

## COMMENT

## What happened in that Maine diner

Mom whose tot was yelled at tells her side



TARA CARSON

Making national news was the last thing we expected on our quiet summer getaway to Maine this week.

One rainy morning, my husband, baby daughter and I went out for breakfast. We had stayed overnight in Portland, a place close to our hearts where my husband spent a lot of time in the coast guard. He suggested we grab breakfast at this diner he knew of. We figured it would have quick service and be family friendly.

When we arrived, we were told there would be a 30-minute wait for a table. While not ideal, we knew that on a Saturday morning in a tourist town, there would likely be a wait everywhere.

We finally got a table and ordered food. I ordered pancakes for my daughter, which took about 40 minutes to arrive. At this point, my 21-month-old was getting antsy, as I imagine most would when they have to sit in one place and wait for a long time. She wasn't having a meltdown, so we decided to stay in our corner booth rather than go outside in the rain. In the noisy diner I didn't see anyone looking at us or think we were causing a disturbance. (If that had been the case, we would have gladly taken our baby outside.)

When the food came, my daughter was still fussing. My husband and I decided that we would eat our food quickly then leave.

Out of nowhere, Marcy's Diner owner Darla Neugebauer threw to-go containers at my husband and yelled: "Either she goes or you go!"

We hadn't seen this woman before and didn't know who she was. She seemed so unprofessional that we didn't take it seriously. Our waitress seemed embarrassed by the owner's behaviour, too.

I continued feeding my child because the food was finally on the table. A few minutes later, Neugebauer, now behind the grill, slammed her hands on the counter. She pointed at my baby's face and screamed: "You need to shut the hell up!"

My husband replied: "Are you serious? Are you really yelling at a toddler right now?"

"As serious as a heart attack," she said, with fury in her eyes.

I'll never forget the look of fear on my baby's face.

It was then that I turned to my daughter and said calmly: "This is exactly how I'm raising you not to be."

We then paid the bill, tipped the waitress 25 per cent and left.

I thought that was that. But after I left a Facebook post about my experience on the Marcy's Diner page, Neugebauer responded with a nasty, profanity-laden attack where she called my baby an "it," a beast and a rotten child. News outlets picked it up, and the story quickly spread. All of a sudden, thousands of strangers were commenting on my parenting skills.

What got lost is that it's never OK to yell at a baby, especially if you own a restaurant. You should care about providing good service to their patrons. Neugebauer could have come over politely and told us our baby was disruptive. She should not have thrown things or yelled or cursed.

It's compassion I try to model for my daughter. I wish others would do the same.

Tara Carson is a mom and marketing manager who lives in New York.

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TARA CARSON,  
MOTHER

## Back on the bus

Taking public transportation to London brings back memories



DEIRDRE PIKE

Living carless for a little more than two months now, I've been taking modes of transportation lately that I hadn't boarded for quite a while.

Take the Greyhound bus for example, literally. After nine summers together, I finally convinced Renée to come to Home County Music and Arts Festival down the road in London town. The free weekend in Victoria Park began 42 years ago as Home County Folk Festival and I had made the annual trek for fantastic music, food and atmosphere for more than two decades before I met Renée and realized she didn't like folk music. (How was that possible?)

But with a change in name and a lineup that included Martha Wainwright, The Skydiggers, and our local friends Poor Angus, she was sold. I was sure we'd rent a car, but Renée insisted on the bus, so off we went on a nearly three-hour tour through towns with names I'd never heard or long forgotten.

We lugged our suitcases, knapsacks, umbrellas and lawn chairs out to the cab, onto the bus, off of the bus, into another cab, up to the hotel room and back again on the hottest and most humid weekend of the summer yet. That was fun.

Picking your seat on a bus for the trip is always fun, too. Thankfully, Renée and I had seats together but I know what it's like to get on a half-full bus and try to figure out who will be the best seat mate for the journey. I've also sat against the window and watched people get on and hope they don't sit with me. It sounds terrible but it's true.

That's the thing about public transportation. We are forced out of our private little

We are forced out of our private little world and made to sit next to our neighbours and face the realities of people we might consider the other.



THOMAS FROESE

The last time I peed in a bottle, my doctor looked it over, then looked me over, took my blood pressure and finally said: "Good God, man! How in the world do you manage to do it?"

He told me that he thought I'd live to be 100, and then, if I remember correctly (which I don't always, anymore), he said something about putting a large poster of me in his clinic (or was it on the front of the building?) to encourage others of my, uh, vintage. I think that's what he said, anyway.

"Dad, you're going to live to be 100!" my children now remind me occasionally, naively unaware that this means I might outlive them and their inheritance.

