adventure #21 – high spirits & great expectations

I sincerely struggled with this week’s adventure – not only because as I sit to write about it, I have to deal with two hyper-affectionate cats vying to rub their faces on my flickering fingers – but because it deals with the twin perils of expectation and disappointment.

This time of year – the time between my birthday and the middle of September, the “back to school” season – is always one that I find to be filled with poignant lessons for me (especially the kind that I should have already learned). I firmly believe that after the many many years of repeating the cycle of school-summer-school, especially among university graduates (for whom the cycle can occasionally appear endless), one cannot help but be programmed to feel a heightened sense of anticipation (trepidation for some?) and excitement (dread?) in these brief weeks when the weather turns, the heat breaks, and all eyes turn to Labour Day weekend when the heady days of summer...
relaxation mark their unavoidable end.

It just so happens that this month, I grabbed a book by one of my favourite authors, the late Robertson Davies, from my shelf – a book that I have not yet read, High Spirits. This book is a collection of ghost stories that Davies presented to the graduate students of Massey College, where he presided as its founding master, on the events of the annual college Christmas parties (I believe through the years 1963 to 1980). It dawned on me that Massey College just so happens to be here in Toronto, and that I’ve never seen it, even though it is such a prominent feature in the life of my most beloved author. So the adventure was to tour the college and marvel at the environs of its ghostly tenants.

I walked the seven or eight kilometers along Bloor Street to the college from my apartment at High Park because the weather was agreeable and the sun not too hot. I made special note of the shops that had closed, the bar where I have my Martinis when I find myself without vodka, and the strip club where an acquaintance said I could get “hooked up” (whatever that meant), and that place where I went for sushi that one time. Finally after an hour or so stroll, I found myself on the University of Toronto campus and near the area where Massey College is to be found.

This was when the disappointment set in. I had no idea what to expect. Davies writes of gothic castles and fabled European cities and in a style that calls to mind the most noble and aristocratic of settings, but, in the light of this expectation, the college itself seemed to me impossibly modern and altogether mundane. Designed by Ronald J. Thom in 1963, the college is highly geometric and rectilinear.
– bearing virtually no resemblance to a French cathedral, Austrian fortress, English manor or any other suitably haunted construct. On the outside, the building resembled not so much a bastion of higher learning and culture as a public works building or a telephone exchange. And thus, I struggled – I literally struggled – to fight the feeling of disappointment with my own expectation of what I would find in this experience, but I failed miserably to overcome it.

Not until today was I able to put this adventure into a suitable frame of reference. We all live with expectations of how things are, how they should be, and how we would like them to be, and then rather often, we have to deal with the disappointment that those things are not that way and sometimes that they cannot be that way. We dread the return to school because our leisurely pursuits are curtailed for another year, but we might equally welcome the new challenges that a new year brings. We might be eager to return to our beloved campuses after a summer of listlessness, but we might also become disappointed when our fresh new courses turn into the same drudgery of cramming and examinations that we went through a year ago. Surely, it is this way with so very many of the things to which we look forward. I think that the real lesson to be had here is to learn to revel in the anticipation of a thing for the sake of that excitement, rather than for what promise of pleasure it implies, but then to be equally aware of the thing itself – the object as it finally appears to you – and not to compare that thing with all of its inherent beauty and challenge to the idealized dream that preceded it. This notion, I shall dub, “living in the moment”, and try and remind myself of its value, even when it applies to such iconic matters as my highly cherished Robertson Davies.
adventure cost:
brunch on a patio near UofT: $16.00
a bottle of water: $1.00
subway ride home: $2.75

AUGUST 15, 2007

birthday wishes

thanks to all of my friends, lovers, and acquaintances who have expressed their well-wishes to me on my 38th birthday. as with so many of the years preceding this one, i spent the day doing things that were contrary to conventional wisdom, potentially show-stopping, detrimental to my health, trivially improvisational, and exceptionally over-thought. however, i had the best day i’ve had in a long time. singlular moments that can reverberate all around your being are few and far between, and today saw one of them. and to boot, i randomly bumped into natasha eloi again! woo-hoo!!!

i may have to rethink my whole adversity to birthdays after today.

love,
– g

song of the day for evaluating 38 years on this planet: fallen, sarah mclachlan
AUGUST 13, 2007

adventure #20 – beerfest 2007

i don’t buy beer, don’t really drink beer – i don’t really even like beer. but when my buddy jim asked if i wanted to go to the beer festival, it seemed like a good adventure.

