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POSSIBILITIES

unleash your imagination

Volume # 05 - Winter 2001



Transformations Without and Within.

A light snow has fallen overnight, transforming an otherwise insipid landscape into a sparkling white wonderland, and turning an otherwise frazzled human being (me), into Mr. Cheer. I love this time of year.

Yea, I know: the snow aggravates our already grief-stricken roads, we have to shovel it, (whoa, remember January 1998?), and it eventually melts into a soupy brown mess that substantially increases our cleaning bill. Bah humbug to you, too. But you can't deny the first snow brings with it a special kind of magic. A magic that transforms all that is lifeless into a soft, powdery, blanket of perfection, and then somehow spins our emotions into a state of euphoria on memories of sky-high snowdrifts, dazzling lights, a chorus of youthful voices, and a life so much simpler.

As I grow older, and I peel away the layers of stuff that Christmas doesn't mean to me, I realize that at the core of my memories, and in the essence of my emotions, is the idea of a gift. We may have indeed created a society based on self-interest, but we haven't yet totally given up on the idea that perhaps our first desire is to give. Every year we visit this idea once again, and most of us have to admit, we like the way it feels.

Smiles and handshakes, even hugs,

are given away more freely. Families reunite to share laughter, and exchange gifts and love. Businesses open their coffers and occasionally their hearts to employees and customers. And all culminates in a singular day in which albeit briefly, the world feels to be at peace, and at rest. And this idea has always been to me, a very special gift.

When I recall memories of Christmas as a child, the single most powerful memory isn't one of an amazing toy I received, (although the train set was a big year!), or of family gatherings, although they continue to be important to this day. Strangely enough, the most solidly burned-in memory is of kneeling on my bed late at night on Christmas Eve, with my chin leaning on the windowsill looking out over the silent, frozen landscape of our neighbourhood. I can still feel the cold air washing over me and if I close my eyes, I can hear the remarkable and rare sound of silence.

I started this ritual in search of Santa Claus but it continued well after I had given up any hope of seeing flying reindeer hauling a generous old elf. In fact, I have yet to miss my Christmas Eve venture into solitude.

You see, when I was a child, I actually believed that on this one night, the entire world was exactly like my little neighbourhood: cold, beautiful, quiet, at peace, and happy. I believed that all around the

world, children like myself were absolutely giddy with anticipation, and that in every house, downstairs, loving parents, siblings and grandparents were busy preparing for the big day. Looking out and seeing no-one, and hearing no-one, could mean only one thing. Everyone was where they should be. At home.

Of course I'm grown up now and I no longer believe in childish ideas. But as hard and troubling as our world can be, I am gradually learning an important truth. The world outside me is merely a reflection of the world inside me. And it's for that reason that this Christmas Eve I will once again search for a quiet moment in an empty room after everyone is asleep and I will open the window and spend a few quiet moments remembering what I once thought the world was, and what I'm still hoping it may become.

However you celebrate this holiday season, all of us here at Bell Financial wish you much joy, peace, and abundance. May the miracle of your personal faith strengthen you and those you love.

And, even if for but a brief moment, may the world around you match perfectly to your ideal.

Bill Bell

New ideas for the new year..

We are quite pleased to share with you the creative ideas that emerged at Bell Financial's inaugural Client Advisory Group meeting. Being open and connected, innovative and resourceful we were able to see the world through a fresh set of eyes. Many thanks to the following individuals who shared their time and vision with us Wednesday evening, November 8th: John Offutt, John Berton, Neal Kearney, David Stroud, Jill King and Rob Park.

A great deal of the evening's discussion centered around the importance of vision planning. To survive and prosper in a competitive world, you have to have a clear picture of where you want to go. Having a vision is more important now than ever and we are keenly looking forward to introducing vision-planning workshops in the coming year.

The popularity of our newsletters was made quite evident that evening in addition to some resourceful ideas to help us continue to inspire others through our quarterly mailing. We are always open to new ideas and topics and we encourage you to either give us a call or send us a note with suggestions of topics of interest. Our email addresses can be found on our web site: www.bellfinancial.on.ca

There was a consensus that educational seminars would be much appreciated and to survey our clients to determine their points of interest. This is something we will begin to explore and have ready very early in the New Year. Again,

please let us know if there is a topic of interest that you would like us to develop and present.

Another subject that arose that evening was the usefulness of surveys. It was noted that the results of a client survey would help us place our focus and efforts on what is most essential to you. As we continue to grow as a company we recognize the importance to maintain the level of service and personal attention to which you are each entitled. The results of the survey would be very useful and help us create a better understanding of your interests and needs.

Please look for these and more changes as a result of the synergy and information flow from the client advisory group meeting. We are quite pleased with the results of the evening and will explore when and how often to hold these sessions in the future. In the meantime we encourage you to share your thoughts and dreams with us, we value your ideas and consider each of you a vital part of our team. We are looking forward to implementing the new ideas in the New Year. Happy holidays.

Victoria Inkster

Great Minds, Great Thoughts

"The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out."

