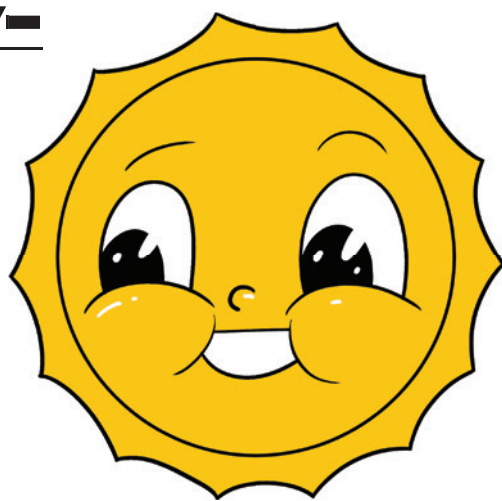


The ultimate try-
anything-once,
antidote-to-
doomscrolling
bucket list for
2025



Brave New Year

Interviews by Ali Amad, Graham Isador,
Maddy Mahoney and Anthony Milton



There's no shortage of things to worry about out there, and the coming year is shaping up to be just as—if not more—stomach churning than the last. So take a break from catastrophizing and make 2025 your year of yes. Always wanted to take a crack at stand-up comedy? The time is now. Curious about what flying a glider feels like? Wonder no more. Wish you could run the world's major marathons? Get going. Dying to commune with the departed? Contact your nearest medium. For inspiration on wonderful, wild and even some slightly reckless things to tackle over the next 12 months—as described by people who dared to try them—read on.

Illustrations by Ryan Snook



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

QUIT SCREENS COLD TURKEY

CHRISTIE WONG, 31

Social media consultant, Regent Park



BECAUSE OF MY WORK, I spend *a lot* of time online, checking notifications, monitoring client accounts and drafting content. When I started my business in 2020, the demand was intense. I worked 60 hours a week, bouncing between clients across several social media platforms. Managing all those accounts was exhausting. I'd start and end my days the same way: lying in bed, glued to my phone, scrolling. By the summer of 2022, I was burned out, so I decided to sign up for Camp Reset, a digital detox that a friend of mine was hosting in September. The premise is simple: you pay between \$325 and \$825 for a shared cabin (private cabins or cottages are more), then hand over your phone. For the next four days, you recharge by shutting out the online world and focusing on human connection.

On day one, I took a bus to Bancroft, three hours northeast of Toronto, to join 200 other campers. The organizers found different ways to respect people's boundaries. For example, each participant wore a bracelet related to physical contact—green for "open," yellow for "please ask" and red for "no." The camp also discouraged work talk—it was a self-enforced rule, but, for me, it was easier than expected to comply. I loved getting to know strangers without having a clue what they did for a living. Instead, we stargazed, lounged in hammocks, swam in the lake and explored the forest. It reminded me of friendships as a kid, before careers became central to our identities.

Camp Reset offered a variety of activities, including archery, a workshop about exploring your fears, and a "silent" disco where we listened to music on headphones and danced the night away. The silence in the woods was wonderful too—without urban sounds or technology, I was much more attuned to my environment. For the first time in years, I wasn't thinking about my to-do list. Being present in the moment was both grounding and surreal.

Since that summer, I've taken steps to unplug whenever possible. I created a system inspired by the camp's consent bracelets: I put my phone in one of three colour-coded boxes at different points in the day: red for "no phone time," yellow for "only for emergencies" and green for "normal use." I set time limits on my phone, which hold me accountable with notifications if I exceed them. I keep my phone out of my bedroom to avoid nighttime scrolling and rely instead on an analog alarm clock. And I've committed to spending my weekends outdoors and away from technology as much as possible.

Unplugging isn't just for people who work in social media. These days, we're all too dependent on technology. Most of us could use a few days of true disconnection. You don't need to attend Camp Reset to do it, but a supportive environment definitely helps.



"For the first time in years, I wasn't thinking about my to-do list"

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

FLY LIKE A BIRD

EMILY PEELAR, 20

Toronto Metropolitan University student, Schomberg



I STUDY AEROSPACE engineering at TMU. The first time I heard about gliding was in 2023, when the University Soaring Society sent an email to people in my program. The USS is a partner of the Toronto Soaring Club, an organization for people who want to fly gliders, and the note mentioned the possibility of an introductory flight. I didn't know anything about gliding, so I did a bit of research. I found out that a tow plane uses a cable to take the two-seat glider up between 2,000 and 3,000 feet. The glider pilot then releases the cable and slowly soars the craft back down to earth. An experienced pilot will be able to find pockets of warm air called thermals to gain altitude and extend the flight time. It sounded exciting and like something I had to try.

A month later, I headed to the Toronto Soaring Club's airfield, a series of grass airstrips and



hangars in Southgate, near Shelburne. I couldn't wait to get in the air—strangely, I wasn't nervous. Flight instructors took us through the daily inspection, checking for things that could go wrong: loose controls, cracks, dents and other signs of stress. Then we picked the best runway based on the weather conditions—low wind is ideal. I climbed into one of the gliders with an instructor, and the tow plane pulled us up, higher and higher. When the rope was released, we slid away so smoothly. Looking around and seeing the other planes and gliders and the fields in the distance was inspiring. I had never experienced anything like that before. I knew instantly I would do it again.

Glider pilots describe soaring as a game of chess in the sky. You have to look at the clouds and figure out where thermals might pop up. If there are no clouds, you look for other sources of rising air, like farmers releasing energy while plowing fields. Finding and catching a pocket is incredibly rewarding.

After roughly 10 months of training, I got my licence and have since completed 21 solo flights. Gliding gives me something to look forward to, something to work toward. I get up there almost every weekend—somehow, being in the sky helps me feel connected to the earth below.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

ZIPLINE AT NIAGARA FALLS

JOAN THOMLINSON, 98

Retired taxi driver, Cambridge



IN 2023, for my 97th birthday, I raised \$1,600 for a food bank in Cambridge by walking 97 laps on the track at Seasons, my retirement community. For my 98th this past spring, I wanted to go even bigger. I heard about the Wild-Play zipline at Niagara Falls: it starts 67 metres above the ground and flies you along the edge of the Niagara Gorge at more than 70 kilometres per hour. Initially I thought, *Oh crumbs, I can't do that!* But, as time passed, I wanted to take on the challenge.

