

# OPINION & EDITORIALS



## The CENTRAL NEWSPAPER

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### Bubble Wrapped World: How Safety Culture Has Destroyed Our Sense of Adventure

By Murray Lytle

Are Canadians less adventurous than they once were? It's hard to argue otherwise. Alexander Mackenzie was only 24 when the North West Company named him chief fur trader at Fort Chipewyan, in what is now Alberta. A few years later, in 1789 he traveled north along what is now known as the Mackenzie River to become the first European to reach the Arctic Ocean overland. Four years later he crossed the Rocky Mountains and was the first European to reach the Pacific Ocean, beating Americans Merriweather Lewis and William Clark by a full dozen years.

In 1898, Martha Purdy arrived in Dawson City to escape a failed marriage and make her fortune in the Klondike Gold Rush. It was while climbing the notorious Chilkoot Pass that she discovered she was pregnant with her third son. She later remarried and, as Martha Black, was the second woman to be elected to Canada's Parliament. She was also a successful entrepreneur, second woman elected to Canada's parliament and a world-renown expert on wild flowers.

Canadian history is filled with tales such as these. Explorers, soldiers, settlers and other restless souls who endured great hardships and did great things.

There is a natural sense of awe that arises when retelling such lives filled with adventure. To our modern selves, they appear as fascinating aberrations, gifted men and women with unusual appetites for risky or dangerous undertakings. Their willingness to set out into the unknown strikes us today as thrilling, unnerving and more than a bit foolhardy. But while their accomplishments may be striking, they lived in more adventurous times.

Today society shrinks from adventure and the unknown. Through a combination of practical circumstances, changing social standards and dramatic shifts in individual risk tolerance and government behaviour, present-day opportunities for adventure have been drastically curtailed. How can Canadians get that sense of adventurousness back?

"An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered", G.K. Chesterton once wrote. "An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered." There is a case to be made that adventures are simply harder to come by these days.

There are no more blank spaces left on maps, and hence no places for modern-day Mackenzies to discover. The omnipresence of the Internet and GPS similarly makes it almost impossible to get truly lost anymore. And if you do, help is usually close at hand. Beyond these practical limitations, however, it seems incontestable that society today is less interested in promoting, facilitating or participating in adventurous life experiences. No one talks of running away with the circus or joining the French Foreign Legion anymore, even in jest. According to Statistics Canada, twice as many Millennials are still living at home as was the case with previous generations. And if any of these young adults do go away, it's more than likely to be an adventure-less 'gap year' holiday between graduate degrees recorded in minute detail on Snapchat and Instagram.

The perpetual childhood of today's younger generations contrasts sharply with the youthful accomplishments of past eras. William Wilberforce, for example, was elected to the British Parliament at age 21 and then proved instrumental in ending the trans-Atlantic slave trade. His friend William Pitt became Prime Minister at 24, and spent his career fighting the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who became a general at 24. Quite a lot can be accomplished when one starts early.

Other factors that limit the availability of adventure in our post-modern era include the suffocating impact of the welfare state. When Mackenzie left his family home at 15 to become an apprentice in the fur industry, it was because he had little choice. He needed to make his way in the world as a teenager. The same urgency applied to Black when she decided to escape a failed marriage by travelling to the Yukon. With no government to hold your hand, adventure follows. Popular culture in earlier eras also did its bit as well by celebrating explorers and adventurers as celebrities in the same manner that we laud singers and athletes today.

Just as adventure was once regarded as a social virtue to be admired, today society aggressively enforces the opposite expectation – that it is our duty to avoid risk at all costs. In their 2021 book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and lawyer Greg Lukianoff take a close look at the impact of a creeping safety culture on the behaviour of younger generations.

Children, the authors observed, are now deliberately shielded from any sense of risk or uncertainty. How can anyone – young boys most of all – learn about the world around them when school principals announce at the onset of every snowfall that "All snow must stay on the ground." The ideal of adventure and resilience has been replaced by a debilitating sense of fragility and risk avoidance.

So is the dream of looking over an untravelled horizon that animated people like Alexander Mackenzie or Martha Black completely dead in the 21st century? Not exactly. Adventure should properly be considered a spirit, not a place. It is driven by a powerful mixture of curiosity, necessity and an openness to experiencing new things. And it can be found wherever uncertainty reigns. Today, that might entail travelling to strange lands, meeting new people or even engaging in uncomfortable discussions about whether Alberta should remain part of Canada forever. Wherever the unknown lies, adventure can be found.

### Letters To The Editor:

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? Send letters to newspaper@ocentral.com

Dear Editor:

The 2026 FIFA World Cup kicks off June 11 — and the most dramatic transformation right now isn't in the locker rooms. It's the grass. It has to be pitch-perfect.

LawnStarter — the nation's largest lawn care marketplace and, yes, we know our grass — has taken a deep look at what 11 U.S. NFL stadiums are doing to get their fields World Cup-ready. The short version: it's extraordinary, it's expensive, and it involves science that would make your lawn guy's head spin.

FIFA doesn't allow artificial turf. Natural grass only — which means 9 U.S. host stadiums with artificial surfaces have to rip them out and start over. That includes AT&T Stadium in Dallas, SoFi Stadium in LA, and MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

The price tag is staggering. Converting a single stadium from synthetic to natural grass runs \$3 million to \$4 million, according to Michigan State turf professor John Trey Rogers.

One size does not fit all. The grass that works in Seattle's cool, rainy climate (Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue) is wrong for Houston's hot, humid summer (Bermuda). Every stadium is getting a FIFA-approved custom solution that represents years of research.

Some stadiums need more than grass. Stadiums with retractable roofs — including AT&T in Dallas and NRG in Houston — have installed LED grow lights to keep the grass alive between matches. Natural grass in a stadium is essentially farming indoors.

Thanks,

Patricia Davis


Communications Manager

Dear Editor:

How is it that our downtown keeps getting worst. I love to go eat at the Hong Kong house that sits right downtown. Lately I have seen a large gathering of motorcycles. I have serious concern over safety. Not so much from the bikers but getting hit by one of these bikes. The police can't do anything as they are motorcycle riders just like anyone in a car. I am concerned for the cosmetics of our core. It is not bad enough we have people shooting up on the street. Hookers all over approaching men. Pot shops every other block. Where are we heading in 2027. I do hope that who ever gets voted in this election has the character to do something positive. Not just excuses. I feel better after writing this. I hope there are others out there with my concern.

Lucia Parker, Oshawa

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