the weather on sunday was terrible. it was cloudy most of the morning, and early in the afternoon, it started to rain lightly which obviously put a dampener on the prospects for the day. and then what really sent me over the edge was the gatekeepers!! it was pissy and raining, and these idiots were getting us to wait in line, after buying $25 tickets, line up a hundred people deep, while they sent other people who hadn’t bought their tickets straight in!!! WTF.
alright. anyways – here's the reason that we were all there – beer. beer is apparently one of the oldest alcoholic beverages, appearing in recorded history in egypt and mesopotamia. but at the beerfest, the order of the day is what is newest and freshest, as opposed to the historical aspects of beer making.

the way this worked is that you get a single 4oz plastic cup that you use throughout the day (four 4oz plastic cups make a pint), but the downside of having small servings is that it's harder to keep track as the number of little drinks gets higher. so i concocted a plan to keep track of what i was drinking. at each booth, every time i ordered a new beer, i took a picture of the booth, so that i could review after the fact (read: hangover) what it was that i had had. so here it is, without further ado:

- Devil's Pale Ale 666 – **Great Lakes Brewery** – 6.6% alcohol by volume
- Niagara's Best Blonde – **Niagara's Best Beer** – 5% alcohol by volume
- Creemore Springs Premium Lager – **Creemore Springs Brewery** – 3% alcohol by volume
- Lvivske Premium Lager – **Lvivska Pyovarnya** – 4.7% alcohol by volume
- Critical Mass – **Trafalgar Brewing Company** – 13 – 15% alcohol by volume
- Warsteiner Premium Verum – **Warsteiner German Beer** – 4.8% alcohol by volume
- Boris – **La Brasserie de Saverne** – 5.5% alcohol by volume
- Innis & Gunn Oak Aged Beer – **Innis & Gunn Brewing Co.** – 6.6% alcohol by volume
- Stiegl-Goldbräu – **Stiegel Brauerei Salzberger** – 4.9%
alcohol by volume
- Tiverton Bear Dark Lager – Steelback Brewery – 5% alcohol by volume
  (another warsteiner)
- Robert Simpson Confederation Ale – Robert Simpson Brewing Company – 5% alcohol by volume
- Brahma Beer – Companhia Cervejaria Brahma – 4.8% alcohol by volume
  (another warsteiner)
- Slavutych Pivo – Slavutych (Baltic Beverages Holdings) – 5% alcohol by volume
  (another boris)
  (by this point, we were chugging beers, and i no longer had the wherewithall to take pictures of what i was drinking)

my buddy jim is a chick-magnet. but somehow, he got "turd fergusen" on his nametag from the blondie budweiser chick, and i got "so sexy hawte"... so, george 1- turd fergusen 0!

and as you can well imagine, there's nothing nastier than the port-a-potties at a beerfest. spending almost five hours there, a trip to the bathroom was a virtual inevitability. i can't understand why people aren't more considerate about what they do in there – considering they might be the next person in the potty next time around after some idiot messes the whole thing up. animals.

perhaps the worst thing about having a few thousand people drinking out of doors with whistles in their hands is that it makes for very loudy parties. after a few hours, we were all pretty keen to grab one out of the hands of a screaming whistling lunatic and smash that sucker into the
ground. and finally, we got to make it happen. so that was kind of like a baby dream come true.

we went to the Bar Wellington where i was finally able to have a proper drink or three. a bunch of us got refused service (although somehow i did not), there was a flip-flop sandal malfunction, many email addresses were swapped, and one plate of nachos fed like 12 of us.

so at the bitter end of the evening, around 9:30 or so, we all split up and head home. well, most of us did. jim and his brother tom and i wandered towards home, but stopped off at the wheat sheaf for some unknown reason to have more to drink. but not before stopping at this lady's house to pick a fight. apparently, this is a jim and tom party favourite, to go up to this lady's house and beg to get the hose sprayed on them for being beligerent. ah... boys will be boys! good times.

and so, after the equivalent of four or five pints of beer samples, 3 vodka martinis and a pint of guinness, i took my leave of the schwartz boys and headed home for a few hours of rest and to prepare myself for what i was certain would be the king of all hangovers.

i was not to be disappointed!

