



RYAN PFEIFFER, GUELPH MERCURY

Top: At the halfway point of his Matt vs. Fat challenge, Matt Shurrie works out under the guidance of personal trainer Marla Arndt of Frameworks Fitness. Right: Matt at the end of his challenge.



ROB O'FLANAGAN
free form

Love it or not, we need the CBC

Back in 1996, when I was trying to scratch out a living as a freelance reporter/photographer in northern Ontario, I walked off the street into the offices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in downtown Sudbury. I asked to speak to Barry Mercer, who, at that time, was the host of the station's afternoon show, *Points North*.

He knew of me from my often vitriolic theatre and art reviews, which appeared frequently in the Sudbury Star and made me somewhat notorious in the nickel capital. I pitched a weekly storytelling segment on his show, where I would write and broadcast a short work of fiction.

"Let's give it a try," he said, on the spot. He offered me something like \$85 a pop. That gig lasted a year and a half, and spurred me to write a lot of fiction. I improved as a writer out of necessity, and would later publish two collections of those stories.

While there was incredible good fortune — and good timing — to that important opportunity in my life, there is no doubt in my mind it would never have happened had Mercer not had a small budget to work with, a spot to fill and the flexibility necessary to hire a relative unknown off the street.

I doubt very much if such a thing could happen today. And it will most certainly never happen for another struggling writer, given the current financial malaise in which the CBC finds itself.

I take the gutting of the CBC personally, and I have said publicly if civil unrest is necessary to force a mentality and policy shift about the public broadcaster, then I will be there, shaking a fist and shouting slogans. I've signed my name to an online petition decrying the situation. But I doubt the Canadian public, largely apathetic towards the CBC, will muster nerve enough to take the issue to the streets.

I have been highly critical of the CBC recently — of its biased, often lazy journalism, its tired personalities, its verbosity as it relates to books and music. And while I would most definitely fall on the left side of the political spectrum, the CBC's left-leaning ethos has always struck me as an imbalance, an unfortunate slant to a public institution that should more faithfully reflect the full range of political opinion in this country. But I love the CBC for what it has been, and for what it could be — a rejuvenated, expanded, unbiased, world-leading information-gathering and disseminating force.

I am not the first to suggest the CBC's slant to the left is probably the very thing bringing on what appears to be a retributive assault from our right-leaning minority federal government. Politics are petty, and this unwillingness to help the CBC out of its fiscal hole looks petty to me.

If the Harper government bails out private broadcasters, while not throwing a lifeline to the CBC, well, we will just see what Canadians make of that.

Over the past 25 or 30 years, so many public institutions have been forced to conform to a business model: public art galleries, universities, school boards, municipal governments, hospitals, and the CBC. But these institutions are not businesses. They are essential social entities, things we collectively need for our sense of identity, for our health, for our knowledge, for our life.

We pay for these things through our taxes. We have a right to expect they will be available to us when we need them. And we have a right to expect governments will rescue them when they falter.

Rob O'Flanagan's column appears Saturdays. Contact him by email at roflanagan@guelphmercury.com.

Matt vs. Fat



Matt knows his battle isn't over. But thanks to a show of support, he knows it's been worthwhile. His hope: That everyone will take a closer look at themselves and those around them — and act.

► MATT VS. FAT FROM PAGE A1

Another key moment happened just recently when I successfully completed the 100-stair challenge a record eight times. My previous best had been twice.

My overall health to date has improved and I'm pleased to report I've lost 47 pounds. Perhaps even more important, I've been able to lower my body mass index. Body mass index provides a ratio of weight to height and mine has been lowered to about 30 from 45.6.

Through it all, the smile on my face has grown and my energy level has increased while my waist size has shrunk.

When I first stepped on the scales in October, I did so sporting a 54.6-inch waist. Today, my waist measures 44 inches. What it means is I'm now able to wear pants I was wearing almost a decade ago. Calling this feeling anything short of incredible would be a huge understatement, but to suggest for one second this process was easy would be unfair. In many ways trying to regain control of my weight and overall health has been a huge challenge — likely the largest I've ever undertaken.

It would also be wrong for me to suggest I have somehow overcome this in a matter of months. One of many messages I will take away is weight loss and maintaining good health is a lifelong struggle.

