

As good as it gets

by BRIAN LOCKHART

If you have ever seen the 1997 movie, 'As Good as it Gets,' starring Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt, you will remember that Nicholson's character is a full blown germaphobe with other compulsive disorders thrown in. He can't step on cracks in the sidewalk, and he has other rituals he must perform just to get through the day.

In one scene, he visits his psychiatrist unannounced and asks for help. The doctor tells him he can't just show up at the office, but must make an appointment.

Nicholson's character has a good response ? how could the doctor treat him for obsessive compulsive disorder, then be surprised when he shows up at the office unexpectedly without an appointment?

When the character leaves, he steps into the waiting room, filled with several very anxious people, waiting for their turn to see the doctor.

Nicholson stops, and says, 'What if this is as good as it gets?'

That thought sinks like a dark cloud over the people in the waiting room, who are now considering the possibility that he may be right.

Maybe he is right ? it could be as good as it gets ? for some people.

I used to be acquainted with a family, who, for lack of a better word, were poor. The father had bailed years earlier and left his wife with three or four young children.

This family seemed destined to remain in a rut of near poverty. They lived in a partially winterized cottage on the north shore of Lake Erie. None of the kids, now older, seemed to value or understand the idea of getting a job ? and neither did the mother.

It was the kind of household, where if the screen door came off one hinge, that door would still be hanging by one hinge, five years later.

My friend started a relationship with the daughter. He found himself, as a high school student, going to their cottage and fixing things that a normal home owner would do on their own.

The family found it amazing that he would think of things like actually fixing the hinge on the screen door so it would work properly, or cutting the grass once it grew to six inches tall.

One time I asked him about their situation as it seemed dismal.

It turns out they were stuck in a circle.

The mother figured she had been given a bad break in life, so she had no money. Because she had no money, she couldn't get ahead. It was a circle of existence she couldn't break.

Instead of finding a solution, she was content to collect public assistance and coast through life barely getting by.

For them, that probably is as good as it gets.

On the flip side, I went to high school with a guy, who is now one of the wealthiest men in the country. I knew he was doing well - you hear things through the grape vine - but one day a national newspaper printed a list of the top 20 wealthiest Canadians, and he was on the list.

This guy didn't come from an uber-rich family, although they were probably upper middle class, and he didn't attend some wildly expensive boarding school that has the clout to get their students into select universities.

He went to a typical public high school.

For some reason, this guy was driven from a young age. He had top marks in school, and the teachers loved him. He went on to a good university, then ended up in the UK, as a Rhodes Scholar.

For him, as good as it gets, means having achieved wealth in the ten-digit range.

I know a lot of people who get into a job situation, and can't get out. They may not like the job, but will stay with it for 30 or more years because they can't give up the pay cheque.

That is an understandable situation when others rely on you to put food on the table.

However, I've seen other people who are dissatisfied with their job, and decide to completely change their life by getting their real estate license, or something similar, and embarking on a brand-new career.

For them, as good as it gets, means putting out some effort and striving to find better opportunities.

Some people prefer to coast along and fly under the radar, while others strive for that next level of satisfaction.

Life ? is what you make it.