I decided to turn my first ziplining adventure into a fundraiser for SickKids, setting a goal of \$2,098—\$2,000 to surpass the previous year's \$1,600 plus an extra dollar for each year of my life.

I was excited as they strapped me into the harness, but I'll admit to being nervous when the gate opened. It felt just like that split second before a big drop on a roller coaster—there's no turning back, no way to go but down.

Once I was released, my fear vanished. I put my arms out, like they'd told me to, and I felt like a soaring bird. The view of Niagara Falls was breathtaking, unlike anything you see from the ground. The best part: I raised more than \$7,000. After seeing me do it, a few friends from my retirement community decided to zipline too.

I truly believe you're never too old to try something new. How am I going to top that for my 99th? Who knows—I'm sure I'll find something.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Channel your inner bootlegger

For speakeasy enthusiasts eager to revisit the days of bathtub gin (minus the health hazards), Spirit of York offers a make-your-own master class for \$100. Hosted at the company's HQ in the Distillery District, participants get a crash course on the booze's history and distillation process before experimenting with botanicals to create one-of-a-kind libations. Everyone leaves with a bottle of their special spirit, and, with a little notice, Spirit of York can revive your recipe at a later date to whip up some reserves.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

COMMUNE WITH THE DEAD

YASHY MURPHY, 44
Travel writer and content creator, downtown



THIS PAST SEPTEMBER, I was looking for a birthday gift for my mom, who's big into the supernatural. When I heard that a friend of mine was organizing an outing to a seance, I figured I'd found the perfect present. It was being hosted by a self-proclaimed mentalist named Jaymes White, who was recreating a Victorian-style seance at the Stanley Barracks at Exhibition Place. He'd been doing it for years at locations across the city, and I was intrigued. When it comes to the paranormal, I'm torn between being a believer and a skeptic. My scientific side says that everything can be explained, and I have enough experience in theatre and film to know that creaking floorboards and shifting shadows can be engineered. But it can also be fun to suspend disbelief—especially during spooky season.

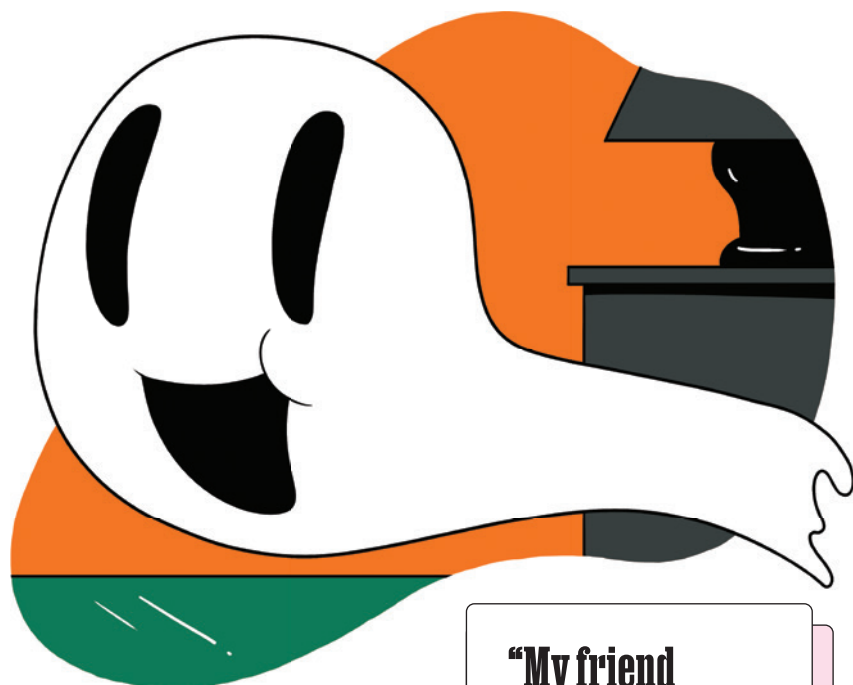
The night of the seance, there were 19 of us gathered. A couple of the guests owned shops specializing in the occult, two were psychics and several others introduced themselves as ghost hunters. At 9:40 p.m., someone with a lantern came to unlock the gates to an 1840s limestone building that had once served as officers' quarters. First, we were led into a foyer that had three very creepy dolls in it. Then, with the help of someone's phone flashlight, we ascended a staircase into a room where we met White, who was dressed entirely in black and had slipped in silently. He handed us each a piece of obsidian, purported to ward off evil spirits, and said to keep it on us. My curiosity piqued, I settled in for the ride.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Rent a mega-mansion

If you find yourself with a windfall to burn and an *Architectural Digest* itch to scratch, bypass Airbnb and Vrbo and head to the Christie's and Sotheby's real estate sites to book a few months of luxe living. Or, for one-stop shopping, the US site Mansion Global lists a range of luxury offerings in Toronto—from \$5,100 to \$21,500 a month—including a three-bedroom-plus-den condo in Yorkville with a 156-bottle wine fridge and a 5,650-square-foot modern home in Lawrence Park South.



We set out down a long hallway lined with wooden doors. There was a strong, yeasty smell in the air. White claimed it was related to the building having been used to quarantine polio patients. He said angry spirits infested the place. All I knew was that the air was musty, but my group started dashing around, looking for ghosts. It was bizarre. After a few minutes, White corralled us into an empty room illuminated by a lantern. Immediately, two people said they felt some kind of uncomfortable presence. Claiming they were channelling a spirit, White encouraged us to ask them questions. I couldn't figure out if this was real or not. It felt like immersive theatre: I was both a participant and a voyeur in a scene being acted out around me.

At one point during the night, my friend and another woman whipped around and shouted at me in quick succession, "Stop touching my hair!" But I wasn't. Nobody was. Knowing that my friend had been hoping for a ghostly experience, I tried to joke, "Did you finally have it?" But, if I'm being honest, I was a little spooked. What could have made them feel that at the same time?

For the seance itself, we gathered around a long table covered in electric tea lights. I was nervous—enough people had felt angry spirits that I figured if we did get a visitor, they wouldn't be pleasant. White told us to hold hands and said we weren't allowed to break the circle no matter how scared we felt—or what forces acted upon us.

"My friend shouted, 'Stop touching my hair!' But I wasn't. Nobody was"

One person left, too disturbed to continue. White then flicked off the candles and asked, "Who's there? Do you want to communicate with us?"

