologist nearly blinds me. A bit counterproductive, if you ask me.

He then tells me that I'm severely myopic—duh, I want to say to the fuzzy blob on a stick a few feet away from me—but the OCT scan shows that the foveoschisis is stable, so ... see you next year.

And somehow, those three five-minute tests take four fucking hours. Person next to me says she's been there for *five* hours. I mention the need for a logistics consultant.

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So I miss the 1:55 train back to Barrie. Then the 3:05 train. Then the 3:55 train. I leave the hospital at 4:00, confident I can make the 4:38 train.

Silly me. I even stop for a slice of pizza on the way to the station. I figured I'd eat it while I sat on a bench in front of where the Barrie train would stop and open its doors.

Here's the thing. Do not try to catch a train at Union Station between 4 and 6 unless you are an experienced train commuter. If you're a neophyte, wait until later.

Or take an earlier train. Like the 1:55. Or the 3:05. Or even the 3:55.

I find the ticket machine, no problem. But that's about it. I give up on a drinking fountain, and thank god I don't need a washroom.

After about ten minutes of mostly trying not to get knocked down, I see a neon-vested Union Station staff person. "Where do I go to get on the GO train to Barrie?" I ask. Beg, actually.

"The platform number will be indicated on the signs," she says. "Three minutes before departure."

I worry that that might not be enough time, depending on which sign I'm at and which platform I need to get to. But I realize, wisely, that I don't have time to tell her how incredibly stupid that three-minute policy is.

Okay. I see the signs. There are several. All hanging about fifteen feet off the ground. The reading part of the lenses in my out-and-about progressives is at the bottom. Simply put, I can't tilt my head back far enough to read the signs. Without falling over. Guess what.

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I ask a young person for help.

“What platform is the Barrie train at?”

“Nine and ten.”

And—just in case—“What time does it leave?”

“4:38.”

“Thank you.”

I look around for a big 9/10 sign and see it over a doorway far in the distance. About 10 metres away.

I look at my watch. Hm. I tilt my head back. Still no. I take off my glasses. Ah. 4:35:15, 16, 17 ... No problem—

I pick up my glasses. That takes a while. Because I get knocked over halfway down.

Fortunately, and purely by luck, I fall over but not onto my glasses. And feel like an awkward half-unfolded stepladder optimistically protecting a bottle of window cleaner.

By the time I get back up, it’s probably 4:36:15, 16, 17 ... but the stampede is well ahead of me. I head to the doorway.

Turns out the platform is another 40 metres past the doorway.

I make a run— I make a walk for it. And cover those 40 metres in 69 seconds. Tying my university track record. For the 400.

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And as I lowered myself into the nearest empty seat, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

And now I *do* need a washroom. And you all probably need one too. So, intermission. See you in ... half an hour.



Sorry I'm late getting back. I forgot I had the second half to do yet.

Actually, that's not quite true. I thought I'd already done the second half. I mean, look, I've already done the second half a dozen times. Just at different places. On different days. And all of the different places look the same now. Even with my glasses on. Walmart, Sobeys, Metro, Home Depot. And a bunch of idiots wandering around buying shit they neither need nor want.

As for different days, well, you know, time ... They say time goes by faster as you age. One explanation for this is that each year is a smaller percentage of the whole. When you're two, a year is half your life. When you're 72, it's ... a lot less than that.

Another explanation is that each year you do less and less. A year full of a hundred new and different things, that's a long year. But a year full of, I don't know, just falling and getting back up— Actually, wouldn't *that* make for a *long* year?

Anyway, I was halfway back to the highway by the time I remembered I hadn't done the second half. Here. Now.

So I turned around and came back. To here. To now. I think there's evidence in there that I time travelled, but I'll let you figure it out.

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Have you noticed there are more signs on the roads these days? Ads for this, that, and what-the-fuck, but also things like “Jesus forgives you” and “Do you need a lawyer?” ...

And of course, “Don’t drink and drive” and, now, “Don’t text and drive”
... As if.

And they’ve gotten much smaller, the signs, have you noticed? So they’re harder to read. I try to keep up, but it’s not easy.

I suspect they should have one just for old people: “Don’t read and drive.”

Speaking of reading, ebooks are great, aren’t they? You can turn *any* book into a large print book. But there’s something about reading a screen that’s ... more tiring. At least for my eyes.