When we started the Matt vs. Fat fitness challenge in October, the first person we contacted for guidance was Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt of Frameworks Fitness.

An accomplished bodybuilder — she is currently training to compete at next weekend's Fitness Star Model Search in Toronto — Arndt's story of overcoming her own weight struggles certainly appealed to me. Hearing about her past battles with food certainly provided a sense of common ground between trainer and trainee. It also didn't hurt she was able to push me — even when I didn't think it was possible to do another push-up or lift another weight.

One area of concern I had coming into this project was my poor eating habits. In my first story it was made clear I had no idea how to properly fuel my body. I'm thankful Arndt was able to step in and offer much-needed direction.

It's probably fair to say I wasn't always the model student. There were many times when our workout sessions saw the two of us spar over food choices. Such events usually took place when my daily food journal revealed something that could only be listed as undesirable. One instance I remember quite clearly involved whole-wheat wraps — normally a healthy alternative to grain products. Unfortunately, the wraps appeared in my food journal three times on the same day and Arndt wasted little time letting me know such food should be spaced out.

You can't just eat wraps and expect to lose weight, she said.

That, in a nutshell, sort of summed up my approach to weight loss. When someone said a food product was a healthy alternative, that's what I would eat — most of the time. It happened with the wraps and also happened with a host of other items, including eggs and yogurt.

The learning curve for me entering this project was immense. Not only had I been making unhealthy food choices for about the last 10 years, my level of physical activity resembled that of a grizzly bear in the dead of winter. To say my body was in hibernation might actually have been a compliment.

There's little doubt that all changed the day I first walked into Arndt's gym.

Soon after, my new best friends included a treadmill, a fitness ball, a stepper and a collection of weights in varying sizes.

At times I might as well have been learning a foreign language, but I actually developed a fondness for working out. You might notice I didn't use the words passion or love. Let's just say working out is no longer despised in my world.

More than anything, I'm impressed with what I've been able to accomplish physically.

From the moment I walked through her door, Arndt quietly admitted I was in decent shape for a person of my size. Maybe that's what pushed me to do more during every workout.

Just this week I found myself attending one of Arndt's regular boot camps. On this particular night, boot campers were instructed to complete "The Accumulator" — a series of 10 exercises. Beginning with one exercise, the challenge gets more difficult as additional exercises are added to the routine. When finished, participants have walked more

than 1,000 stairs and completed roughly 100 push-ups, 90 standing jumps, 50 to 70 bicep curls, 50 to 70 arm raises and 20 to 30 knee bends.

It was gruelling — something I never would have completed just six months ago.

From the day we launched the Matt vs. Fat challenge, it developed a following online through the blog at GuelphMercury.com. As of this week we had recorded almost 17,000 visits and averaged 90 visits per day. In that time we have posted 114 entries and just the other day recorded our 100th comment. Not bad for a blog launched only six months ago.

Throughout this challenge I've tried to set the bar high for myself — and for the community. After all, this whole project was launched after a Statistics Canada health survey last year suggested about half the adults in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph health region are overweight.

If anything at all comes out of this, I'm hopeful each one of you will take a closer look at yourself and those close to you. Identify areas in which you can do better — and take action. Your health depends on it.

Taking Charge: For more on the Matt vs. Fat blog, visit GuelphMercury.com. To contact Matt, email mattshurrie@hotmail.com.

Matt's new tale of the tape

WEIGHT
Now: 242.8 lbs.
Then: 289.8 lbs.
BMI (body mass index)
Now: 30
Then: 45.6
CHEST
Now: 46 inches
Then: 50 inches
WAIST
Now: 44 inches
Then: 54.6 inches
HIPS
Now: 49.2 inches
Then: 54.3 inches
THIGHS
Now: 27.2 inches
Then: 28 inches
ARMS
Now: 15 inches
Then: 16.2 inches
PUSH-UPS
Now: 10 to 20
Then: 2
WALL SQUAT
Now: 5 minutes
Then: 1 minute



watch the video of Matt describe his battle

To learn ore about the series and the Matt's bid to lose weight and become healthier, visit guelphmercury.com.