Hi there! I’m Will

And I’m Ted

And this is “It Seemed Like A Good Idea...”.

[music tag]

On this show, we take a look at uniquely Canadian feats, facts and flubs that make this country the ingenious place that it is. We wrote a whole book about it, actually, called It Seemed Like A Good Idea.

**T:** Which, clearly we thought seemed like a good idea for a title, since we’ve used it twice.

**W:** Each week we’re going to give you a couple of all true stories around a different theme, and today’s theme is… BIG.

Okay, let me start us off with a story about a moose. Have you seen a moose in the wild?

**T:**  I’ve seen a bunch in different places, including counting 40 during a dawn drive through Grosse Morne park in NFLD

**W:** I’ve seen a grand total of one, and it was gigantic. But this is about one specific moose named Mac in appropriately enough, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Mac was the biggest moose in the world, at 9.8 metres tall - that’s twice as tall as a giraffe. He has stood, watching placidly over the highway, since 1981. And he’s made of concrete. Painted.

Moose Jaw was proud of their world record, and he was a popular roadside attraction for tourists. But little did they know that trouble was brewing. Across the Atlantic Ocean, an even taller moose was being built, that would take their title from them… *Storelgen.*

[SFX: dun dun DUUUUN!]

If you think that name sounds like something out of Norse mythology, you’ve pretty much nailed it. It’s Norway’s giant moose, and it is 10.1 glorious metres of polished chrome ungulate.

**T:** Just a slight clarification of what follows An ungulate is a hooved animal, for those of you keeping score at home.

**W:** The Norwegians weren’t trying to take the record, they said. They just wanted to build something to keep drivers awake and aware on a particularly boring stretch of highway near Stor-Elvdal. (Apparently it’s been effective, too.)

**T:** So, to recap: Moose Jaw Mac stands 9.8 metres. Storelgen, 10.1 metres.

**W:** But the Moose Javians weren’t going to let it go at that. When Canadians think big and someone thinks bigger, Canadians don’t get racked up about it, they think BIGGEST.

Now, as polite, easy-going Canadians, we can admit that Mac isn’t going to win in the looks department. You can Google him.

**T:** I have. You’re right; he’s painted a shade of industrial brown. Not a grabber, like chrome.

**W:** So that made it all the more important to reclaim the height crown. But how? Higher hooves, longer legs? You’ve heard of being on the horns of a dilemma? Maybe they could be the answer.

**W:** Yes, a ton of Canadians chipped in and paid to get a new, taller rack of antlers made for Mac, and in October 2019, with heads held even higher, they took the title back by... *drum roll, please!* 26 centimetres.

The event went international. The mayor of Stor-Elvdal came to Saskatchewan and struck a “moosarandum of understanding” with the Moose Jaw mayor. They did a moose dance together; Moose Jaw promised to celebrate “Norway Day” every year, Norway promised to celebrate “Canada Day” every October 15th, and Moose Jaw raked in the tourism dollars from all the press coverage.

The “Moose Truce” - that was their pun - said that Mac would be recognized as the tallest, but that Storelgen would, and I quote, “forevermore be known as the shiniest and most attractive moose in the world."

**T:** And how quintessentially Canadian to declare a truce rather than a victory

[music cue]

**W:** You might think that, now that Norway and Canada have hashed out their differences, the whole biggest moose thing might have retreated into the underbrush. But no, there are other giant moose lurking out there with big aspirations.

*Max* the Moose, in Dryden, ON stands 5.6 metres. He’s not the tallest, sure, but apparently he’s the oldest, dating from 1962, and he’s lifelike enough that somebody shot him once.

[Sound fx; shot, ricochet?]

And less than ten days after Mac took the title back, the mayor of Desbiens, QC announced the town would be building an even bigger moose, one that could be enlarged any time its record was threatened. He shrank that announcement back a few days later, saying they would just make theirs “the same size”. (Desbiens isn’t just talk, either - the previous year the town baked the world’s largest tourtiere, of nearly 1,000 kilograms, over 2,000 pounds.)

Finally, and perhaps more ominously, back in Norway, the artist who originally made Storelgen is apparently considering making another, even bigger moose. This one would be *twenty meters tall*, almost twice the size of Mac. And, fittingly, it would be entirely gold.

**T:** I think I’d prefer chocolate.

**W**: What?

**T**: You know, *chocolate mousse?*

[music cue]

**T**: Okay, super-sizing a moose statue is eccentric, but understandable. I think. If I

don’t think too hard, anyway: I mean, there’s publicity, friendly competition, etc. And

neither competition nor moose are eccentric on their own. So let’s talk about super-

sizing eccentricity itself.

Ever heard of Charles Vance Millar? In the 1920s he was a wealthy Toronto

lawyer, president of the O’Keefe brewery and also into thoroughbred racing. One source

described him as “shy and retiring” and a quiet donor to the Hospital for Sick Children,

but he also apparently had a reputation as a practical joker with a quirky sense of

humour.

How quirky? I thought you’d never ask. When Millar died of a heart attack on

Halloween, 1926, his will turned out to be maybe the biggest practical joke of all time.

Millar was childless, a lifelong bachelor with no close family. With no one dependent on

his estate, he’d made some interesting bequests that got a lot of attention.

Such as? Well, the Catholic/Protestant religious divide was a big deal in 1920s

Ontario. The O’Keefe brewery – he was president - was traditionally a Catholic owned

company. Millar left his O’Keefe’s stock to Orange lodges and protestant ministers

around Ontario.