So I go with those magnifying sheets. Credit card size for grocery shopping, paperback size for reading. Pity they don’t make one the size of my tv so I can read the Netflix menu without getting up.

And speaking of driving, I don’t drive at night anymore. It’s easy on a highway without many cars. I just follow the pair of tail lights ahead of me. Once I followed someone all the way home. *Their* home, not mine.

That was embarrassing. She called the cops. The one in charge took one look at me, saw that I was old, and asked me where I live. Talk about a stereotype.

But wouldn’t you know it, I couldn’t remember my address. In my defence, I never look at the number out at the road, I’m too busy aiming for the driveway.

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Plus, for the first ten years, my house didn't even *have* a number, because the road I'm on didn't even have a *name*.

Generally speaking, my memory is still pretty good. I haven't started to forget things yet, but when I do, I figure I'll just start labeling things and leaving myself notes. 'The tea is in this cupboard.' 'Your keys are in the fridge. And the broccoli is in your coat pocket.'

The forementioned sleeping pills, vodka, and razor blades? In a box in the bathroom. On the counter where I can see it. And reach it. Clearly labeled.

First I went with "Can't walk, can't hear, can't see, can't—" but I ran out of space.

Then I went with "It's now or never!" thinking, of course, of the paradox: if you can form the intent and carry out the deed, it's too soon; but once you can't form the intent or carry out the deed, it'll be too late.

Then I went with "No more fucks to give." Because, well, you'll see.

Finally, anticipating that more clarity might be needed, I went with "Sleeping pills, vodka, and razor blades."

I eat a lot of broccoli now. And walnuts and blueberries. And what have you. All the stuff they say prevents cognitive decline. And I know that most of the studies attribute any benefits to the placebo effect, but since we're all so good at deluding ourselves, that doesn't really matter, does it.

For the moment, however, I do remember where stuff is. But I don't always remember how it got there. I've got half a dozen filing

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cabinets in my study, and I have no recollection whatsoever of purchasing them or putting them there.

I also don't always remember whether or not I've read a particular book. So I'm starting to sign books out of the library that I've already read. Typically things start to seem familiar a hundred pages in, but not always. The upside is I've started re-reading my entire Jodi Taylor collection. And laughing just as much as I did the first time around.

Works with movies too. I can't tell you how many times I've watched my Monty Python movies. I really can't.

Anyway. I couldn't remember where I lived– No, that's inaccurate. I knew where I lived; I just couldn't remember my actual, my new, address. So I told the cop I lived at R. R. #1, Burk's Falls.

I could tell he thought I was a smartass.

He was right, but ... for the wrong reason.

I hadn't yet told him where to put the apostrophe.

Anyway, he asked me to walk heel-to-toe in a straight line. Well, you know how that went. I fell down. Of course, I fell down.

Then he asked for my driver's licence. I gave it to him. He took a look at my address–why didn't I think of that?–and offered to drive me home. Said I could come back in daylight to get my car.

“Okay, where is it?” I asked.

He stared at me.

“The address, I mean. Of here.”

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He told me.

I stared at him. “I won’t remember that.”

He agreed. Apparently. “What’s your phone number?”

I told him. Don’t ask me why I remembered it, because I never call myself ...

He tapped away on his cellphone. “Okay, I just sent a text with the address.”

“It’s a landline. You can’t send texts to landlines.” This much I know.

He tapped away again. And waited. And waited. “There’s no answer.”

I stared at him. Again. “That’s because I’m here.”

I started to wonder just which one of us was the more confused.

“Why don’t you just write it down on a piece of paper for me?”

He didn’t have a piece of paper. Of course not.

“Here.” I pulled a notepad from my pocket.

He stared at it.

“Here.” I handed him a pen.

He stared at it.

Oh, yeah. Young people can’t write.

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“Or you can print it,” I told him.

“Smartass,” I heard him mutter, as he printed out the address.

I grinned.

“Use your GPS,” he said, “so you don’t get lost again.”

Right. *That’s* why I’d ended up there. I didn’t tell him the real reason.

I also didn’t tell him I didn’t have a GPS. His brain would have exploded.

I have an old car. It didn’t come with a GPS. I did buy one from Canadian Tire a few years ago, *and* figured out how to use it, but when I turned left instead of driving off a cliff, it kept sending me on elaborate detours back to the cliff. So I stopped using it.

I had some fun with it first, though. “Turn right, turn left, turn right!” It was so easy to make the thing frantic. I kept waiting for it to scream, after five wrong turns, “Where the *hell* are you going?”