That's when a few people noticed a blue orb bolt under a table. I didn't, but I did feel a rush of air, like someone was darting around us. There was a loud crash. One of my tablemates started crying and shaking. The people on either side of me had an iron grip on my hands, and others in the group were screaming. I felt bad for them—spirits or not, the experience was very unsettling.

Shortly afterward, White called the seance to a close. The evening lasted roughly two hours, but the effects lingered. Later that night, I was awoken by my husband, who said I kept making strange noises in my sleep—I must have been having a bad dream.

Looking back, my rational mind can explain everything. There could have been speakers hidden around the room or assistants lurking in the shadows. And yet, another side of me wonders, *What if?* I've decided I won't do a seance again. If there are angry spirits out there, I'd rather not provoke them.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: WONG BY CIARÁN BREEN, PEELAR HEADSHOT AND GLIDER COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT, ZIPLINE BY WILDPLAY NIAGARA FALLS, THOMLINSON COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

HOST A CONCERT ON A MOVING STREETCAR

RYLEY MURRAY, 40
Creative director, the Annex



I WORK at the PR firm Edelman, and in 2014 we were working with a beverage company whose tag line at the time was "Make it original." We

wanted to put together something really fresh for the North by Northeast music festival, so we created a unique venue by taking over a streetcar and turning it into a moving performance space for 16 bands over four nights.

The logistics of putting on a concert series in a moving streetcar were wild. We figured out an ideal route along Queen Street—from McCaul to the edge of Parkdale—with multiple stops to attract as many pass-holding audience members as possible. The vehicle was driven by a TTC employee—so no worries there—and decked out like a concert venue, with mood lighting and band posters. I worked more than 100 hours that week to make it happen.

Macaulay Culkin played with the Pizza Underground, his pizza-themed Velvet Underground cover band. Part of their set involves getting a pizza delivered to the band, so we had to figure out delivery to a moving vehicle while the musicians played and 50 spectators looked on. Lizzo belted out her songs while swinging on the streetcar's poles and blew everyone away with her star power. Comedian and musician Reggie Watts gave an amazing set. He wanted to smoke a joint before his performance, and I had to tell this celebrity that he really shouldn't light up on TTC property. But he was cool about it.

Renting a streetcar to use as a festival venue was extremely hard to organize, but the TTC does let people charter their vehicles for things like sightseeing, film shoots and bar crawls (a streetcar is roughly \$2,500 for three hours). Despite the logistical challenges, every night was so incredible. It's one of the coolest things I've ever been a part of.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

WALK ON WATER

ERIC FALLON, 41
Owner of a lip balm company, Leslieville



WHEN MY FATHER died suddenly four years ago, I was shocked. We think we have more time, but that's not always true. I decided to stop putting things off: I took up salsa, bought a dirt bike, and travelled to Aruba to try windsurfing, kitesurfing and wing foiling. I'd seen a clip of the latter on social media: people hovering over the water, powered by the wind. They were standing on a board mounted on top of a hydrofoil, which looks a bit like an airplane wing and functions the same way, except underwater. They were also holding a sail, which provides propulsion, while the hydrofoil underneath generates lift as it pushes through the water. When everything goes right, you're levitating over the surface like Jesus.

Except everything did not go right for me in Aruba. I signed up for a lesson that came with next to no instruction—they just gave me the board and foil then left. Bad plan. Each time I gained momentum and came out of the water, I'd fall. It was a dismal failure, so I didn't try wing foiling again until two years later. In 2024, I met a man named Max Robinson at my gym. He teaches wing foiling at the Toronto Windsurfing Club and is something of an athletic Adonis. I figured if anyone could teach me, it would be him.

We had our first lesson—\$240 for two hours, totally worth it—by Cherry Beach. It's the perfect location: protected, flat water, good wind. I started off behind a boat, no sail, just holding a rope for momentum. With Robinson's help, I got a proper sense of pitch and angles, and it felt incredible when I started lifting out of the water. Once I had that down, we ditched the tow line and added the sail. After four lessons, I had the hang of it. I've since taken myself out on Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe and Lake of Bays. The feeling? Pure stoke. It's a tricky sport, but every time I practise, I feel myself getting better. Every micro-adjustment brings a surge of adrenalin.

I've become obsessed with the wind—I check wind reports for the lake about eight times a day, and I'm constantly looking at the cameras at the Toronto Windsurfing Club for the best conditions. What makes the hobby even better is the people—it's such a cool and diverse community. I can't wait for next summer, but in the meantime I've saved up so I can head to Mexico or the Caribbean every few weeks during the colder months to wing foil. I've also compiled a list of the top destinations for the sport. I really want to go to Mauritius, off the coast of Madagascar. When you're out on the water, it feels like the whole ocean is yours.





WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... **DO STAND-UP**

LARISSA PRIMEAU, 46
Writer, director and producer,
Upper Beaches



WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD, I did an impression of my Uncle Maurice and my dad cracked up. That was my first memory of being funny. My personality was just developing, and suddenly, making people laugh became a big part of who I wanted to be. It gave me confidence. Being funny is a gift, like being good at math or visual arts—both of which I stink at. In high school, I loved watching *Saturday Night Live*, and I worshipped cast members like Molly Shannon, Cheri Oteri, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. But what they had accomplished felt so out of reach. *I will never be a comedian*, I thought. *Not one who gets paid, anyway.*

When I was in my late 30s, working in film production and consumed with raising young children, my husband bought me a session of improv classes at the Second City. I gave it a shot and found that I loved spur-of-the-moment comedy. My fellow performers and I succeeded together and failed together. It felt a lot safer than stand-up, which terrified me. I couldn't imagine being on stage alone, watched by a bunch of strangers waiting for me to make them laugh. But that changed this past summer, when a friend asked me to be part of a Comedy Bar show made up of people who had never done stand-up before. I don't know what compelled me to say yes. Maybe it's being 46 and at a point in life where I'm less concerned about other people's opinions—or maybe it was the gin and tonic I was sipping at the time.

