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### Silent lessons

A few days ago I ventured out into our backyard to string a few lights on our now naked cherry tree. The lights, which would be visible from our kitchen table, have become a family Christmas tradition. It was night, the air was cold but still, and the stars shone brightly. A light skiff of snow lay on the ground. The quiet that one only finds on such evenings enveloped our neighbourhood. A tingle ran up my spine. I love being outside on such a night, with the cold nipping at exposed skin, and my breath visible in small clouds. I worked slowly, not being in a rush to find myself back inside.

When I was a boy, my father would flood our driveway to build an ice rink on such nights. Most of the time he worked alone. Often he would flood after a late shift at work, which could actually mean early in the morning, but even when he flooded earlier in the evening, for years I was too young to join him. Nonetheless, I can recall many a night watching him from my bedroom window. He would be outside, alone, for hours, slowly moving up and down the driveway, moving the hose in long sweeping motions to pour a thin layer of water as evenly as possible. The water would freeze almost immediately and I noticed how carefully he had to step on the newly frozen surface so as not to fall.

I have no memory of my father actually skating on this rink. But he loved that we skated. Three figure skaters and two hockey players skated thousands of hours and honed their skills on ice prepared tirelessly by their father.

As I grew older there came the occasion that I would join Dad on his late night ice duty. We seldom spoke. This was solemn work and the quiet of those dark cold nights was too special to disturb. The sounds of the water and the crackling noise it made as it reluctantly transformed into ice, were all I remember hearing. When Dad did speak, it was to instruct. I was the oldest son, and I sensed on those nights that Dad had a great number of important things to teach me about life. Things I would need to take on as my own responsibilities one day. Things like building an ice rink for my children. I was proud to think that my father believed I would one day be as skilled and capable as he.

As the years passed and I grew from young boy into young man many things changed in my perception of my father. I gradually grew to believe that my father had in fact little to teach me. He never attended high school, and I was an honour student. He was a small town policeman, a career he eventually settled into after starting and running a number of businesses that, while successful, always left him looking for something else. My mother and uncle continued to run one such venture with virtually no involvement from him, for 25 years. I was on a straight line into a career as teacher. The things my father excelled at were of little interest to me, things like carpentry, car repair, handyman stuff. I was busy playing hockey and baseball, studying, writing, and in all of my chosen endeavours, my father was no longer the source of guidance and improvement. It occurred to me that he had become more of an observer than anything and I wondered if he was disappointed that he was able to contribute so little, or ecstatic that I had grown so far beyond him. We didn't even make an ice rink anymore.

*Continued Inside*



## Silent lessons Cont'd

Only recently have I been able to understand what my father had done for me. He stood alone in our driveway countless hours so that I could have fun, and become a better skater and hockey player. He worked in his shop endlessly on projects for someone else, often me. He volunteered to help out neighbours and friends at every opportunity. Despite how narrowly I perceived his talents, he applied them in every way he could, for the benefit of others, especially our family. When we needed a ride, he drove us. When I needed the car, he handed me the keys. When Ellen and I moved into our first home he arrived with a new picnic table and a winter's supply of firewood. I have no recollection of a time when his needs came before mine.

My dad wasn't teaching me how to build an ice rink. He was teaching me how to be a good man. And despite there being many other men who have profoundly influenced my life, from teachers, to coaches, to business mentors, none have put a permanent stamp on me like my father did by simply being the man he was.

My father died in October of 1987. But I never stop wanting to make him proud. I realize that I was confused about my

father when I was a teen and young adult. But I had it right when I was a young boy proudly standing on the cold ice on a dark night beside the man I would never stop admiring. He did have a lot to teach me. And every lasting lesson I learned was taught without the utterance of a single word.

The Christmas lights are on our cherry tree, but in the cold and without the proper tools, and without any real interest in "handyman" stuff, they aren't very symmetrical. I just kind of poked them up and onto the scrawny branches using a bunch of handles and hockey sticks held together with duct tape. The family thinks the lights form the shape of a question mark. Funny, while hanging them, I think I stumbled more upon answers.

May the joys of the season be yours now and always. And may God bless you richly in the year ahead and help you distinguish between the important and not so important things that have made you who you are.



## What's a KYC?

Yes, we know the financial services industry, like many others, can often seem to be a sea of buzzwords and acronyms. KYC is short for Know Your Client and has become an increasingly important (albeit often controversial) form in the mutual fund industry. The essence of the KYC form is the gathering of what the securities regulators believe to be information that is critical to determining the appropriateness of investments. Things like risk tolerance, current financial position, time horizon, and the like along with the identification information to allow the investment dealer to check the status of clients.

