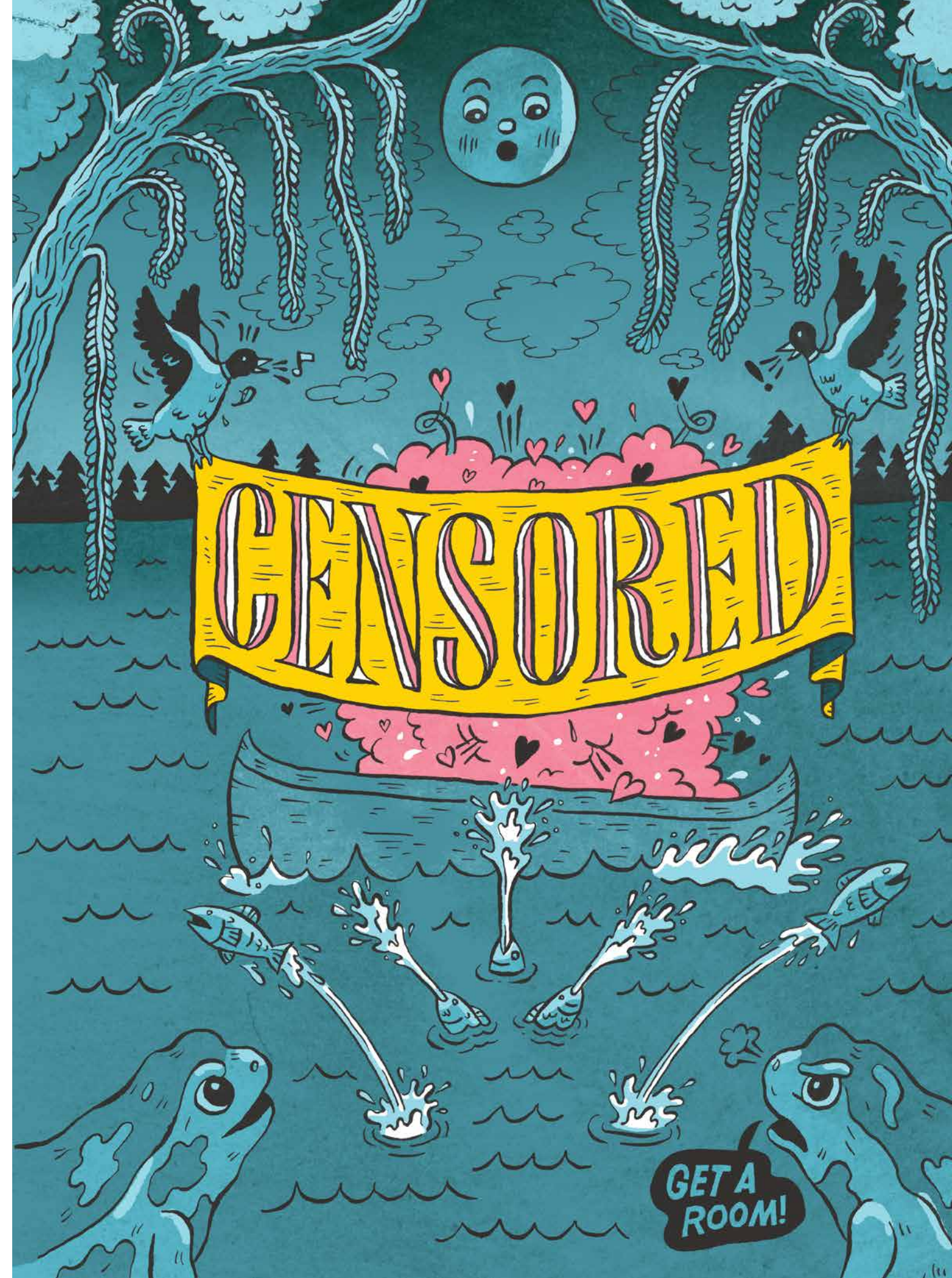


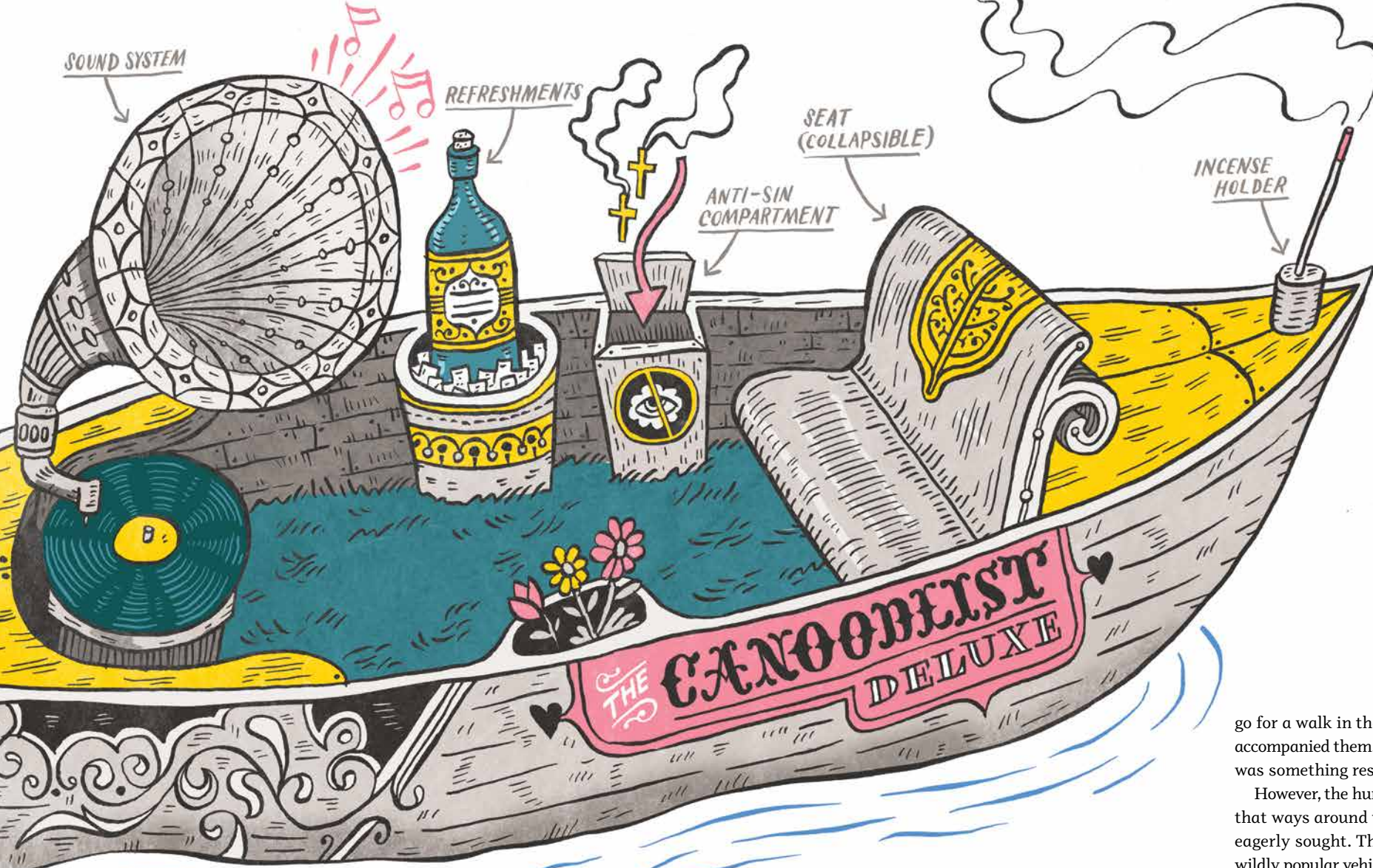
the Original **Love Boat**

HOT!
STUFF

Canadian couples have a history of doing it on the water (canoeing, that is)

By Roy MacGregor Illustration Ray Fenwick





For as long

as men and women have paddled together, there has been a bit of a wink-wink-nudge-nudge undercurrent to the fine art of canoeing.

It was the late Pierre Berton who was credited with the line—though he later denied it was his—“A true Canadian is one who can make love in a canoe without tipping.” But it is my friend and master paddler Phil Chester who claims—and would never deny—that “anyone can make love in a canoe. It’s a Canadian who knows enough to take out the centre thwart!”