After multiple attempts at bailing on the event, I finally did it: I performed five minutes of original Larissa Primeau stand-up in front of 60 strangers. Ten seconds into my set, I heard the first laugh. More followed. I have never felt so high. I didn't want that feeling to end, so a month later, I signed up for Comedy Bar's core stand-up class. I intend to continue performing. Stand-up isn't about being the funniest person in the room; it's about storytelling and delivery. Besides, what's the worst that can happen? And even if the worst does happen, that could be funny too.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... **SOUS FOR A CELEBRITY CHEF**

EVAN WEBSTER, 31
Software sales manager, midtown



I LOVE COOKING, so when my family surprised me last December with an "Into the Kitchen" experience for my 30th birthday, I was ecstatic. The company gives amateur chefs like me the chance to cook in a professional kitchen alongside renowned local chefs, including Mamakas Taverna's Rafael Freitas da Rocha and the Chase's Cory Vitiello. For me, chef Nick Liu from DaiLo was the clear choice—I eat a lot of Asian food but rarely make it myself, so I figured it would be an opportunity to learn and get out of my comfort zone. Options range from a \$600 shadowing session to a \$1,400 package that features an eight-course tasting with wine pairings, which my family sprang for.



When I arrived at DaiLo, I was welcomed with a chef's jacket, and Liu introduced me to his seven-person kitchen brigade. The energy as they prepped for service was controlled chaos. Liu explained the role of each kitchen station before giving me a crash course in different dishes, including fried watermelon, which is all about layering different textures and sweet, spicy and sour flavours. We prepped the fruit, then coated it in cornstarch and fried it, transforming it into a crispy and juicy centrepiece topped with cubes of pickled watermelon rind and a tangy nahm jim sauce made from fish sauce, lime juice and Thai chilies. Liu made the nahm jim with a mortar and pestle, which gave the sauce a vibrant quality you'd never achieve with a blender.

Then came the real test—making one of DaiLo's "Asian garnishes": green onions sliced as thin as hair. Liu made it look effortless, but I couldn't replicate his knifework. "You're pretty good," he told me with a smile, "but to work here, the AG has to be flawless." Another chef, witnessing my attempt, leaned over and whispered, "Don't worry, it's never thin enough for Nick."

After three exhilarating hours in the kitchen, I met with the head of front-of-house for a session about wine and went behind the bar to learn about cocktails. Then my girlfriend joined me for the tasting portion of the package. We tried different vintages alongside bites of the dishes I'd helped prepare, like the fried watermelon and pumpkin purée dumplings with a soy brown butter sauce and a glaze made from White Rabbit candy, an iconic Chinese sweet. I'm not a wine connoisseur, but I started to understand how the right wine could enhance the flavours of a dish.

By the end of the meal, I was happy, full and a little buzzed. The experience wasn't just fun—I got to see first-hand how much care goes into each dish, and I gained new skills, like how to properly brown butter, as well as a new appreciation for the work involved in a seemingly simple garnish.

PRIMEAU BY LINDSAY STEPHENSON; WEBSTER HEADSHOT AND DALLO KITCHEN BY JENNA WAKANI

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... **SNEAK INTO ABANDONED BUILDINGS**

DAVE CONLON, 49
Marketing manager, Burlington



URBAN EXPLORATION is the study of the parts of a civilization that are typically unseen. Put another way, it's the art of infiltrating any space you're not supposed to be in. That can include climbing onto rooftops or going into sewers, storm drains and abandoned buildings to look around. I got into urban exploration in 2012, when a friend told me about an abandoned and supposedly haunted house in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Looking around online, I found forums where people posted pictures of the buildings they'd snuck into. I started by going into abandoned farmhouses in Milton, then worked my way up to old factories and hospitals. It was fun and surreal to be in a huge space all alone, plus the fear of getting caught upped the exhilaration factor.

Urban exploration is illegal, but the repercussions vary. Daytime trespassing in Ontario carries a fine, same as a speeding ticket. After 9 p.m., it's considered "prowling," which is criminal, but I'm not there to steal or vandalize. The handful of times I've been caught, I've simply been asked to leave. Cops and security guards tend to calm down when they realize I'm just there to take pictures.

I've sometimes encountered animals or people living in places I'm exploring, but I've never felt truly unsafe. When my gut says to get out of there, I do. My most recent adventure was at a factory in Hamilton—I won't say where—full of scrappers, people who steal copper wiring from buildings slated for demolition. I picked up a metal

"Street cred among urban explorers comes from going into places no one's been"

CONLON HEADSHOT AND ABANDONED HOME BY FREAKTOGRAPHY.COM



bar for protection, just in case, but my best defence was friendliness—I struck up a conversation with everyone I met, and they left me alone.

Street cred among urban explorers comes from going into places no one's been. My biggest get was the Canadian Niagara Power hydro plant in Niagara Falls. It's a tourist attraction now, but it was abandoned for several years. In 2018, I got in through an open window. It extended a couple hundred feet underground, through multiple levels of slippery catwalks, pipes and ladders. At the very bottom is the tailrace—the old brick tunnel that takes the water back to the river. To get to it, I had to cross a huge drop via a rickety ladder in the pitch black. I followed the tunnel more than 600 metres to its end, at the foot of the roaring falls.

After the hydro plant was renovated in 2021 and opened to the public, I came back as a regular tourist. It was neat to see how it had changed since I'd been there—they'd laid concrete in the tunnel and fixed the cracks and the loose bricks. They'd also added an elevator. But the

coolest thing was that I had a secret. Unlike everyone else in the room, I'd already been there.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... **Go wild at the zoo**

Animal lovers who spring for the Toronto Zoo's VIP package (up to \$400 per person) get behind-the-scenes bonuses: five hours with a personal tour guide and a private vehicle to zip around the African Savanna, Australasia Pavilion and more. It's a hands-off experience—no touching or feeding the animals, please—but you're privy to training and health care sessions that don't happen in the habitats, plus tons of insider info. (Psst, the white lion Fintan gets a spritz of Adidas cologne in his mane when he's good—the big cat loves nothing more than smelling fine.)

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

BE AN EXTRA ON A FILM SET

MADDIE FORDHAM, 34
Production manager, Oshawa



AFTER GRADUATING from university with a theatre degree, I wanted to get into film, but I didn't know how to break into the industry. Friends of mine were background actors—commonly known as extras—and seemed to be having fun. I decided to give it a go and asked them to help set me up.