Why do you need to know about this? The rules around the

KYC have tightened to the point that we won't be able to properly manage investment accounts unless the KYC is no more than 12 months old. This means two things. Whenever we meet, you are likely to see your advisor ask you to sign a new KYC. And if our last meeting was more than 12 months ago, you are likely to receive a call from someone here asking you to verify the current information on file, with any signatures needed handled by mail.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about this, please give us a call.

## Coming Events

**Labour Sponsored Investment Funds (LSIF) and Income Trusts Seminar.** Wednesday January 28, 2004. 7:30 PM. Garden Hilton Hotel. Highway 7 and 404, Richmond Hill.

We are very pleased to have two guest speakers at this seminar, with considerable expertise in their respective topics. Chris Kresic is a Senior Vice-President with Mackenzie Financial and a lead manager in fixed income funds. He will provide you with considerable insight into one of the most hotly debated investment products in recent times - Income Trusts, as well as bring you up to date on fixed income markets in general.

Peter Seeligsohn is a General Partner with Vengrowth, one

of Canada's most successful Labour Sponsored Investment firms. The attractive tax credits (up to 35%) make these investments a favourite topic during the RRSP season (combining the tax credits and tax refund, you could make a \$5,000 contribution with as little as \$1,100 after tax refunds!). With a full range of LSIFs available, ranging from the potentially explosive Health Sciences field to the more conservative industry portfolios, there's much to talk about and for you to think about in assessing the value of incorporating this investment strategy into your existing portfolio.

Join us on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January and learn more from these highly regarded investment experts. RSVP to Cheryl if you wish to reserve a spot.

## Employee Benefit Plans: Managing Long-Term Healthcare Costs



Here's a newsflash: healthcare costs in Canada keep on rising, and show no signs of letting up. Perhaps that's something you already know, and you may also know that prescription drugs represent a large percentage of every dollar spent on healthcare in an employee benefit plan. What some of you may not realize is how a number of different factors are combining to push the cost of drug plans to even higher levels in the not-too-distant future.

According to statistics recently released by one of Canada's largest employee benefits carrier, Great-West Life, drug costs make up over 80% of total health claims for employees aged 55 and over (see graph). As the population continues to age (by the year 2030 one out of every three Canadians will be age 65 and over), the capacity for employers and employees to pay for their medications will become stretched. When we also recognize that more people are making more drug claims than the previous year, that the number of claims per person rises each year and that the cost per claim is rising annually, it comes as no surprise that healthcare inflation is running at 16-18% per year.

If drug costs continue to rise at current levels or possibly higher, employers may need to review their plan design and implement new strategies that can have a long-term moderating influence on claims trends. Cost sharing with employees through the use of deductibles, caps and co-insurance will address the short-term need to contain costs, but may not affect long-term increases. Strategies that focus on a building a healthier work force, on the other hand, including wellness education, fitness subsidies and access to a company-sponsored Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may result in lower drug claims over time, and may also result in other benefits including better productivity, lower absenteeism and fewer employees on disability claim.

If you would like to discuss ways to better manage your company's long-term healthcare costs, please give us a call.

**David Frank & Laurie Sobie**

### Great Minds, Great Thoughts

*"What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"He who has done his best for his own time has lived for all times."*  
Johann von Schiller

*"It is not what he has, nor what he does, which directly expresses the worth of a man, but what he is."*  
Henri Frederic Amiel

### Holiday Wish

We wish the special spirit of this holiday season upon you and those you love - may it enrich you deeply. Thank you for being a part of Bell Financial. You inspire us to be the best we can be.

## Swedish For Common Sense: A Bit Presumptuous, Perhaps

Start with a ridiculously heavy, flat-packed box. Add instructions that can only be described as modern-day hieroglyphics. Finally, mix in a healthy portion of thumbs and you have a recipe for disaster just waiting to be cooked up. Add sweat and blood to taste.