The romantic canoe is really not so much a story of desperation and innovation as it is the result of happy coincidence. The canoe as a recreational vehicle was born in the Victorian era of strict morals and behaviour. But it was also a time in which the concepts of romance and marriage were taking a dramatic shift. Marriage in Great Britain and much of North America ceased to be as much about necessity, convenience, or arrangement and became, instead—in no small part because of idle time, urbanization, literacy, and the rise of popular, romantic novels—more about two people finding each other and, over time, falling in love.

Courtship became an accepted prelude to marriage, but the Victorian era tended to treat courtship as a potentially wild animal to be caged, or else. Young couples could meet in the parlour under family, usually parental, supervision. They could sit on the front porch so long as a chaperone, often an elderly relative, was included. At later stages, they might even

go for a walk in the park—if a guardian accompanied them. Privacy, in those days, was something reserved for marriage.

However, the human condition is such that ways around this restriction were eagerly sought. The bicycle became a wildly popular vehicle for courtship since older chaperones either could not ride or could not keep up. According to *Can I Canoe You Up the River?: The Story of Paddling and Romance*, a delightful little book by John Summers, published by the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough, Ont., the canoe was an even better option, with no room for a chaperone, and carrying, for older people, a built-in fear factor of tipping. A bicycle might take a courting couple into a park, but a canoe allowed them to slip into a hidden cove or under the curtain branches of a willow.

There was, all the same, a strong sense in Victorian society that canoeing, by its very nature, was pretty much guaranteed to be an innocent activity. “If I was a gal,” says the narrator in the 1855 book *Nature and Human Nature* by Nova Scotian author Thomas Chandler Haliburton, “I’d always be courted in one, for you can’t romp there, or you’d be upset. It’s the safest place I know of.” Many chaperones felt the same. And many young lovers were just as happy to let them think that.

It became perfectly acceptable for young men and women to spend time together in canoes. Much of this had to do with the rise of canoe clubs in the late 1800s. They were particularly popular in the United States and as much given to social activities as they were to actual paddling. Whole families joined, which brought together unmarried young men and women.

There were also fortuitous, and significant, changes in women’s fashion. Split skirts and bloomers gave women far more freedom of movement, as they were no longer forced to sit sidesaddle on horses and were now able to pedal a bicycle and step easily into a canoe.

Canoe manufacturers were quick to move on the possibility that their products could be useful for more than hunting, fishing, and racing in regattas. Sleek vehicles known as “courting canoes” became quite fashionable. The man could paddle and the object of his desires could lounge and relax, taking in the scenery and, of course, avoiding the sun. Some canoes had fixtures in which she could stand her parasol. Others, somewhat later, came with fold-up gramophones capable of playing the popular 78 RPM records of the day. The 1970s may have had their “shaggin’ wagons,” but the 1890s had courting canoes. No records exist of their relative success rates.

In the spring of 2014, the Canadian Canoe Museum opened a popular and entertaining exhibition, which ran for almost a year, called *Can I Canoe You Up the River?* The title, taken from an old Arthur Godfrey song, is as harmless on one level as it is suggestive on another—as was much of the exhibition itself.

One of the fascinating aspects of the show was the collection of illustrations and postcards tied to the phenomenon, with a frisson of risqué-ness that increased over the years. While the subtext of the postcard of a man helping a dainty young woman aboard, with the line “You’ll be perfectly safe in my canoe,” is perhaps slightly suggestive, the intent of another, portraying a couple paddling below the line “I’d like to paddle your canoe,” is, well, unmistakable.

In the background of the museum’s exhibition, the curators put up a screen to show old clips of romantic movies that featured the canoe, including one

A brief timeline

of romance on the water, in film

Reviews by Jackie Davis

- 1932**

Horse Feathers

Prof. Wagstaff (Groucho Marx) sarcastically serenades Connie (Thelma Todd) while they’re out canoeing.

ROMANCE-o-meter: LOW
- 1981**

On Golden Pond

Norman (Henry Fonda) and Ethel (Katharine Hepburn) paddle, bicker, and spot loons. Then they both flip a jerkball powerboater the bird when he disrupts the moment.

ROMANCE-o-meter: MED
- 1984**

Another Country

Guy (Rupert Everett) and Harcourt (Cary Elwes) drift along in each other’s arms, talking about love, class structure, and Marxism.