T.B. Macaulay

"Have courage for the great sorrows of life, and patience for the small ones. When you have laboriously accomplished your daily tasks, go to sleep in peace. God is awake."

Victor Hugo

"If you do not find peace within yourself you will never find it anywhere else."

Paula Bendry

"We give but little when we give of our possessions, it is when we give of ourselves that we truly give."

Kahlil Gibran

Coming Attractions!

Financial Forum 2001

**Metro Toronto Convention Centre,
Jan 25th to 28th, 2001**

The Financial Forum is "under new management" this year and the new operators are determined to make it a worthwhile event for everyone. We will be participating this year and hope you will stop by our booth for a visit. If you are planning to attend, make sure to take advantage of our special VIP passes. Call us for more info.

RRSP Deadline March 1st, 2001

If you are a member of the "last minute club", we just want to remind you about this important deadline.

2nd Annual Bell Financial Charity Golf Classic Glenway Golf & Country Club

Thursday May 31st, 2001,

When the January blues set in, it may be a small comfort to be able to remind yourself that it's only 3 or 4 months to the next golf season! Mark this date on your calendar and come out for a day of fun in support of Blue Hills Family Services.

Rewarding your employees effectively

The end of the year is fast approaching, and many employers are considering wage increases for next year. Unfortunately, giving employees an increase in pay is not always the most cost-effective method of compensation.

Consider a 3% pay increase on a salary of \$30,000 versus an equivalent amount towards an employee benefit program or an enhancement to your existing benefits plan (ie. a more comprehensive dental or drug plan). The following illustration has been calculated using the Payroll Deduction Table - Ontario:

A Comparison of Costs for the Employer:

	Pay Increase	Group Benefits
Enhancement	\$900.00	\$900.00
EI	\$30.24	N/A
CPP	\$35.10	N/A
WCB (3%)	\$27.00	N/A
Sales Tax	N/A	\$72.00
Payroll Tax	\$8.82	N/A
Total	\$1001.16	\$972.00

A Comparison of Benefits for the Employee:

	Pay Increase	Group Benefits
Enhancement	\$900.00	\$900.00
EI	(\$21.60)	N/A
CPP	(\$35.10)	N/A
WCB (3%)	N/A	N/A
Income Tax	(\$298.80)	N/A
Total	\$544.50	\$900.0

With government cutbacks and drug, hospital and paramedical costs all steadily on the rise, rewarding employees with an employee benefit plan can be much more valuable to them than a small increase in pay.

Laurie Sobie

Situation Critical

Life is full of risks. Some are worth insuring, others are not. Insurance 101 tells you to insure against catastrophic losses, the one that may wipe you out - and not against superficial ones.

With that in mind, ask yourself this. If you suddenly found yourself dealing with a stroke, cancer, heart attack or a similar illness, would you be able to deal with the financial burden of special medical attention not covered by Government benefits, and would you be financially equipped to elevate your odds of recovery and indeed perhaps survival by paying for medical services in the U.S.? Most people would have to admit the answer to these and similar questions is no, and if that includes you, you should consider "critical illness insurance", (C.I.), a relative newcomer to Canada that is catching on fast.

C.I. was developed in South Africa by Dr. Marius Barnard, the brother of Dr. Christian Barnard, the famous heart transplant surgeon. Disturbed by the fact that many of Dr. Barnard's heart transplant patients were financially destitute after surviving a heart attack, Dr. Barnard challenged the insurance industry to come up with a solution.

Critical illness insurance will pay a lump sum upon the diagnosis and survival of a major illness. The big 3 illnesses (heart attack, stroke and cancer) account for almost 90% of all claims. Other illnesses that may be covered include Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis, to name a few.

While the proceeds from C.I. products are most often used to pay for things like out of country surgery, private hospital

services, experimental drug therapy, special equipment, or home care, the use of the funds are in fact unrestricted. Some people have used the proceeds to pay off their mortgage, (in England consumers buy C.I. on their mortgage before they buy mortgage life insurance). Others have used the money to put their kids through university, or take a family vacation.

A 40-year-old male would pay approximately \$55 per month for a \$50,000 benefit. That includes a refund of all your premiums should you die before the age of 75 and not suffer a critical illness. A 40-year-old female would pay about \$49 for the same policy.

Is it worth it? That depends on your risk profile. When you combine life's uncertainties with an aging population, increased longevity, and cutbacks in health care, a little peace of mind is probably worth the small cost. As we mature (read "get older") we realize we are not invincible. And while we can't (and probably don't want to) imagine poor health, we certainly can protect ourselves and our families from the financial devastation that a serious illness usually brings with it. C.I. is clearly an important component of that protection.

Tad Gacich

Shopping Ideas for the Holidays

I am writing amid a sea of boxes. My desk is my island, and with our rescue still ten days away I feel very much the castaway, not really *living* anywhere. We are in the Bermuda Triangle of moving; our lives are suspended somewhere between addresses. Some days I feel that we own two houses, on others I feel homeless. As the boxes pile ever higher, the air seems to be getting thinner, and I find myself gasping for diversions to clear my mind. So I go shopping.