The IKEA experience has always left me rather ambivalent. On the one hand, it began many years ago and remains unmatched today as a brilliantly executed alternative to the heavy, dark and chunky status quo of home furnishing. A walk through IKEA's showroom is like a breath of fresh, Swedish air. Everything is light, airy, colourful and extremely cleverly designed. And, in most cases, scandalously inexpensive. It is this combination of ingredients that stirs the senses and makes us hunger for the look, the feel and the good taste of the various rooms on display. Their catalogue, delivered each summer right to the door, is an event that in many homes rivals the coming of the Great Bearded One himself (no, not the IDOMO guy). There always seems to be something new to cause us to salivate, from children's beds to office furniture to all manner of candles and holders (there is an obsession with candles in our home, and I am powerless to stop it). In short, for our family and for countless others like us, IKEA is Swedish for Seduction.

On the other hand, a fairly daunting disclaimer lingers at the end of nearly every item described in the IKEA catalogue: **RA**, which to the uninitiated means "Requires Assembly". For those of you who wake up each morning confident in the fact that you know the difference between a Phillips and a Robertson (or even know what they are), you will have no sympathy for people like me. None. For you see, although I am blessed with many talents, and you'll just have to trust me on that, none of these abilities are of any use when attempting to put things together. As a child, model cars and planes lay in pieces on the bedroom floor for weeks until someone mercifully removed them (thanks, Mom). As an adult, the simplest home repair job renders me catatonic. Trying to follow written instructions only makes things worse. Please understand that the people who write instructions are the same people who created the thing in the first place; their directions make perfect sense to them. Rarely is a manual ever prefaced by the following words of encouragement: "Now I know that you're scared and clueless, but I'll guide you through, step by step. Don't worry; you can do this!" Even when I muster up the courage to start a project, before long someone usually has to step in to finish it up and take me to bed.

So it was with a blend of excitement and trepidation that I recently made my way to the new IKEA store in Vaughan. I was on a mission to find a sideboard for the dining room, deemed to be an absolute necessity after a recent dinner party where serving dishes had to be placed *on the floor* along the wall when we ran out of space on the table (an inexcusable faux-pas which was not to be repeated). I had previously perused a number of furniture stores and antique shops, only to find pieces that were too dark, too traditional and far too pricey. Elizabeth and I wanted to try to match the look and feel of our dining room table: light and contemporary. IKEA was a logical first stop, and with my parents in tow we navigated the showroom floor until we found the area we were looking for. There were many pieces to choose from, but I found fault

with all of them. As I was turning my attention from sideboards to the miles of holiday candles on display, my mother called me back. She had found a small buffet that met our requirements exactly - almost. "Too bad; it's not long enough", I said. "Buy two", replied my mother.

"Buy three", enthused Elizabeth when I came home with a picture of the buffet. She was right, of course. Three pieces would exactly fit the space along the wall, and would offer us even greater storage opportunities. There was only one problem as far as I was concerned, and that could be summed up in a simple mathematical equation:  $RA \times 3 = TROUBLE$ . However, once again seduced by the IKEA experience, I returned to the store later in the week and made my purchase.

They say that the mind can't remember pain. If this weren't the case, then families would never have more than one child (or so my wife tells me). The same mechanism must have been responsible for my decision to assemble not one but three large pieces of furniture. After the packages were loaded and unloaded (why does the term "Flat Packing" make one think that the contents would somehow weigh less?), I opened the first box and was dismayed to find over two hundred screws in various shapes and sizes, gift-wrapped in tidy little packages. And, of course, there was an Allen key. I think that every nightmare I've ever experienced has had an Allen key in there somewhere. The last item to emerge from the box was the instruction sheet. In an attempt to make them easier to follow and to avoid the cost of reprinting in thirty-two languages, IKEA's instructions are depicted pictorially. Great idea in theory, but unless the pictures are deadly accurate you end up with instructions that people the world over don't understand.

After toying with the idea of calling my brother to help me (and he would, too; he's one of those handy types), I decided to go it alone. Early on, things were going surprisingly well. Individual pieces of wood were starting to come together to resemble something vaguely familiar. Then, disaster struck: there were four pieces of doweling missing, and they seemed to be awfully important. I slumped back against the sofa. Defeated again. Then, an idea popped into my head (perhaps new brain cells can form beyond the age of eighteen after all). I rummaged through my tool kit and found four wall plugs about the right size and substituted them for the missing pieces. A perfect fit.

Seven and a half hours later, the three buffets were assembled and standing proudly along the dining room wall. I only made one mistake, and although Elizabeth will notice sooner or later, I decided I would let her find it on her own. I poured myself a beer, settled onto the couch and attempted to turn on the T.V., but nothing happened. I noticed a small note taped to the bottom of the set. It was from my son. "Television doesn't work. Can you fix it?"

**David Frank**

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