– g

adventure cost:
shorting jimmie-jim-jim for the beerfest ticket: $20.00
additional beerfest tokens: $20.00
August 13, 2007

adventure #19 – imason island luau

Back in May or June, my friend Dar started planning an “uno de junio” party for her company, and I thought that I was such a fun idea, I proposed having one here in Toronto at Imason! It took almost two and half months to plan and schedule, and we completely missed the first of June date, but at last, our first big company summer picnic became a reality.

My day started last Saturday, waking up at 8am after the first date I’d had the night before in Oakville. I was supremely tired for no good reason, but I managed to get myself fed and watered and to the office by 9am to start the insane preparations for transporting our Imason Island Luau to Toronto Island where the gathering was to be held.

The first problem was getting the food. We had a large delivery of supplies brought to the office the week of the event, but we still had to get hamburgers, hot dogs, buns, drinks and ice for the 40-50 people we were expecting to host at the event. Across the street from our office is a major hot-dog cart vendor supply shop where we were able to get supplies. Now, purchasing $250 of barbeque stuff is one thing – transporting it is completely another. We
stocked five huge bins and two coolers and assorted flats of pop into two cars along with five people and one little dog and made our way to the ferry. by the time we reached the site for the day around 11am, we were already fairly exhausted and i for one had sweat about a litre of water.

but once we got into it, it was a great time... there was barbequeing (which my boss scott and i mostly managed with no reported cases of food poisoning), kiddie-face-painting, frolicking in the splash pad, and frisbee/football/soccer shenanigans throughout the afternoon.

for my own part, i had one thing that i was supposed to provide for the day and only one thing (other than my lifting ability of many of the 80lbs bins) – a tug of war rope. so days before the event, i went to value village and bought $25 worth of used (but seemingly clean – to the naked eye) bedsheets that i then braided into a 40’ rope. i pulled and pulled on the rope on my balcony, and in spite of knowing that there were some weak areas where the braiding became confused, i felt pretty confident that the rope could support an antique grand piano, or at least my own descent from my apartment balcony, if i lived on a lower floor. when we had all had a few burgers and hot dogs, and were ready for a big group activity, 10 or 12 of us got on our ends of the rope, and started the epic war of our side against their side. the tug of war lasted for about three seconds when the rope suddenly tore in half at the middle from the cosmic forces straining it to its meager limits. what an incredible disappointment!!! at least we all had a good laugh at the result, and the group failed to find concensus to create a noose out of the remaining length of rope to hang me.
ps. the luau also saw my first and only soccer game for this decade. i’ve decided to leave the team sports to the beckhams and ... well whoevers... out there and will stick to my solipsistic running/cycling/swimming, thanks very much!!!

adventure cost:
covered by the company – they are THE BEST!!!

AUGUST 6, 2007

dating at the video store

so it’s voting time again. this weekend, i tried to get as much practical stuff done as i could – working on websites for my friends, cleaning and sorting and filing, working out and the lot... but there were two big releases at the video store this weekend as well, and it was a challenge to try and decide what to get. both 300 and hot fuzz were all out at the videostore, so i decided to buy one dvd from the choice of two. at $30 a piece, i’m not convinced that i’d like to blow $60 on a few hours of entertainment.

so then came the conundrum... if you’re going to totally indulge your entertainment budget on something... how do you choose which one you want? it suddenly struck me that this choice is a lot like dating... who would i rather spend two hours of my evening with? so i present the vote of the month – with whom would you rather spend your evening?

this evening’s contestants are gerard butler, king leonidas of 300, and simon pegg, sergeant nicholas angel of hot fuzz. gerard is only a few months younger than i am, is a
lawyer from glasgow, and sports perhaps the most exceptional (but potentially computer enhanced) physiques ever to grace the screen. however, he is forced to spend almost the entire film barring his teeth and being all fascisto which can be a little off-putting. and i personally had a problem with the scottish-greeks lording over the miniature persian ninjas or whatever bizarre anachronistic mash-up was going on there. simon is a few months younger still, but has been in doctor who, has of course written and starred in shaun of the dead which i only recently watched, and his movie is about half-an hour longer (representing potentially better value).

ok – so there you have it... all the facts and figures right there... sort of. make your choice – but choose wisely!!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gerard butler</th>
<th>simon pegg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

who are you (optional)

- g