ROMANCE-o-meter: HIGH
- 1995**

Pocahontas

John Smith (voice of Mel Gibson) meets Pocahontas (voice of Irene Bedard) for the first time when he helps her climb out of her dugout.

ROMANCE-o-meter: HIGH. At least for animation, circa mid-’90s.

Blipp the canoe opposite to listen to some old-time paddling love songs

with a singing Nelson Eddy as the bad-paddling Mountie Sergeant Bruce and Jeanette MacDonald as the damsel in distress in 1936's *Rose-Marie* ("Oh sweet Rose-Marie, it's easy to see / Why all who learn to know you, love you / You're gentle and kind, divinely designed / As graceful as the pines above you"). There were also photographs of Marilyn Monroe posing with a Mountie and a canoe while filming the movie *River of No Return* in Banff in 1953.

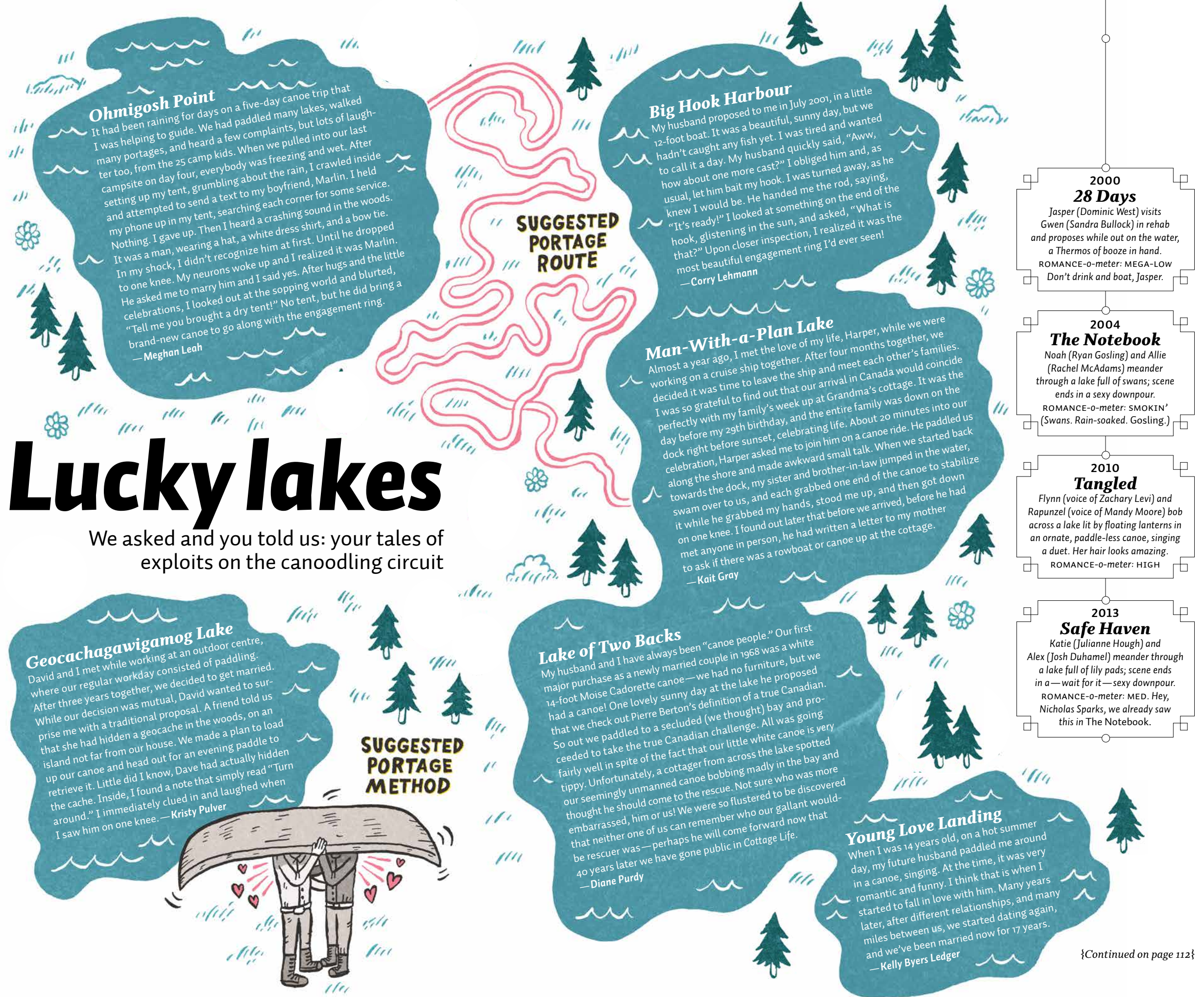
And then, of course, there are the songs, the canoe once being as familiar in the day's popular tunes as hurtin' is to country music, as in this popular tune from 1913: "In my canoe / You'll find some nice soft pillows / In my canoe / We'll hide among the willows close by the shore where no one can see / I'll cuddle you and snuggle you if you'll cuddle me."