I am not at ease with shopping. I am too impatient with crowds and incompetent salespeople to actually enjoy the experience... with one exception: I love to spend inordinate amounts of time in a toy store. Not the Big Box variety, but the smaller, more intimate shop that hires far too many intelligent, motivated, cheerful people to make economic sense. From the moment I enter, the day's pressing concerns melt away. I am transported back to a former life, one that places few demands on me, other than trying to figure out how to purchase an infinite number of toys with the finite number of coins in my jeans.

The big holidays, Christmas and Hanukah, are fast approaching, so today I visit the local toy store and ask a bouncy, enthusiastic salesperson what's hot this year, other than Harry Potter paraphernalia. On cue, she pulls a sheet of paper from her pocket containing this year's Top Toy Picks for Christmas, produced by Today's Parent magazine. This particular store stocks nearly all of the top fifty recommended toys, games, CD ROMs, etc., and while I am suitably impressed by the quality and variety of this year's offerings, a curious thought begins to seep from the nether regions of my mind to the forefront of my consciousness. I wonder, I suddenly find myself asking the salesperson, whether anyone has ever bothered to produce a list of the Fifty Worst Toys for Christmas. After a moment's hesitation, she reluctantly pulls a second list from her other pocket (the Dark pocket, where lint festers and multiplies). After assuring her that I have no intention of buying anything from the list, that I just want to *look* at it, she passes it to me, all the while glancing nervously over her shoulder at what must be her boss. I thank her, walk down the aisle and begin to review the list of toys and games deemed unfit for children's consumption.

While most of this year's "must not buys" are just plain silly (for example, a craft kit entitled "Draw the Invisible Man", consisting of an empty box), some actually seem enticing, in a quirky sort of way. For younger children, there's the latest Blue's Clues CD ROM where the popular animated puppy Blue assists the young viewer in uncovering the fact Elvis is indeed alive and well and working in Toronto as a greeter at the Bata Shoe Museum. The inquiring mind will be kept busy with the "X-Files Alien Dissection Kit", complete with an instructional video by Fox Mulder that ends abruptly with him screaming, "Oh no! They've found us; run, run!". The latest in a series of self-help books,

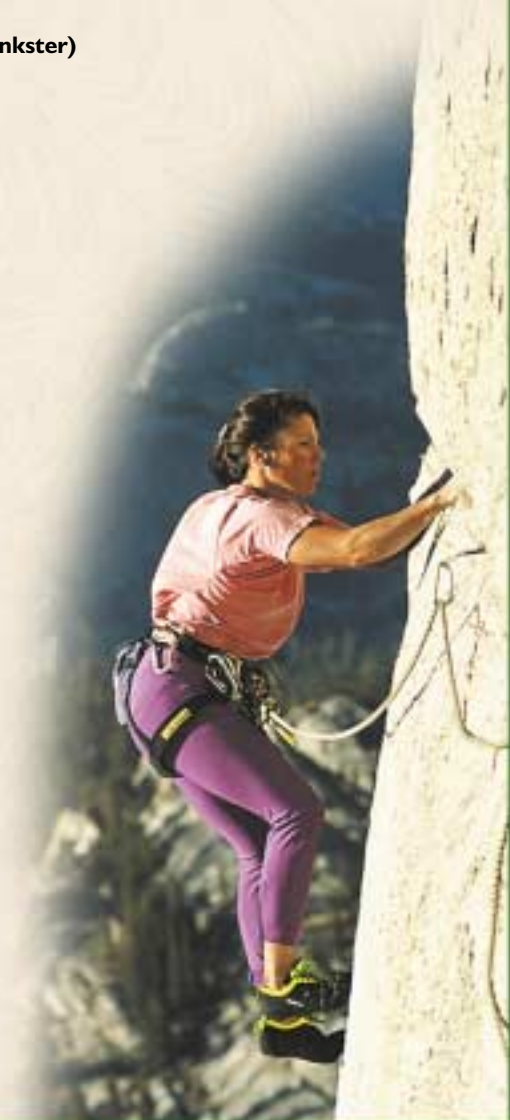


"Nuclear Fusion For Dummies" is sure to attract interest from the teen fringe element (forward by Saddam Hussein). An alternative toy for the youngster who has seen it all might be "Slap and Tickle Me Elmo", where the lovable furry creature dresses up in stiletto heels and begs to be spanked. Finally, former golf pro turned Premier Mike Harris has released an educational video, "Math My Way", where he employs his unique mathematical theory to explain how the government can close schools, lay off teachers, cut spending in the classroom and increase the average class size and *still* improve the quality of education for students across the province. "In golf and education, less is more!" beams the Premier.

I return both lists to the salesperson, thank her again, and leave what has been my sanctuary for the past hour. I grab a quick lunch, but before I head back to the office I stop by the Big Box toy store in town and pick up the "Elmo" doll. For the Holidays.

David Frank

(Illustration by Scott Inkster)



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