He had a vacation home in Jamaica. He left it to three men known to loathe each

Other. He willed shares in the Ontario Jockey Club to two outspoken opponents of

racetrack betting and one bigtime gambler. They could only claim the shares if they did

so as a group. Then, after very publicly tempting all these people it turned out that the bequests were largely worthless. For example, Millar had only token shares of O’Keefe stock and the vacation house had already been sold.

**W:** So, what’s the big deal? These are silly but harmless pranks at the expense

of people whose reputations could afford it.

**T:** Well, the show-stopper was the final bequest. Clause Nine of Millar’s will

stipulated that the rest of his estate was to be cashed in and invested for the next nine

years. On the tenth anniversary of his death, the money was to be awarded to – and

listen carefully to this, because it’s a direct quote from the will - “… the mother who has

since my death given birth in Toronto to the greatest number of children as shown by

registrations under the Vital Statistics Act.” If there was a tie, the money would be

equally divided. The great Toronto Stork Derby was on.

**W:** How did people react? What had Millar been up to?

**T:** At first, the public response was a mix of outrage, amusement, and confusion,

especially when the other clauses in the will largely turned out to be hoaxes.

Some said it was a dangerous and tasteless insult to women that also put the

health and welfare of the mothers and resulting children at risk, if poor families couldn’t

support them properly. Some said Millar was doing the opposite by trying to raise

awareness of the needs of women trapped by a lack of birth control. And others said it

was yet another prank, not intended to be done at all. This group included some distant

relations in the States who wanted a piece of the action, and the Ontario government,

which wanted the money divided between the Hospital for Sick Children and

scholarships to the University of Toronto.

The will was contested all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. But Millar

was a lawyer and he’d made sure the clause was iron-clad. The Court ruled that the

bequest was legal and had to be honoured.

So, did people take it seriously? Depends on who you asked. While the

contest made for fanciful feature articles in the papers for the first few years, (the

Toronto Star signed up contestants for exclusive stories) the onset of the Great

Depression turned it into much more for some of the city’s poor. Winning the stork derby

became a long-shot ticket to prosperity.

By 1933, two contestants had seven children born since Millar’s death, (one was

pregnant again) and three others had six each.

The winner? At contest deadline, 4:30 p.m. Oct 31(Halloween), 1936 it looked to

be a six-way tie among moms who had each borne nine babies in the ten years. Then

the arguing began. What about stillborn babies? What if the babies hadn’t been properly

registered in Toronto? What if some had – gasp - different fathers? It was decided the

babies had to have survived, been legally registered in Toronto, and born to married

parents.

The result: in 1938 four of the women shared first place with tallies of nine

babies, winning $125,000 each. (In today’s money that’s around two million dollars)

Because of the restrictions two others didn’t qualify as winners but got lesser prizes

anyway.

Interestingly, given the controversy over Millar’s intentions, most of the women said they’d already had or had wanted lots of kids anyway. All of which makes Charles Vance Millar the father of one of the all-time biggest practical jokes and the financial father of at least thirty-six children. Quite a feat for a childless bachelor.

We’ve got a little trio of short items here to round us off for today. We’ve got three guys who went BIG by going small…

**T:** Our first story is about going small for BIG profit.

Jean-Louis Brenninkmeijer, a businessman who left the family business to build a miniature Canada. And by miniature, I mean gigantic. This warehouse-sized scale model currently has a miniature Toronto, Ottawa, Niagara, Golden Horseshoe and Petit Quebec. Each of the cities takes over 30,000 hours of work and up to a million dollars to build. And while the buildings may be tiny, Toronto alone is already the size of four basketball courts.

Little Canada has a giant underground property in the heart of downtown Toronto, and aims to become one of the city’s BIGGEST tourist attractions.

**W:** Well how about going small for BIG artistic merit?

An artist named Tom Brown made a BIG impression in Calgary with his tiny street food.

Now, ordinarily, I’m not one for small portions. But in this case, the size is the point: Tom makes the tiniest food you’ve ever seen. His whole kitchen, with an oven, sink, stove, pots and pans and utensils, fits in a single briefcase. And they’re not just props - he bakes dollar-sized pizzas in a tiny pizza oven. He makes waffles in a waffle iron the size of a postage stamp. He’s made miniature shepherd’s pie, dumplings, pasta and french fries, and gives them all away on the street for free. No matter how small the results, I’d call that BIG dedication to his craft.

**T:** And last but not least, how about going small for BIG science?

A scientist at McMaster University has set a record for building small. Let’s imagine you’re looking at this scientist’s creation through a microscope. First, you’re zooming way in on a human hair, which is about point-zero-five millimeters across. Next to that hair, at about half the width, is a tiny snowman, winking and sticking his tongue out. But zoom in closer - what’s that on his head? It’s not a tiny hat… it’s a tiny gingerbread house, the smallest in the world, with a tiny wreath over the door, a Christmas tree on the wall, and a miniscule Canadian flag doormat.

The architect used a focused ion beam microscope to etch out his sculpture, which ended up being about 20,000 times smaller than the gingerbread house you build from a kit.

And the scientist’s name? Casagrande, which is Spanish for Big House.

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**W:** That’s all we have for you today. Thank you so much for listening! If these stories tickled your fancy, there’s plenty more in our book, It Seemed Like A Good Idea - Canadian Feats, Facts and Flubs, available wherever books are sold.

I’m Will Staunton,

T: And I’m Ted Staunton. Catch you next time!