So. Where the hell *was* I going? Oh yeah. Driving at night on the highway is easy, but in a city? I can see the traffic lights, red, yellow, green, no problem. But I find all the headlights coming at me a bit blinding.

Which is why we’re here for a show at ten o’clock in the morning. Well, one of the reasons we’re here for a show at ten o’clock in the morning. I explained to the booking agent that my audience gets up at five, god knows why, they have a nap after lunch, whenever that happens to be, and then after supper, they watch tv for a bit, then go to bed. At six or seven. So eight or nine, at night, wouldn’t work. And so we’re here at ten. In the morning.

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But what was I talking about? Before— Oh yeah. When you want to clean your picture windows, do not use your six-foot stepladder either. Once you climb past the second step, you'll have nothing to hang on to. Or grab. And two steps up is of no value.

What you need to do is wait for a rainy day, then use one of those long-handled window cleaning things with an extension. Don't use the squeegee side though. That'll just leave streaks. Very long streaks. Use the sponge side. Mop the whole window with a vinegar-water solution, then just let the rain rinse it clean. But make sure it's just a rainy day, not a thunderstorm day. Otherwise, the extended handle becomes a lightning rod. And nothing good will come of that.

But before that ... Ah. Staying active. I can't run, I can't play basketball, I can't riverdance— So I thought I'd get into yoga. All that stretching would be good for a body that's turning into the Tin Man with every passing minute, right?

So I bought a yoga DVD. Well. The young and very flexible young woman—oh, did I say 'young' already?—the young and very flexible young woman was on the seventh move by the time I'd gotten into the first one. It was down on the floor. I had to press the 'pause' button.

And then when I lay back, as she instructed, I remembered that I get dizzy when I lay flat on the floor.

So I closed my eyes. That helps. But then I couldn't see what I was supposed to do while I was there, lying on the floor. Getting back up is my usual goal when I find myself in that position.

So then I tried another DVD, called "Gentle Yoga". I also bought "Yoga for Arthritis" and "Yoga for Inflexible People". I thought that last one hit the nail on the head.

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But no. Even for that last one, eventually I had to get down onto the floor. And back up. And back down and— I tell you, if I intentionally get down onto the floor, I'm gonna wanna stay there for a while. And once I get back up, I'm gonna do my damnedest to stay *there* for a while.

It didn't help that, anticipating that I'd have to pause the DVD at some point, I'd gently tossed the remote onto the carpeted floor. *Before* I'd pressed the 'Power' and 'Play' buttons. I stared down at it. And wondered where my claw thing was.

So once again, by the time I'd gotten into the starting position, the young and very flexible young woman was— Well, she was laughing, probably.

I'm surprised I couldn't find one called "Yoga for Old People", but then I figured that someone in HR had likely gone ballistic someone in Marketing, "You can't call them 'old'! That's insensitive!"

Look. It took a great many years to get here, and I'm damn well going to own it, as they say. I'm old. Not *that* old, yet. But old nevertheless.

So, all things considered, imagine my delight at finding a DVD called "Chair Yoga". It's yoga you can do when you're just sitting. Okay, now we're talking. I got into the starting position, remote in hand, and *then* pressed the 'Play' button—who says you' can't teach an old dog new tricks—but I have to say that after the first two poses, I thought to myself "This kinda wrecks the 'just sitting' part."

And then I thought to myself, to hell with this, I have to warm up before I can even get out of bed, that should count for something.

Especially since I have to do that half a dozen times through the night to get to the bathroom.

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And now I have to pee again. Back in a minute.



You know what else I think? Pot was legalized just in time. I'm old now! I don't have a job anymore! I don't have to be lucid—for anything!

Once I got stuck in a revolving door for hours. Double-dutch flashbacks, I tell ya. (Men, don't even bother; you won't get that one.)

I didn't see the regular door next to it. Because it was a transparent door. A see-through door.

Another house I rented, once, had a sliding glass door leading from the kitchen to a closed-in porch. I walked into it not once, not twice, but three times. Before I stuck a large post-it on it at eye level that said "STOP. *Open* the door first."

You ever notice that the stairs you take to go up are the very same stairs you take to go down? How can that be? How can the very same be exactly the opposite?

Regardless, because I'm old, I now use the escalator. Once I walked up the down escalator at just the right speed and created my own infinity staircase! It made me tired.

