

OPINION

Drawing to conclusions

I was a Globe editorial cartoonist for 35 years. Now, I turn the page to new adventures

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Brian Gable's final bow as a Canadian court jester, as imagined by Bruce MacKinnon, one of several editorial cartoonists who paid tribute to their comrade in his retirement. You can see more of their work below.

COURTESY OF BRUCE MACKINNON

There is no way to predict what each new workday will bring for an editorial cartoonist. On a good day, the cartoonist bounces out of bed filled with inspiration, goes to the studio, draws an insightful image effortlessly and then proudly signs it. Based on my experience, those days happen roughly once a decade. Most days, the headlines are a tangled web of tragedy and chaos, seldom providing an obvious opening for humour.

The editorial cartoonist's task is to emerge from this blizzard of information with a coherent and (it is hoped) amusing idea, one that addresses some aspect of the day's events. That good idea requires coaxing, coddling, cajoling.

The Canadian cartoonist John Larter said that every morning, he would beg his brain: "Just one good idea, please, and I won't bother you any more!"

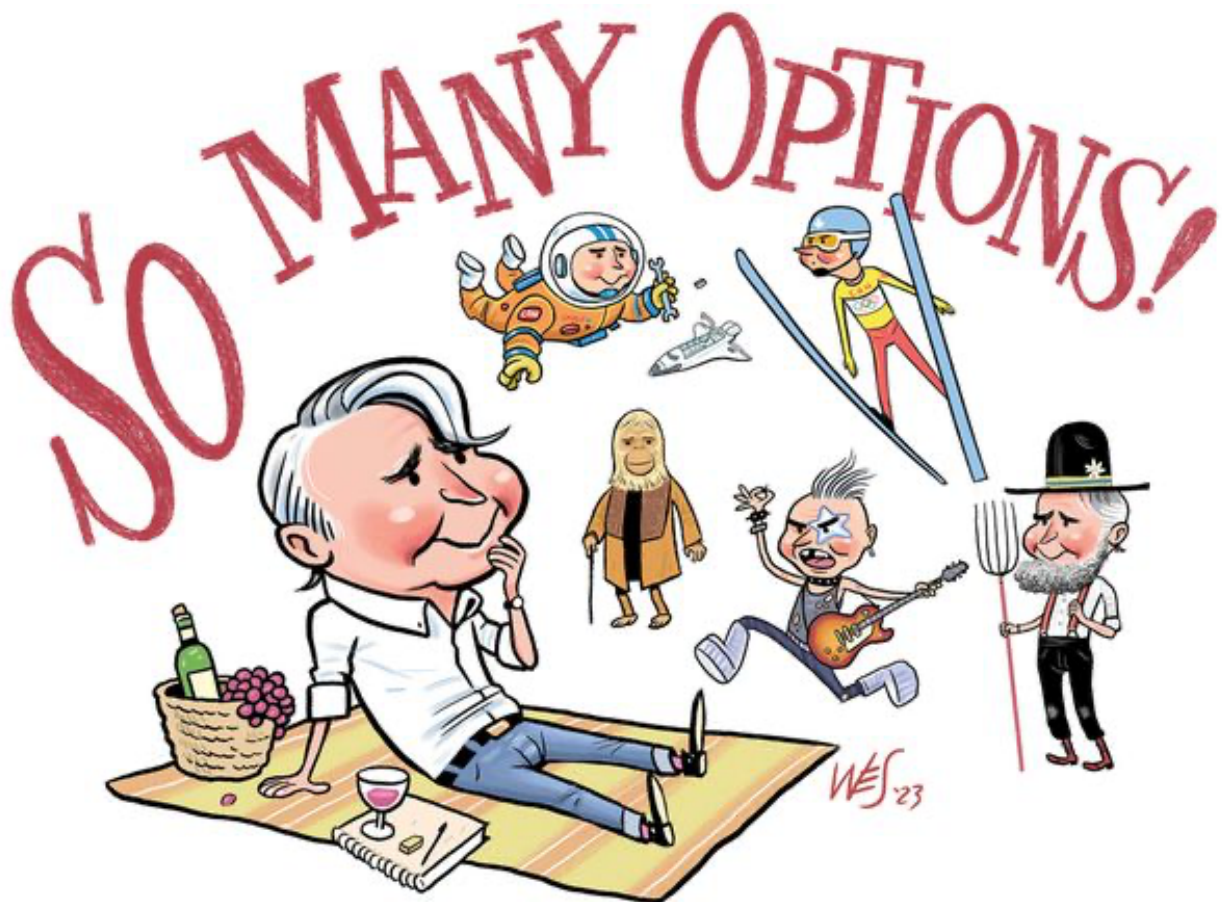


In my case, that coaxing process is based entirely on doodling, which I've done my entire life; I'd like to think it's the only thing that stood between me and an epic career in rocket science or theoretical physics. My teachers were always unimpressed whenever they walked by my desk and saw the evidence of my academic concentration scribbled in the margins of my notebook. But little did I know that I was honing my skills as an editorial cartoonist during Miss Service's geometry lessons.