My first job, in 2011, was for a movie I don't think ever got released—it was a big-budget 3-D showcase that featured dancers from *So You Think You Can Dance* and a K-pop star. I was hired, along with 900 other people, to be a club-goer. The club was in a former slaughterhouse, and let's just say that the smell had lingered. It was so aggressive that we could be on set for only 15 minutes or so before they had to air out the

space. We'd dance really hard for a brief window, then be moved outside into the hot sun to wait. We did this on and off for 15 hours—I ended up with a brutal sunburn.

When I received my paycheque, I realized that being a background actor paid significantly more than my retail job—and I didn't have to deal with customers yelling at me about returning a sweater. I could handle the occasional sunburn. So I eventually quit retail and did background work for the next five and a half years.



Like at any job, there were things about the work I didn't like—the hours could be very long, we filmed in extreme weather—but there were highlights too. I was a body double for a sex scene in Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*, I worked closely with Elisabeth Moss on *The Handmaid's Tale* and I was part of a car crash scene in the *Total Recall* remake with Colin Farrell. The filmmakers put explosives under the car and flipped it, and I was one of the people in the crowd freaking out. Once the car had done its thing, the director called cut and replaced the stunt driver with Farrell—who *definitely* winked at me when everyone was busy setting up.

Some people think background acting is silly, but it allowed me to observe how a film set works. I got to ask a lot of questions and figure out what kind of job I'd ultimately like to do, which led me to a career as an assistant director. I did that for more than a decade before moving into production management. Background acting was my way in—it's an incredible way to learn.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... Play pirate for a day

From May to October, mini mates and their grown-ups can deploy their best arghs, ayes and ahoy with Pirate Life Theatre for \$45 per person. The swashbucklers don their gear and Jack Sparrow-worthy temporary tattoos on shore, then spend an hour sailing around the harbour on the 45-foot Island Rogue. Buccaneer business includes searching for buried treasure, fending off invaders (firing water cannons at a Pirate Life staffer in a passing motorboat) and belting out sea shanties.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

DIVE THROUGH A SHIPWRECK

MATT MANDZIUK, 45
Scuba diving instructor and dive shop owner, St. Catharines



I GREW UP underwater. My dad owned a dive shop, so I had my own tiny oxygen tank at the age of four and was diving in the Caribbean by the time I was 10. I took over the business in 2012, and when I'm not manning the shop, I'm probably exploring Second World War-era shipwrecks in the Pacific, or maybe I'm 400 feet down in a tea-coloured lake in Bon Echo Provincial Park. Of all my favourite dive sites, however, Tobermory, a harbour town on the Bruce Peninsula, is the one place that draws me back.

Nicknamed the scuba diving capital of Canada, Tobermory is famous for its clear blue waters, which are part of both Georgian

Bay and the northern reaches of Lake Huron. Tobermory's limestone bedrock contributes to the incredible visibility—that area is far clearer than the green, murky waters of Lake Ontario. For pure geological wonder, there's Bad Neighbour Rock, a massive limestone formation that plunges 300 feet below the surface. When I bring my diving students to Tobermory, their minds are blown by the quality of the water—and by how cold it can get early in the season!

Among scuba divers, Tobermory is best known for its shipwrecks—no two are the same. One of the most famous wrecks is the *Arabia*, a three-masted 130-foot-long barque that went down in the late 1800s. Some people think it looks like a ghostly pirate ship. The anchor chains cascading down from the bow are still intact, making that particular dive a popular choice for underwater photographers.

Another incredible wreck is the *Forest City*,

a wooden steamer that sank in 1904, when it ran into an island in the dense fog. It lies on a slope from about 60 to 150 feet, so you can explore different levels as you swim.

Many ships from this era never made it back to port, and diving down to the *Arabia* reminds me of how resilient those sailors had to be. They faced so many dangers—sudden storms, thick fog and treacherous rocky shoals—without the navigational aids we have today.

Even after nearly 30 years of diving in Tobermory, I never know what I'll find—maybe a new detail on an old wreck. Each dive promises an adventure.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Charter a yacht



Party like Bey and Jay on the *Medi* (except on Lake Ontario) by chartering one of the opulent vessels listed at getmyboat.com. *Below Deck* fans can opt for something like the *Carver*, a 65-foot yacht that hosts 20 guests for \$700 an hour plus captain's fees. If cruising and sailing is more your speed, the 42-foot Fontaine Pajot *Astréa* catamaran will cost you and 17 of your nearest and dearest a breezy \$1,700 an hour.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

MARRY YOURSELF

NAOMI HARRIS, 51
Photographer, Downsview



THIS COMING April, I'll be celebrating the 10th anniversary of my wedding—to myself. I was never the type of person who dreamed of a big white wedding with all the fixings. Frankly, I thought both the institution of marriage and the wedding industrial complex could use a major overhaul. It should be possible to experience love and commitment without going over the top or into debt. So, in 2015, when I read a short piece on Twitter about how single women in Japan were opting to "marry" themselves, I was intrigued. The focus wasn't on the ceremony or the vows but rather on the joy of getting dressed up, being a bride for a day and having lovely photos taken. Why should you need a groom for that? I was 41, a self-proclaimed spinster and an avid traveller who'd never been to Japan. Up for trying anything once, I booked a ticket during cherry blossom season and flew to Kyoto.



The woman behind the mock matrimonial service was a middle-aged Japanese divorcee who ran a boutique travel agency and charged her clients roughly \$3,400 for a two-day package that included a dress rental, hair and makeup, and a photoshoot. I don't usually wear fancy clothes or even makeup, so I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed trying on the gowns, each one more lavish than the last. I finally settled on a strapless number that flared out at the hips in a frothy explosion of tulle.

The hair and makeup artist had a tougher time with me. I'd woken up with conjunctivitis in one eye, and no amount of concealer could obscure the oozing puffiness. I asked her to style my hair in finger curls, but the effect was, to my amusement, less Old Hollywood and more Queen Mum. Like most photographers, I'm uncomfortable having my own picture taken. Yet, somehow, against a backdrop of blossoms, I successfully posed for some classic—if clichéd—wedding shots: bride gazing dreamily off into the distance, bride looking down through her lashes, bride blushing sweetly.

