

TOUR

A survey by online travel company Expedia has some news about **Canadian tourists**. The most popular tourists in their own country are Canadians, followed by Belgians and the Swiss. Americans are considered the most generous travellers, followed by Canadians and Russians. Canadians are among the best tourists following the Japanese, Germans and British. Always



cheerful and therefore least complaining tourists were the Japanese, Chinese and Canadian tourists. Canadians are also found to be among the tidiest and cleanest tourists in the world. More than 4,000 hoteliers from across the globe provided opinions on the best overall travellers. Not surprisingly, the Italians and French get the top sartorial prize. *Weekend Post*

SOCIAL TRENDS



GLENN LOWSON PHOTO FOR NATIONAL POST

Rebecca Field Jager has come to love the electricity of the city, and lots of her visitors like the whirlwind, too.

Our urban runaway finds she can keep her feet in both camps, at home and in the city

Escape artist returns

As a little girl, her dream was to be a big-city career gal. Life, however, took Rebecca Field Jager in another direction. Now, this happily married empty nester wants one more kick at the can — even if just for the summer. Herewith, the second instalment of her monthly series on running away from home:

BY REBECCA FIELD JAGER

If you lie flat on your back in the middle of my bed with your head turned to the left, through sliding glass doors you'll see an astonishing view of Toronto from Wellesley Street southeast to Lake Ontario. At night, I fall asleep against a backdrop of the city lit up; in the morning, the glaring sun pries open my eyes. I could close the vertical blinds but that somehow seems rude, a guest turning down the hospitality of her host.

Besides, I love the sights and sounds of the morning rush hour, the cacophony of horns and sirens, the din of thousands of people swarming the streets. From my balcony, a private box seat, I cheer on all the pedestrians and motorists fighting their way to work, trying to avoid run-ins with the crazies. By crazies, I mean the many cyclists who weave in and out of this mayhem without a helmet.

It's been more than 20 years since I've lived alone and, after one month of doing so, I know this much is true: It's easy to keep a place tidy when you have only your own crap to clean up. A big chocolate bar tastes even better when there's no one around to inquire if you're going to eat the whole thing. And all those things you don't do, as in "I don't do hooking up electronics" and "I don't do furniture assembly," you do do, although not efficiently. It took me two hours to connect the HDTV thingy, and the better part of a Saturday afternoon to put together a tiny patio table.

I know, too, that living alone doesn't mean being alone or lonely. I've enjoyed the companionship of both city and suburbia friends, and it seems that having a pad in the heart of Canada's largest metropolis earns you several "cool Mom" points, especially if your kids are young adults. My stepdaughter jaunted down from Muskoka for an overnight visit, and my daughter and son drop by so frequently that their things are trickling in: a toothbrush here, a stick of deodorant there; I'm forever finding a hoodie in the laundry.

My husband has come to see me a few times, too, and though he's flustered when he arrives — the traffic annoys him, the elevator makes him nuts — he loosens up after a cold beer or two. During these visits he is strangely polite, as if there's something about my bathroom floor that

makes leaving a towel on it unacceptable, as if saying please and thank you is a Toronto bylaw. His well-mannered demeanour is sweet but, thank God, he doesn't bring it to bed.

Careerwise, things are clipping along: Ideas for stories practically fall out of my head. How, I've been asked, can the distractions of a noisy city be conducive to creativity? Shouldn't a writer be holed up in a log cabin in the middle of nowhere? I explain that as a freelance journalist, I not only write stories, I also pitch them, which means I have to come up with a steady stream of interesting things to write about. Every scribe has her muse: I'm more stimulated by people than trees.

That, and the fact I love it here. Wait until it's 100 degrees in the shade, skeptics warn; wait until the city's crawling with tourists; wait until the novelty wears off. I'm aware that my feelings may change in time: I almost want them to. Some of these folks push a bit harder, questioning the real reason I ran away. Top of the list: I'm losing my marbles, leaving my husband or loathe my life. I may not realize it now, they tell me, but in the end this "fulfilling a dream" thing will prove

I wanted to tell him how awful it is to lose your bearings

to be little more than an elaborate exercise in self-deceit.

Funny. It feels so pure.

Of course, I dare not tell them that I don't go home as frequently as I'd planned, and if city living has been a whirlwind, the first time I returned to the burbs initially played out like a slow-motion bad dream.

When I let myself in the front door, the house seemed eerily quiet. Was this because it was the middle of the afternoon and no one was home, or had I grown accustomed to the streetcars' serenade?

The house had a feel-good, too, the way a house does when you return from a long vacation. And although my husband isn't a messy person and I am far from a neat freak, there were indicators that I hadn't been around. The sideboard heaved with

clutter, the fridge was full of mouldy dairy products, the houseplants were dying or dead. Mind you, if he ever went away, there would be telltale signs, too: a dandelion festival on the front lawn, anything broken unfixed, the houseplants dying or dead. (Alas, there are some things neither of us is good at and we can manage interior flora only as a team.)

Wandering from room to room, I grew increasingly uneasy as the evidence of my not-thereness mounted. The pile of unopened mail addressed to me on the kitchen counter, my favourite throw draped over the back of the chaise longue exactly as I'd left it, our bed messed up, but — aw, geezus — only on one side.

I called hubby.

"When are you coming home?" I asked struggling to keep the edge out of my voice. This was my first visit in three weeks; I wanted it to be special.

"I dunno, 6:30. Maybe 7?"

A panic rose inside as if I were faced with treading water for hours.

"This. Is. My. First. Visit." Veins were popping in my neck and forehead. "I. Want. It. To. Be. Special."