In either case, on an otherwise unremarkable summer day, I recently reached what's apparently my halfway mark. I'm now in The 50 Club, those of us walking this Earth since before anyone stepped on the

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THE CANADIAN PRESS

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world and made to sit next to our neighbours and face the realities of people we might consider the other.

I found it difficult to watch a couple with their daughter for the leg of the trip from McMaster to Woodstock. They were standing in the pouring rain, the little girl in a wheelchair, each clad in only shorts and T-shirts with nothing to protect them from the elements. After the parents found seats, one in front of the other, they spent the trip passing their unhappy and uncomfortable daughter back and forth trying to get her to sit still and look at pictures on a tablet of some sort. I surmised they had come in for a doctor's appointment at the children's hospital and were heading home.

That's the other fun thing about bus travel. It gives you time to make up stories that you think might match the person next to you or just up on the left. What I like even better are the opportunities of having real conversations with interesting people. (Yes, I can be that seat mate that yaps your ear off all the way home, if you're willing.)

Besides the Greyhound, we embarked on two other buses of which I had not seen the inside for quite some time. One was the HSR shuttle to watch the Canadian wom-

en's soccer team play, and sadly lose the semifinal against Colombia.

On the way home we took a yellow school bus back to the new GO station. Funnily enough the inside of the bus matched the outside as we were the only ones not wearing the bright yellow shirts that signified the Colombian fans. It was a jubilant group of fellow travellers and we laughed with our new friends for the short trip.

Public transportation challenges us to leave the privacy we long for, and sometimes find, in the comfort of our automobiles with the music we love and the temperature set where we want it and where we don't have to smell the food or other odours that people bring onto the bus.

Personally, while I enjoy the comfort of a nice car ride just like anyone else, I find the experience of travelling with others always leaves me with more stories, experiences and wisdom for the journey ahead.

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## Why I chose in-line skates instead of a smartphone

As a member of The 50 Club, being unconnected is the price I pay for peace

moon, never mind carried the sum total of the world's information in their back pocket.

As a reward for this remarkable achievement, for getting out of bed and taking one step in front of the other for five decades, I asked my family for in-line skates. I did not ask for a smartphone.

This is because my current phone, a 10-year-old flip that's older than two of my three children, is rather dear. Purchased in Dubai just after life in Yemen finished and just before life in Uganda began, it's small enough to fit in my pocket with plenty of room to spare and, when in Africa, cheap enough to pull out and call Canada for less than the cost of lunch.

In phone years, it must be 100 itself. In its long and faithful life, it's been dropped, kicked, lost, found and generally loved, this since the time when tweeting was just what birds did and information wasn't yet peddled on the market like diminishing currency no longer backed by gold.

Now my old phone, old even by developing world standards, and my older age, and my new, hip red in-line skates are all converging in a sort of happy dance. It's all in the spirit of summer and my new life motto of "Doing less and liking it more."

I realize this may seem strange: someone with newspapering in his blood who's so hopelessly disconnected, who cares so little about what's out there. The Economist reports that half of the planet's adults now have smartphones. That's expected to be 80 per cent by 2020. Why am I missing the party?

In truth, it's the price I pay for world peace. Well, at least peace in my world. Because really, peace, like war, is about what's

happening inside of you as much as what's happening out there somewhere.

You know what I mean. We're anxious when the price of oil goes too high and anxious when it's too low. We're anxious when our children are underfoot and we're anxious when they're too far away. We worry when it's too hot outside, then worry when it's too cold.

We worry over news reports of war and murder and planes falling from the sky, not to mention terrorism, even if this world, generally, is more at peace (what this world calls peace, anyway) than ever, even if crime is down and air travel safer than ever.

Yes, statistically, you're more likely to die by falling off a ladder than by any act of terror.

This is not to say that I don't have my anxieties. I do. Perishing somewhere in Africa has become one of them. So why live with more distraction, with more, as Coleridge put it, "water, water everywhere, with not any drop to drink?" Why choose more knowledge (if it's even knowledge) and less wisdom?

Instead, I'll go for my new red skates. Hamilton's picturesque bayfront is one spot where my family especially likes to skate while we're here, while we're home.

"So where is everyone?" I asked my eldest there at the waterfront recently, the two of us, hand-in-hand, rolling in the sunshine, barely a soul around. "It's such a beautiful day!"

"I don't know," she said. "At home with their devices."

Thomas Froese writes about news, travel and life. Read him at [www.thomasfroese.com](http://www.thomasfroese.com) and [www.dailydad.net](http://www.dailydad.net).