The wedding was staged, but the happiness I felt in the photos was real. When I look at them now, a decade later—a little greyer, wiser and still happily single—I know I made the right choice for me.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

PERFORM IN AN OPERA

MARK GARLIN, 37
Administrative assistant in outpatient care,
Swansea

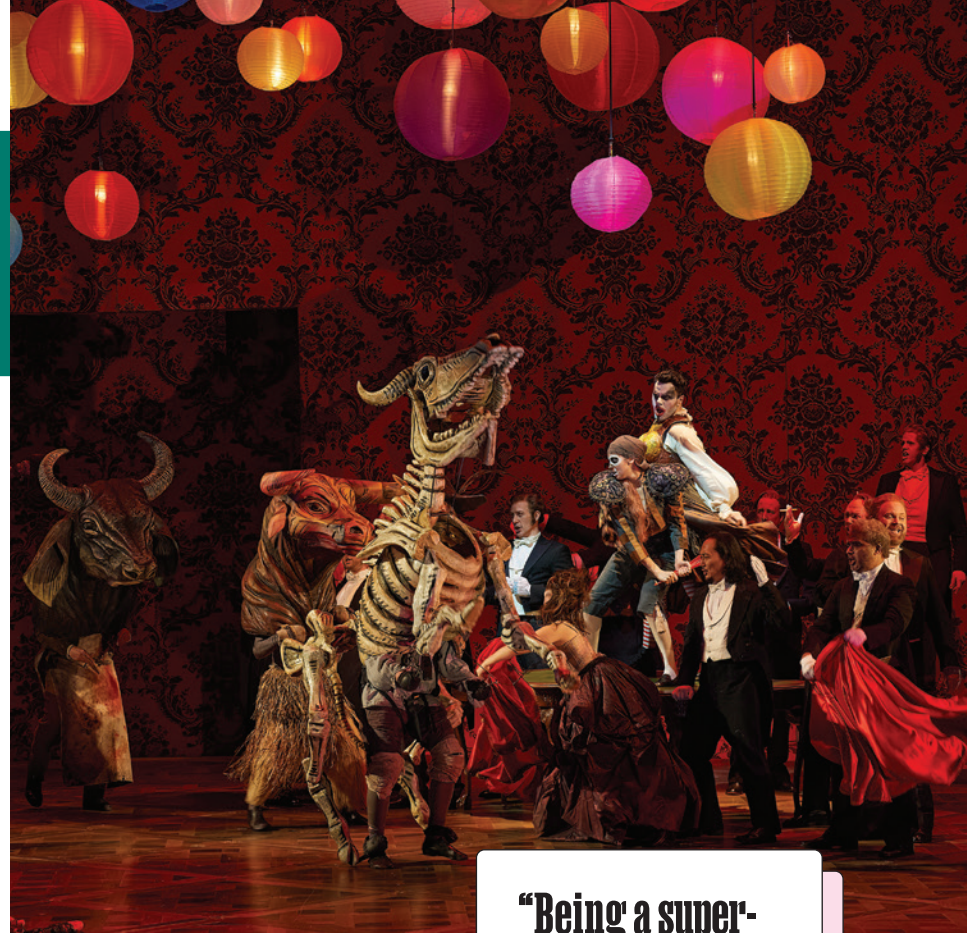


I'VE ALWAYS LOVED opera and tried to see as much of it as possible. When I was a university student with a limited budget, that usually meant watching livestreams and the occasional Met Opera broadcast in movie theatres. So, when I saw an open casting call in 2013 for more than 100 supernumeraries for *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at the Canadian Opera Company, I thought it would be fun to apply. Being a supernumerary—a non-singing extra in an opera—is like being handed an all-access pass. All I had to do was send in my measurements and a headshot. To my surprise, they got back to me within a couple of weeks with a date for a costume fitting. I was in.

A few days later, I went down to the COC's rehearsal space, a huge hall in a former factory on Front Street. *Dialogues of the Carmelites* is set during the French Revolution, so I was outfitted in a ripped shirt, trousers and an overcoat with the sleeves removed. Our contracts stipulated that we'd have to attend 30-plus rehearsals, each of which was between two and four hours. We'd get an honorarium of roughly \$15 for each one. In other words, it was essentially a volunteer gig.

The production staff walked us through the show, our roles and what we had to do onstage. We were common folk—meant to represent the looming uprising—gathered outside a noble's house at night. The directions were specific: we had to stare threateningly at one of the people singing, then slowly shift our gaze to another character. Rehearsing in our street clothes in a bright room, we did our best to project menace.

Over the next two and a half months, rehearsals progressed from weekly to nightly. At first,



we practised in the rehearsal space, accompanied by a piano. As the premiere approached, we shifted to the Four Seasons Centre, and then the orchestra joined us. The first time we rehearsed with the musicians was surreal—it was like diving into a deep pool, like swimming through music. Moving with my fellow supers, I was a small cog in a well-oiled machine. It was electrifying.

When opening night came around, I felt surprisingly calm—we'd rehearsed so much, and it helped that I was just one person in a crowd. Three years later, when I got my first role in the spotlight—as an apprentice bullfighter in *Carmen*—I finally felt the nerves. I keep a framed picture of myself just before going on in that production, complete with a stiff smile and a thousand-yard stare, as a reminder of one of the most terrifying and brilliant things

I've ever done.

All told, I've appeared in 10 COC productions, including *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly* (I was onstage for 20 seconds total) and *Louis Riel*. In *Siegfried*, I played one of many corpses lying outside a dragon's lair—I had to stay still on a hard floor for an hour and a half. On the plus side, I was a metre

“Being a supernumerary is like being handed an all-access pass to the opera”

away from Stefan Vinke, the astounding German tenor playing Siegfried. He has the most powerful voice I've ever heard, and I had the best “seat” in the house.

My parts have gotten bigger over time. In a 2016 production of *Götterdämmerung*, I played a raven messenger for Odin, which involved more than an hour of makeup for just two minutes on stage. In the Italian comedy *Don Pasquale* last spring, I played a kid who becomes entranced with the first TV he's ever seen—and suffers an existential crisis when it's taken away. My costume: a lime-green communion suit three sizes too small.