He wisely got off the phone with the promise to hurry.

I chatted with a neighbour.

I folded three towels.

I read a chapter of some self-help book I had long ago abandoned. By the time my husband arrived, I was staring out the kitchen window trying to find inspiration in the trees.

"Hi," he said, and I spun around to find him standing there grinning, his arms laden with steaks and a few bottles of wine. The expression on his face reminded me of how he looked when we were first married and he came home after work: almost silly with happiness to see me.

I wanted to cry. I wanted to tell him how awful it is to lose your bearings, to feel like a stranger in your own home. Instead, I threw myself into his arms and when I opened my eyes, my face still nuzzled in the warm crook of his neck and shoulder, the strangest thing happened: I saw signs of me everywhere. The black canister set I practically stole from HomeSense; the pictures I took of a much younger Samantha and Trevor hamming it up in Mont Tremblant; the hardwood floors I'd abandoned over when picking the colour: Suddenly, all were familiar.

Mine.

Now that he was here finally, I was home.

Weekend Post

Stop bleating about your imperfect life

Whatever happened to the stiff upper lip?

BY ANDREW O'HAGAN
in London

Is it possible that British people have more feelings than they used to have? I don't mean stronger ones or deeper ones, but just more of them? People these days seem to emote at the drop of a hat: "How did it make you feel?" is a question repeatedly asked by television interviewers, and the public is never short of a reply. Nothing in modern life is excluded: Anything and everything that can be expressed is expressed. We spend an enormous amount of time not in private contemplation but getting things off our chests.

It would be hard to pinpoint exactly the death of the British stiff upper lip, but I would hazard it happened around the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. What with hours of television shows devoted to personal problems and acres of self-help manuals filling the shelves, its demise had been coming for some time, but the Princess's death opened the floodgates and we haven't stopped having sizable feelings from that day.

Feelings, of course, are often quite unavoidable. Equally, though, they are a rather cumbersome replacement for thoughts. Yet, people increasingly believe that if they can only say what they feel, then all anxieties will magically vanish.

Not so, according to this month's *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. It turns out that, contrary to every mother's advice, and every episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, there are serious health benefits to be enjoyed from bottling things up. Not speaking about one's worries is a reliable way of getting over them, while the highly profitable culture of Yak Yak Yak has done quite the opposite, making people altogether more worried about the bad things that have happened, or are happening, or are likely to happen in the next 50 years.

Laying it all out on the table over a nice cup of tea is nothing short of a health hazard: It may offer the instant sensation of a burden lessened, but doctors now believe that too much talk about worries can exacerbate them to the point where they seem out of control.

Science and I don't often agree — which is good news for science and bad news for me — but I've been arguing for the return of the stiff upper lip for some time. I hate all those TV programs where people line up on stage to ask their daddy why he didn't love them enough.

For a start, one can usually understand quite quickly why the daddy didn't. Quite (perhaps more scientifically), the people on those shows don't seem to benefit from the spectacle of unburdening.

In the old days, when people's daddies didn't love them enough, they felt a bit sad about it and tried to do better with their own children. Or they sought ways to bear it.

Bear it! Now there's an outmoded concept. Surely there's something to be said for gearing oneself up for a bit of disappointment in life, to say

nothing of pain, rather than bleating every time you realize that a perfect life is not something that follows on naturally from excessive moaning.

Yet misery memoirs are now among the nation's national tonics, even though any number of them have proved to be works of fiction aimed at a gullible and needy public. Tonics, in my view, are something best taken with a glass of gin and a slice of lemon, helping one toward the refreshing conclusion that solutions to intractable problems might often be found in a combination of acceptance and forgetting, as opposed to endless wallowing.

Being "self-aware" — i.e., droning on about feelings — has, among other things, threatened to kill the art of conversation and normal social interaction. The proper response to, "How do you do?" is "How do you do?" not "Well, actually, I have a tummy ache" or "I am prey to unbearable anxieties about my childlessness."

It used to be considered insufferably self-regarding to answer any polite query about one's health with anything other than a cheery, "Fine, thank you," even if one were riddled with necrotizing fasciitis and had mere moments to live. Today, anyone who inquires about anyone else's well-being needs to brace himself for an onslaught of unlovely detail.

While it is rather sad if your mummy never kissed you goodnight — and such sadness can lead to great heights of human expression, see Proust — too much wallowing can cheapen emotion, and common complaints transform into little arias of self-importance.

You'll notice that the expression "sob story" has recently fallen out

Everyone is now assumed to have a sob story

of common parlance and that's because everybody is now assumed to have one: You can't turn on the radio without hearing some allegedly successful person wailing about the fact that there was never any candy in their lunch box.

How much more impressive (and heartening, and a real tonic) it is to come across people who have surmounted incredible difficulties and can still get on with their lives. People in wheelchairs find love; people with no voice become politicians and speak for masses — with nary a complaint or a memoir along the way — while every day we are invited to commune with some perfectly endowed individual who wants us to feel her pain about not being able to find a boyfriend.

The stiff upper lip doesn't seek to deny sadness, but rather acknowledges it quietly, takes control of it and allows one to survive and move on. The person who ends each telephone conversation — with everyone from their mother to their plumber — with "Love You" is not necessarily the supremely well-adjusted hero you might think. This is to put sentimentality before real feeling; sometimes holding back is simply a way of allowing your emotions their true weight.

The Daily Telegraph



JAMAL A. WILSON / AFP / GETTY IMAGES; RICH SCHMITT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Diana and Oprah: saying what you feel may make problems worse.