All that, obviously, is not only corny but also tame. There was a different standard between the safe, innocent songs and the suggestive postcards. There is even one cartoon found in the museum's collection of a man and a very buxom woman hanging desperately on to the sides of an overturned canoe, with the line "We learned one thing—it can't be done in a canoe!"

But, of course, it can. Canadians don't need Pierre Berton or Phil Chester to tell them that it is possible—who knows how many of us were "launched" in a Chestnut or a Peterborough or an Old Town—and is considered, for many North Americans, an important rite of passage among those who know that length and girth are measures in cedar, as well.

It has been more than a century since Queen Victoria's passing. To say times have changed is an understatement, as a couple of years back *Cosmopolitan* magazine even offered up specific "Erotic Instructions" for the art of "canoodling" in the very vehicle the act is named after. No need to go into details here, and perhaps, as well, no real need to pass on the "Cosmo Hint" that went along with the instructions: "To play it supersafe, make sure you only go out on a calm lake where you can swim to shore." 🐾

Roy MacGregor has much more to say about courting canoes in his upcoming book, *Canoe Country*, to be published in September by Random House Canada.



Lucky lakes

We asked and you told us: your tales of exploits on the canoodling circuit

Ohmigosh Point

It had been raining for days on a five-day canoe trip that I was helping to guide. We had paddled many lakes, walked many portages, and heard a few complaints, but lots of laughter too, from the 25 camp kids. When we pulled into our last campsite on day four, everybody was freezing and wet. After setting up my tent, grumbling about the rain, I crawled inside and attempted to send a text to my boyfriend, Marlin. I held my phone up in my tent, searching each corner for some service. Nothing. I gave up. Then I heard a crashing sound in the woods. It was a man, wearing a hat, a white dress shirt, and a bow tie. In my shock, I didn't recognize him at first. Until he dropped to one knee. My neurons woke up and I realized it was Marlin. He asked me to marry him and I said yes. After hugs and the little celebrations, I looked out at the sopping world and blurted, "Tell me you brought a dry tent!" No tent, but he did bring a brand-new canoe to go along with the engagement ring.
—Meghan Leah

SUGGESTED PORTAGE ROUTE

Big Hook Harbour

My husband proposed to me in July 2001, in a little 12-foot boat. It was a beautiful, sunny day, but we hadn't caught any fish yet. I was tired and wanted to call it a day. My husband quickly said, "Aww, how about one more cast?" I obliged him and, as usual, let him bait my hook. I was turned away, as he knew I would be. He handed me the rod, saying, "It's ready!" I looked at something on the end of the hook, glistening in the sun, and asked, "What is that?" Upon closer inspection, I realized it was the most beautiful engagement ring I'd ever seen!
—Corry Lehmann

Man-With-a-Plan Lake

Almost a year ago, I met the love of my life, Harper, while we were working on a cruise ship together. After four months together, we decided it was time to leave the ship and meet each other's families. I was so grateful to find out that our arrival in Canada would coincide perfectly with my family's week up at Grandma's cottage. It was the day before my 29th birthday, and the entire family was down on the dock right before sunset, celebrating life. About 20 minutes into our celebration, Harper asked me to join him on a canoe ride. He paddled us along the shore and made awkward small talk. When we started back towards the dock, my sister and brother-in-law jumped in the water, swam over to us, and each grabbed one end of the canoe to stabilize it while he grabbed my hands, stood me up, and then got down on one knee. I found out later that before we arrived, before he had met anyone in person, he had written a letter to my mother to ask if there was a rowboat or canoe up at the cottage.
—Kait Gray