Lately, I've had to say no to roles because of my day job, so I'm looking forward to the winter season, when I'll be more available. Being part of a professional production is incredible—you feel plugged in to the cultural life of the city.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SHIPWRECK BY WARREN LO, YACHT BY GETTYBOAT.COM, HARRIS HEADSHOT AND WEDDING BY YUHIINO SUZUKI COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Burn rubber in a 'Rari



In need of speed? Trade Toronto's gridlock for the rush of high-octane laps around a professional racetrack in Grand Bend or Bowmanville via the luxury car rental company GTA Exotics. Sunday drivers with champagne tastes can book one of the agency's tours through Niagara wine country or Halton Hills. For \$700, drivers get to spend six hours tooling around in multiple high-performance cars, including a Lamborghini, a Ferrari and a McLaren.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

WALK A PILGRIMAGE

CHERIE BAUMAN, 52
Cook at a retreat centre, Guelph



IN 2016, I was volunteering as a gardener at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph when someone mentioned the Martyrs' Shrine walk, which begins in town and continues almost 200 kilometres north to a church in Midland. Even though I'm not part of any organized religion, I was intrigued.

At the time, I was juggling work and raising two kids with my partner, and I couldn't seem to make any time for myself. The idea of spending eight days on a pilgrimage sounded freeing, so I signed up for the walk that August and convinced my then 12-year-old daughter, Poppy, to join me.

It's a ported journey, which means staff haul your camping gear and provide you with meals. Your focus is to walk between 20 and 30 kilometres a day and reflect. Our group was made up of 40 or so pilgrims of various ages—from kids like Poppy to seniors who had recently lost their partners. We were mostly free to talk, but there were also mandated periods of silence. I left my phone behind because I wanted to be in the moment.

The walk was more challenging than I expected: the late summer heat was intense, and by the second day, I already had blisters from my hiking boots and rashes across my legs from the gravel dust. The cars and trucks flying past us were a real test of our spiritual focus too.

By the halfway point, I realized that many of my frustrations in life were of my own making: I was grasping for control of things that were out of my hands. I spent the rest of the hike trying to let go. I realized I could give myself a break, ease up on my kids and allow my partner time to do his own thing. It's the kind of resolution I could achieve only away from the commitments of work and running a household.

On a pilgrimage, everyone comes with their own needs and expectations, but you walk together. It's lovely to make time for self-reflection and to meet others doing the same.

GARLIN BY ELLI GARLIN, OPERA BY MICHAEL COOPER, CAR BY GTA EXOTICS, GIOVANNI BY JAMES NICHOLAS MERZETTI

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

DO A STRIPTease FOR STRANGERS

OCEAN LA'VODKA GIOVANNI, 24
Drag performer, Little Portugal



THIS PAST JUNE, I signed up for an amateur strip competition where non-professionals can do their thing in front of a live audience. It's something I'd been thinking about for a while.

I'm a drag performer, but stripping and burlesque are out of my wheelhouse. It was a queer competition, which felt like a good place to experiment—the audience tends to be welcoming, plus no one is allowed to take photos or film you. If things go awry, at least there's no evidence!

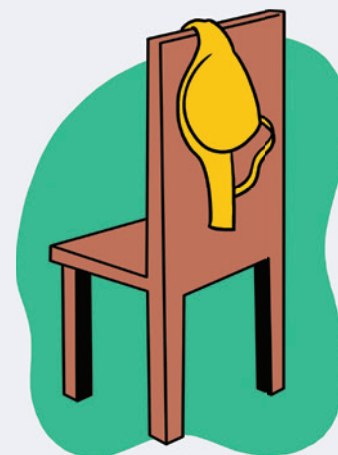
The day of, I had a gig in the Village, and I wasn't sure it would end in time for me to make it to the competition. Sure enough, just as my drag performance wrapped up, I got a call from a friend—it was my turn. I sprinted over, still wearing the heels I'd performed in. En route, I tried to think of things I could do onstage—I hadn't really mapped out a number since I hadn't known for sure that I would be going on. I wasn't wearing a whole lot, just a bodysuit, my glasses and pumps, which didn't leave much to strip. I started to worry about how I would burn through my four minutes onstage.

The host stalled until I arrived, and I had just enough time to borrow a couple of items from people in the audience: a pair of glasses, which I slipped over my own, and a jacket. It was a whirlwind entrance, but in a way, that worked in my favour. I didn't have time to get nervous—within seconds I was onstage and “All That She Wants” by Ace of Base was playing.

I started by slowly removing the audience member's glasses—offering up the surprise reveal of my own glasses underneath. That got a good laugh, and I immediately loosened up. Off came the second pair of glasses, then, eventually, the jacket. I was under the hot lights in just my bodysuit, which left my arms and legs exposed. Even though I've been onstage in drag a lot—sometimes wearing very little—doing a burlesque-style number made me feel surprisingly vulnerable. I was in new territory, and that was scary.

We were allowed to take off as little or as much as we wanted. Some competitors got fully naked. I wasn't quite ready for that, so rather than take off my bodysuit, I playfully returned the glasses and jacket to their rightful owners and spent my remaining time dancing. I really got into it—I found it freeing to try something new in front of a supportive crowd that was hooting and hollering. At one point, I surprised myself by falling backward into a bridge position. I didn't even know I was physically capable of it until that very moment.

Although I removed just three articles of clothing, the audience embraced me. I did not come close to winning, but I had a blast. A lot of the performers stayed back for drinks afterward, and it was amazing to get to know everyone. We started a group chat that's still active more than six months later. It was an incredible experience to put my body out there and be so welcomed. I was definitely feeling myself up there—everyone should get to experience that at least once.





WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

EAT AN ENTIRE LAMB

WAYNE WALKER, 43

Cook at a brewery, High Park North



BESIDES PIZZA, Beast Pizza is known for their whole-animal dinners, which transform entire lambs, ducks, elk and other creatures

into six-course experiences for \$175 per person.

This past November, my wife and I decided such a dinner was the perfect way to celebrate our one-year wedding anniversary, and we settled on lamb. You also get to choose how adventurous you want the menu to be. We thought about requesting “no eyeballs” but ultimately decided that, whatever they cooked, we’d try.

The first course was an elevated take on a spring roll, with the unusual addition of finely chopped lamb tongue wrapped in rice paper and paired with a tangy Vietnamese nuoc cham dip. The next course was the show-stopper: an insanely rich French onion-style broth poured over thin slices of lamb belly. You could tell the broth had been simmering for days.