And the elevator took me down to a bunker for cars! A huge concrete bunker—full of cars. Figures. The apocalypse is just around the corner and men think first and foremost of saving their cars.

Speaking of elevators, used to be I was considered too stupid to press the button. "Oh is *that* what that's for?" I'd say to the Important Man who'd just pushed past me to press the button. "I saw the button, with an upward-pointing arrow, and I understand that elevators can go up,

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but you know, *I just never put the two together!!* I was just waiting for it to *know* that I was standing here!"

Now I'm also too weak. Apparently.

Recently, at least the man was mature enough to ask first. Whether I'd pressed the button. And I said, in full geriatric mode, "I can't remember."

Because, you know, I really couldn't.

I probably didn't. Press the button. I was probably too busy marveling at the fact that the same elevator goes up *and* down. Just not at the same time, surely.

Speaking of house rentals, I also rented a house down south last winter. A lakeshore house in South Carolina. So I could keep kayaking. Because it's hard to do that here. In the winter.

And while I was there, Trump decided that all Canadians staying more than 30 days had to be registered and fingerprinted. Otherwise, we'd be subject to criminal charges, a fine of \$5,000, and/or imprisonment. He called the Executive Order "Protecting Americans from Invasion".

Well, he didn't have to be so heavy-handed. I mean, how much damage can a few battalions of seventy-year-olds do?

And we're *Canadian*. If he wanted us to leave, all he had to do was ask.

And, unlike most Americans, we know where we live. So we *could've* gone back home, is what I'm saying.

Anyway, I went online and filled in the I-94 form. The instructions said I had to print it out and present it at the nearest port of entry within

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seven days. I figured I could make the drive to Buffalo in two days, but that would put me at a port of *exit*. However, if I crossed the border into Canada, then turned around and came back, I'd be at a port of *entry*. Like stairs! And elevators!

But seriously? *That's* what I was supposed to do? It's an online form, why couldn't I just click on 'Submit'? Or take it to the post office? Or, hell, hire a pony.

As for getting fingerprinted, the website said I had to make an appointment at a USCIS Contact Centre. The nearest one was in Atlanta. A three-hour drive, one way. I figured I'd go to the public library instead. They have inkpads. And it's a fifteen-minute drive, one way.

So. I had a month left, and I was trying to decide whether I should just keep my head down and stay—it was sunny and warm and I could go kayaking every day—or return home a month early. Where it was cloudy and cold and I could shovel snow every day.

While I was dithering back and forth, the fingerprint requirement was retracted and a deadline for registration announced as April 11. A week past my planned date of return.

Which was fortuitous, because it took a week longer to get back, as I had to dodge torrential rain and whiteout snow, tornadoes and hurricanes, forest fires and flash floods. Not all at the same time at the same place, obviously, but geez loueez, it makes you wonder how *anyone* can *deny* 'climate change'—'shit speak' for global warming—with a straight face.

What was I saying? Oh yeah. Another upside to being old—in addition to being able to take full advantage of the legalization of pot—is that we become invisible. This is true of old people in general, but it's

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especially true of old women. Has been since we turned, oh, forty. Men, you know it's true: as soon as we become unfuckable, we don't even register on your radar.

And I have to say we really haven't taken full advantage of that. Being female and over *sixty* is like having a Romulan cloaking device.

So we can get away with all sorts of shit. Shoplifting a screwdriver. Going up to the buffet table six times. Placing a bomb in the House of Commons. When Parliament's in session. Anyone who *can* see me will just assume that I'm some dim-witted cleaning lady. Not an advocate of the separation of politics and government, along with electoral reform that would replace the current 'first past the post' practice with something actually democratic.

And it's amazing how much a woman can record while Romulan-in private offices, boardrooms, hotel lobbies You'd think we didn't understand the concept of blackmail.

Another upside? Now's the time to eat all the pizza I want. And a whole pan of still-warm chocolate chip cookies if I'm so inclined. Because what with the withering away of my muscles, I probably won't gain any weight.

And apparently my taste buds are going to wither away too, so I figure it'll be easy to lose weight later. When I'm *really* old.

And don't have any teeth left. Either.

Which, come to think of it, explains the nursing home menu of mashed peas, mashed potatoes, and mashed mystery meat.