Lake of Two Backs

My husband and I have always been "canoe people." Our first major purchase as a newly married couple in 1968 was a white 14-foot Moise Cadorette canoe—we had no furniture, but we had a canoe! One lovely sunny day at the lake he proposed that we check out Pierre Berton's definition of a true Canadian. So out we paddled to a secluded (we thought) bay and proceeded to take the true Canadian challenge. All was going fairly well in spite of the fact that our little white canoe is very tippy. Unfortunately, a cottager from across the lake spotted our seemingly unmanned canoe bobbing madly in the bay and thought he should come to the rescue. Not sure who was more embarrassed, him or us! We were so flustered to be discovered that neither one of us can remember who our gallant would-be rescuer was—perhaps he will come forward now that 40 years later we have gone public in Cottage Life.
—Diane Purdy

SUGGESTED PORTAGE METHOD

Geocachagawigamog Lake

David and I met while working at an outdoor centre, where our regular workday consisted of paddling. After three years together, we decided to get married. While our decision was mutual, David wanted to surprise me with a traditional proposal. A friend told us that she had hidden a geocache in the woods, on an island not far from our house. We made a plan to load up our canoe and head out for an evening paddle to retrieve it. Little did I know, Dave had actually hidden the cache. Inside, I found a note that simply read "Turn around." I immediately clued in and laughed when I saw him on one knee. —Kristy Pulver



Young Love Landing

When I was 14 years old, on a hot summer day, my future husband paddled me around in a canoe, singing. At the time, it was very romantic and funny. I think that is when I started to fall in love with him. Many years later, after different relationships, and many miles between us, we started dating again, and we've been married now for 17 years.
—Kelly Byers Ledger

- 2000**
28 Days
 Jasper (Dominic West) visits Gwen (Sandra Bullock) in rehab and proposes while out on the water, a Thermos of booze in hand.
 ROMANCE-o-meter: MEGA-LOW
 Don't drink and boat, Jasper.
- 2004**
The Notebook
 Noah (Ryan Gosling) and Allie (Rachel McAdams) meander through a lake full of swans; scene ends in a sexy downpour.
 ROMANCE-o-meter: SMOKIN'
 (Swans. Rain-soaked. Gosling.)
- 2010**
Tangled
 Flynn (voice of Zachary Levi) and Rapunzel (voice of Mandy Moore) bob across a lake lit by floating lanterns in an ornate, paddle-less canoe, singing a duet. Her hair looks amazing.
 ROMANCE-o-meter: HIGH
- 2013**
Safe Haven
 Katie (Julianne Hough) and Alex (Josh Duhamel) meander through a lake full of lily pads; scene ends in a—wait for it—sexy downpour.
 ROMANCE-o-meter: MED. Hey, Nicholas Sparks, we already saw this in *The Notebook*.

{Continued on page 112}

{Continued from page 59}

Bad Timing Lake

Our son envisioned exactly how he was going to propose to his sweetheart, on a moonlit night in a canoe. Sweetheart, however, was not in the mood to canoodle in a canoe but rather to rest in a hammock. After some cajoling, she agreed to join him on the water. Floating around the point, in full view of us parents on the family cottage beach, our son stopped paddling. From the stern, he asked his sweetheart if she would turn around. She must have sensed something in his voice; she seemed hesitant to shift position in a bobbing canoe. While she did successfully seat herself to face our son, she looked, at this point, very wary. We had no idea how skittish she felt until our son leaned forward to present the ring.

Splash! Fearing he was going to purposefully upset the canoe, and her with it, she decided to jump overboard to preclude his actions. While she quickly swam to shore, we could hear the forlorn heartache in his voice as he pleaded, "Please, come back!"

It wasn't long before he too jumped from the canoe, swam towards her and, both standing a few feet from the shore, proposed to her with the ring. She was so caught off guard that she trembled and shook, while jumping and crying, until they landed in each other's arms with a big kiss.
—**Heather Stewart (Robinson)**

International Inlet

Since I am a Brit, my childhood vacations consisted of beach holidays in Spain and summer days in beer gardens with my siblings and Mum and Dad. My husband's childhood vacations were spent in nature, camping and canoeing in cottage country. When we were dating, he introduced me to the outdoors, and I too fell in love with it.