Chef Nathan Middleton followed that up with lamb chops, a tender lamb saddle—which isn’t something you can find easily, even at a quality butcher’s—and lamb sausage stuffed with earthy morel mushrooms. For dessert, we were served a coconut panna cotta with perfectly tart yellow kiwi and raspberry jam. My wife and I jokingly wondered if they would try to sneak the eyeballs into the desert, but if they did, we couldn’t find them. I’m already fantasizing about their duck menu.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Book a 200-seat screening room with friends

Sure, your living room is cozy and convenient, but nothing compares to sitting in a darkened theatre with other movie-loving diehards. Now imagine dictating the time, venue, film and guest list. Local indies across the city, including the Royal, the Paradise and the Revue, rent out their spaces for a few hundred bucks an hour. It beats squinting at your smartphone.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

SCALE A FROZEN WATERFALL

CHRISTA NIRAVONG, 48

Climber and business owner, Elora



WHEN I WAS 25, some friends invited me to go rock climbing near Guelph. I ran and swam, but I was also a city girl who spent most of her time singing karaoke and going clubbing. I wasn’t sure if I was up for something as challenging as rock climbing, but I decided to give it a try.

Our instructor, a fit guy in his mid-20s, had these incredible stories about hard-core backpacking trips, ziplining and rappelling across the globe. It was like being told about this whole other world I’d never visited. That first climb was equal parts terrifying—I was scared to look down—and exhilarating. Over the next few months, my friends and I kept climbing, then started joining in on some of the instructor’s adventures. In winter, that meant ice climbing.

Climbing a frozen waterfall isn’t something I’d ever considered. I was scared, but after going through the safety procedures like checking (and double checking) my harness, I realized I was more daunted by my



self-doubt than by the climb itself. If I could overcome my negative inner voice, I could scale the waterfall.

We set out early one morning for Tiffany Falls, a little less than an hour’s drive from Toronto. From the parking lot, it’s just a 15-minute hike to the falls, but I was carrying more equipment than I was used to, including a helmet, harnesses, ropes, carabiners, crampons and two axes. When we got to the falls, I immediately forgot about how tired I was. They were massive, maybe 70 feet tall. I’m a tiny person, about five-foot-two, and all I could think was how beautiful and *big* they looked.

Once I’d convinced myself not to freak out, I realized I was going to get to carve my own path up the cliff. As a small woman, I felt empowered pounding my axes into the ice and hauling my body upward. Don’t get me wrong—I was worried the entire time, but it was invigorating to discover what I was capable of.

I’ve ice climbed at least once a year since, more than 20 times total. I’m not a thrill seeker by nature, but when you’re able to do something that’s physically extreme, it can make day-to-day challenges seem less frightening. That’s a message I try to pass along to other people through my company, One Axe Pursuits, which offers various recreational team-building activities. It’s amazing how taking on new adventures can transform people’s lives.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

RUN THE BIG SIX MARATHONS

ROBYN MICHAUD, 53

Conestoga College Indigenous studies professor, Woodstock



BACK IN 2012, I started feeling pins and needles in my arms and having balance problems. My doctors were worried that it was a fatal form of multiple sclerosis. As I was confronting my mortality, a friend of mine told me she was going to run the Chicago Marathon, and I made up my mind to join her. I gave myself eight weeks to train. I was a mess on the day of: by the 14-kilometre mark, I hit a wall and couldn’t imagine finishing. It was a mental battle, which I won by telling myself, “Just get to the next aid station.” After making my way past seven of them and across the finish line, I thought, *Never again*.

Afterward, the doctors investigated and discovered that I didn’t have MS, to my relief. But they found a cyst in my spine, which meant I would have to learn to deal with nerve pain. Surgery wasn’t necessary unless the cyst got bigger—something I could help prevent by staying active. So, in addition to hockey, I tried running again.

It wasn’t until 2018 that I was ready to run another major marathon. I had my eye on New York, but it’s really hard to get into. So I forked over \$1,200 to a tour operator that bundled race entry with a hotel stay. It was worth it. There’s a saying that you can’t run a marathon and not have it change your life. That’s true. It’s almost enough to make me forget that, for me, running feels like falling on ice and smashing my tailbone again and again—for 42 kilometres.

As I was preparing for New York, I found out about the Six Star Medal, awarded to

“Running a marathon is extraordinary, but you don’t have to be superhuman”

WALKER BY ASHLEY WALKER; ICE CLIMBING BY FREDERICK SCHUETT/ONE AXE PURSUITS; MICHAUD HEADSHOT COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT; MARATHONS BY JENNIFER RILEY; MARATHON PHOTO AND MARATHON PHOTO



runners who complete the world’s original major marathons: New York, Boston, Chicago, Tokyo, Berlin and London. It seemed out of reach—with my condition, I can’t run as fast or train as hard as most runners. But, looking at the Boston website, I discovered that my condition was an advantage: people with physical impairments can qualify with a six-hour time. After years of fighting through pain, I felt like my perseverance was finally being rewarded.

In November of 2019, I ran the Berlin Marathon. Then the pandemic hit. I spent lockdown running virtual marathons, which are better than not running but pretty depressing. When the real races returned, I went to as many as I could handle. In 2021, I finally ran Boston, then London two years later. I got into the Tokyo Marathon by pledging \$9,000 to charity. Friends raised \$2,000, and my father gave me \$5,000. That was huge—my dad’s health was declining, and I wanted him to see me do it before he died. This past October, I ran Chicago again—and the Toronto Waterfront, my 42nd marathon. People held signs saying “You run faster than the TTC” and “Raccoons don’t run this city, you do!”

Running has saved me. It’s kept my cyst under control, and it’s been great for my mental health. I’m Anishinaabe, and I’m part of an Ontario-wide Indigenous running group—we follow one another on the fitness app Strava. People think

running a marathon is something extraordinary—and it is—but you don’t have to be superhuman. In the past couple of years, I’ve even run 50-kilometre ultramarathons, and I’m toying with the idea of the Javelina Jundred 160-kilometre ultra in Arizona next year—if I can convince someone to do it with me.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

Host a private concert

You can spend thousands on Taylor Swift tickets, or you can skip the sweaty throngs, overpriced drinks and bathroom queues by hiring your other favourite artist to thrill you and your crew (and no one else). Paquin Entertainment Group has a roster of 350-plus musicians at various price points—including locals like Broken Social Scene, Cuff the Duke and Holly Cole—and can help you book the venue and gear. If DIY is your thing, there are great cover bands that will rock an exclusive guest list for a few grand—as long as you’re up for playing party planner, host and roadie.