At the beginning of each workday, one scribble has led to another, when suddenly, out of the muddled swirl of pencil strokes, the artist's twisted

subconscious recognizes the germ of a cartoon idea. It's much closer to alchemy than it is to science.

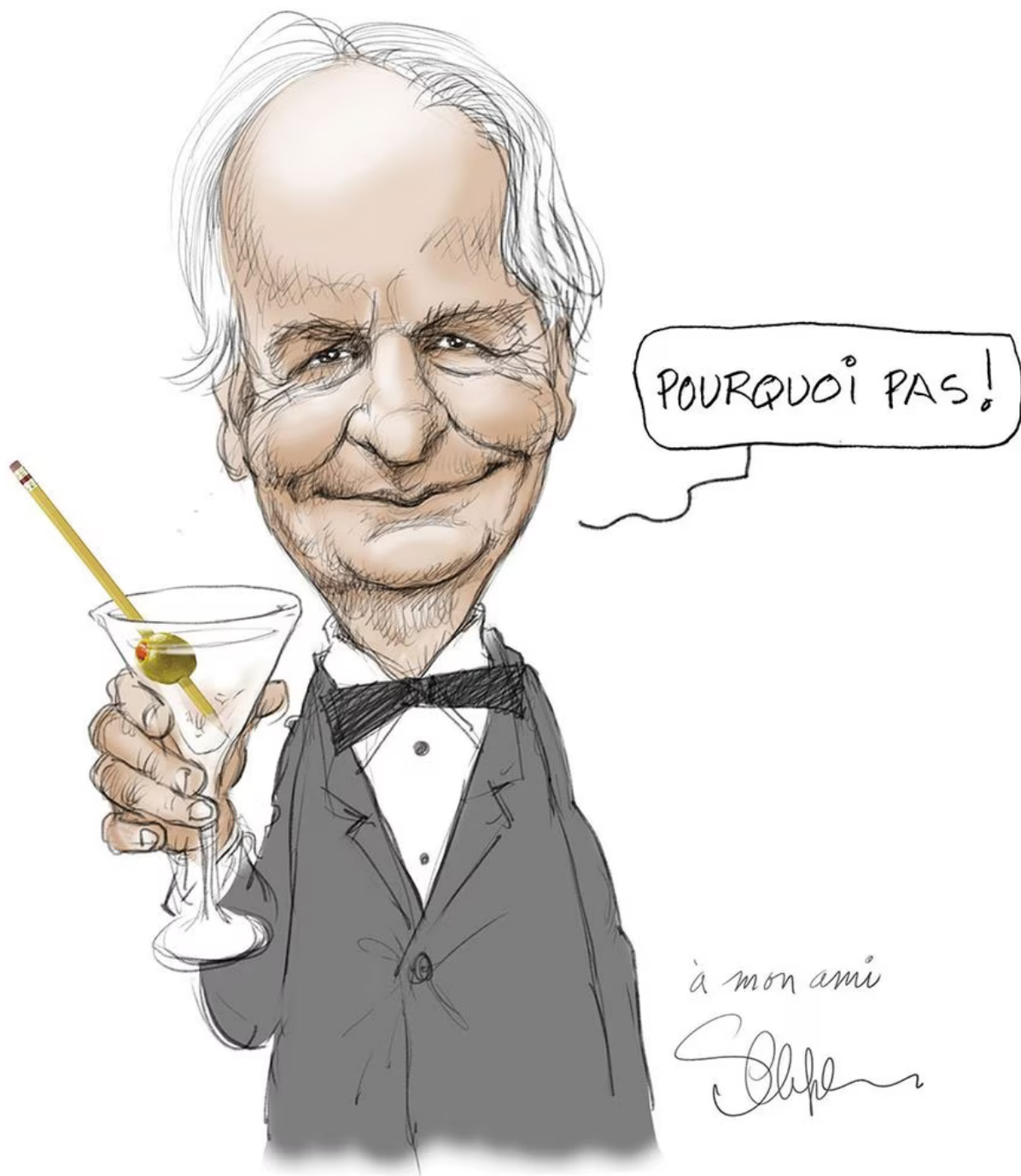
For the past 35 years, I've practised this alchemy on the editorial page of The Globe and Mail. In that time, I've witnessed significant changes in the nation of Canada, our political culture, and in the nature of mass media itself. Through it all, I have been aware of the immense privilege of occupying a position on a page devoted to the expression and exchange of opinions on every aspect of our daily life. But even as I pack up my philosopher's stone and leave my unique observation post for retirement, I will keep doodling. For the past three decades, I haven't known where my pencil will take me next – so why stop now?











CARTOONS COURTESY OF WES TYRELL, AISLIN, DAVID PARKINS, SUSAN DEWAR AND SERGE CHAPLEAU

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