One cottage weekend, while on a canoe ride, my then fiancé asked me to turn around. I was a little bitchy in my reply, as he knew that I didn't like standing or moving out of my spot while in the canoe. But I carefully manoeuvred myself around to face him, and he pulled out the box with a ring in it. Even though I knew a proposal was coming—we had picked the ring together—this location was a total surprise. I had assumed it would have happened on land. Ha!
—**Vikki Subarsky**

Light-It-Up Lake

One dark summer night, I took my now-bride out for a canoe ride with a water-coloured engagement ring and, in the dark, fumbled through asking her to spend the rest of our lives on the water together. At first she thought I was joking, but after shining a light on the ring, she knew I was serious. We nearly tipped a few times with all the emotion, but after some stargazing and warm embraces, we were able to navigate safely back to shore. —**Jay Poole**

Candy Cove

Some courtships are long. So are some canoe trips. For us, it all began on a six-week canoe journey through the Arctic. I paddled mostly in the stern. In the bow was a bewitching woman—about 12 feet out of reach for most of the trip. Many years and canoe trips later, we were on yet another canoe adventure in the Yukon. We paddled for a week, then took a couple of days off from the dazzling river to hike into the mountains. There, on a summit, I pulled a candy ring out of my pocket and asked that bewitching woman to marry me. She even said yes. —**Tim Irvin**

Lake of Fire(works)

I proposed to my wife in the family canoe on May 18, 2003, when we were at the cottage for the long weekend with my parents. We went out in the canoe just as the sun was setting. I hadn't planned to propose yet—the ring was on layaway at a jeweller. Something in the air, and the fact that I was locking eyes with the most beautiful woman in the world in my favourite place, and the question popped out. I was terrified. Just as we kissed, someone on shore set off fireworks. I couldn't have planned it better if I had tried! —**Joel Arthurs**

Shaky Bay

My husband, Doug, and I had been dating for about a year when he invited me to his grandparents' cottage. There is a little island in the middle of the lake, and Doug suggested that we take a ride there in the old cottage canoe. I had only ridden in a canoe a handful of times before, and this one was by far the tippiest. I was oblivious to anything other than surviving the ride. We finally arrived at the island, and we were enjoying the view, when Doug asked me to be his wife. He brought out the ring and the champagne he had smuggled into the canoe when I wasn't looking. Nearly 22 years later, the cottage is now ours, and we are the proud parents of two children—and own a slightly less tippy canoe. —**Margaret Riddell**

Have you canoodled?

Or do you know someone who has?
We asked on Facebook

Graham Collins Of course—I'm Canadian.

Catherine Bowerman Oh, yeah!

Eric Sexton If you haven't, how can you call yourself a true Canadian?

Lorne Wilkinson It's a very distant memory, but yes.

Wendy Lott No, but I'd like to.

Michael Mage Soooooo many times. I should write a book.

Philip Andrews Yep, and got wet. Fortunately, warm shallow lake, no weeds on the beach.

Shawn Hambler You have to have great balance.

Dawn Osler What is the definition of being Canadian? Making love in a canoe standing up! I am a true Canadian!

Sa Cha Miigwaan Sportspal canoe. Sunset. Newlywed love. Boland Lake, Ontario. Need I say more?

Bob Hillhouse My grandfather proposed to my grandmother in a canoe. He said he would dump it if she said no.

Mary Meme Teolis My brother and his wife, married 42 years, go out in their canoe most summer mornings. He paddles and she sits with pillows and reads to him. It is very sweet.

Shelley Keeble First thing my hubby and I did together was canoe. Very romantic way to get to know someone. Talked for hours on the quiet calm water, as the sun was rising!

Henry Bartak When I was married we used to camp a lot. We had a favourite spot. We would paddle just 100 yards to a little treed island, where we would make grunting sounds and pretend we were part of nature. LOL. Miss those times!

LaRee Finnsson When we first admitted our attraction to one another, we were in the canoe. Which led to the first kiss, where I saw stars for the first time in my life.