Another thing is that the older you get, the less time you have left. You might think that's a downside, but what it means for me is that I

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don't have time for shit anymore. I don't have time for small talk anymore. And I certainly don't have time to be polite to assholes anymore.

For example, when I see a woman who's performing femininity, wearing high heels and make-up, endorsing the view that women must appear sexualized at all times, do I tell her she's making it hard for those of us who'd like to be taken seriously, for our knowledge and our skills? Hell yeah!

You thought I was going to piss on men, didn't you.

Okay. Fair's fair. When I see a man who's— When I see a man, I tell him to shut the fuck up and get out of my way.

But you know what? Another upside of being old is I just don't care anymore. And for good reason. I've written 30 books. And not one has made a damn bit of difference.

All the conversations I've had with my neighbours over the last 40 years? And there must have been over a dozen—conversations, not neighbours—didn't change a thing.

For example, my boomer neighbor recently flew to China because it was on her bucket list—

Sidenote for the young ones: There's a huge difference between early and late boomers. I was born in the late 50s, so yeah, I'm a boomer. But *my* age cohort has been into 'reduce, reuse, recycle' since forever. So global warming? That's not on me.

And 'a bucket list'? It's a list of all the stuff the early boomers wanted to do but never got around to while they were busy making a mint and wrecking the planet. Me? I was busy trying to find a job.

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And seriously. Do you think any one of them is going to ‘kick the bucket’? Noooo, they’re going to climb into a hospital bed, claim it in perpetuity, and demand every procedure available. They don’t know how to say ‘Enough’. It’s always ‘More, More, More!’ You’d think they were all classical economists. Who failed grade ten science.

And it was mandatory back when they were in school. Grade ten science. It was even evidence-based science, not this what-the-fuck faith-based science. Which, by the way, is an oxymoron if I ever heard one.

So they have no excuse for their stupidity. Except, well, their stupidity. Ever notice how it’s the stupid people who think they know everything and the smart people who know they don’t? So we’re the ones who come off as stupid, while they come off as authorities. Which is why ... the world.

What was I saying? Oh yeah, my boomer neighbour. And her bucket list of flying here, there, and everywhere. Which, as you hopefully know, produces *three hundred times* as much carbon dioxide as going by car. So if she really thinks her trip to China is essential travel, she could at least drive there.

And lest you think boomers have a monopoly on stupidity or irresponsibility, my millennial neighbor still has so-called ‘campfires’ during the summer, all day long, just a stone’s throw from Algonquin Park. Remember the forest fires of the summer of 2023? And 2025? He, apparently, does not.

Three times a year, for months at a time, the local folk kill the increasingly scarce deer, moose, bears, wolves. For fun. And every weekend, the city folk try to kill the few fish that are left. For fun.

So, fuck it. I tried.

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And so, another upside, I just sit. A lot. The path down to the water is, mysteriously, steeper than it used to be, and there are more exposed rocks and roots than there used to be. Eventually, I'll probably put in some stairs. Or maybe a zipline.

But for now, I just take it slow.

Once I'm down there, I set aside my ski poles, take off my padded hockey pants and my motorcycle helmet, unpack my knapsack, settle into my lounge chair, and just sit.

I drink deeply from a huge and perfect cup of tea, I flood my brain with some breathtakingly beautiful music, and I stare at the sparkles. The bright sparkles on the dark water. I watch the little mink as it makes its way along the shoreline of the cove, with its multitudes of green; the two otters when they pop up and natter away, before arching and sliding back into the water; the dragonflies with their unbelievably fragile but functional wings that are, in addition, so exquisitely iridescent ... and I think to myself, 'What a wonderful world'? Hell no. The world is fucked up. In so many ways.

I think to myself, 'Savour these moments.' Because you never know when something is going to be your last time. I didn't know that August 23, 2003 was going to be the last time I'd go for a ten-mile run. Or that some other time was the last time I'd riverdance or the last time I'd play Beethoven's *Pathétique*.

And that's true for everyone. Because shit happens. Other than getting old.

And people who say 'Live each day as if it's your last' must have no imagination. Because doing that would make each day simply ... too sad to bear.

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So instead, I say to myself ‘Savour the moments’. The crappy moments, you just have to live through, to get to the next day. But the wonderful moments? The moments that fill you with joy? *Savour them.*

Besides, I think to myself, it took so long to get down to the water and into the chair, I’ll be damned if I’m going to get out of it any time soon.

Well, at least not for a good five minutes. Then I’ll have to pee.

