



Photo by David LeClair

James Caughill and Muckwah wait out a heat wave on a property located in Quinte West. James is currently working on Vol. 7 of Walking to The Rockies With Muckwah.

# Taking a walk to the Rockies

By David LeClair

James Caughill began his journey in St. Catharines, Ont., on Sept. 24, 2016, at 2 p.m. “I’ve got a photographic memory,” said Caughill, recalling the exact moment.

Caughill was sharing the rent on an \$1,100, two-bedroom apartment with his father in St. Catharines, paying \$550 each, but his dad became ill with congestive heart failure.

The apartment the father and son shared could not allow oxygen use due to insurance reasons, forcing James’s father into a long-term retirement residence.

“I had to find another place,” said Caughill. “I saved up my money; I even rode my bike all over St. Catharines collecting empties.”

“I found a one-bedroom bachelor apartment for \$900 a month that would allow me to bring my dog Muckwah,” stated Caughill.

Caughill explained how he paid for the apartment’s first and last month’s rent, but so did nine other people.

“This a-hole had fake rental agreements that looked real and took my first and last month’s rent and booked it.

“That left me with a whopping \$165 in my account,” said Caughill.

According to Caughill, all his welfare sup-

port worker at the time could do was put him on the ‘housing help centre waitlist’ for affordable housing. At the time, the wait was approximately eight months.

His Ontario welfare worker demanded that he move into a homeless shelter called South Bridge to keep claiming his benefit for the following eight months, he added.

Caughill explained what he called “the worst part” of trying to get help from Ontario Works was dealing with a worker who had no compassion for his only companion at the time, Muckwah, a full-breed Husky.

“She looked me right in the eye and said, ‘But you gotta get rid of that damn mutt,’” Caughill explained with rage.

“I told her the exact part of her anatomy she could shove the welfare cheque with explicit instructions on how to shove it there,” stated Caughill. “I opted out of my welfare cheque, and that’s when Muckwah and I lived on the streets.”

Seven years ago, on July 1, 2016, Caughill became homeless and struggled for three months on the streets of St. Catharines.

“Damn hard, let me tell ya, living in an unused dumpster stall. “We were eating best before food from the dumpster.”

Caughill picked best before dog food from the dumpster.

“The Canadian government, assholes that

they are, don’t allow (the pet food stores) to donate the food to local food banks, and it has to be thrown out,” said Caughill, on edge.

The whole time Caughill and Muckwah were on the streets, they spent one hour a day at a pet-friendly local library searching for a shelter that would allow dogs throughout all the provinces in Canada. According to Caughill, no pet-friendly shelters exist in the country.

“There are absolutely no homeless shelters in this entire country that take in pets,” explained Caughill. “So I decided to fix it,” he remarked with a confident smile.

Caughill thought of walking across Canada to raise awareness of the no pets in shelters issue he has been facing with his dog Muckwah.

“It snowballed.”

“We ran into a lady named Susan between Beamsville and Grimsby, the social media representative for ‘CHCH11.’ An interview was conducted with station owner John McKenna, who was impressed by Caughill’s efforts to bring a change instead of being lazy like most homeless people, explained Caughill.

“He called in a favour and got us an interview on CTV National, so we had to walk to downtown Toronto.”

“We got there Friday night and spent the weekend in Toronto’s tent city; I love that

place!”

“After the interview finished that weekend, we headed north to Barrie and Orillia, where we became famous,” Caughill stated proudly.

Caughill and Muckwah started April 14, 2017 and remarked that it was the best year of his life. According to Caughill, they walked 15,065 kms from Parry Sound to Schreiber, on the top of Lake Superior, in six months.

Feeling accomplished in 2017, Caughill and Muckwah got on a VIA Rail train and headed back to Washego, where they stayed with his friend Steve for the winter.

In spring 2018, the pair took the train back to where they left off on the journey and continued walking, reaching Vermilion Bay, before returning to Caughill’s friend’s residence in Washego, where the duo again spent the winter months.

Tragically, in March 2019, Muckwah got very sick and passed away. “I was going to quit; I was in a dark place.”

“Before I started this, I was a hardcore functioning drug addict for 25 years.”

“Powdered cocaine for the first 10 years, crack cocaine for the next 15,” explained Caughill. “I’m lucky I’m not dead right now; by all means, I should be. God has a purpose; this is why I’m still alive,” Caughill explained.

With Caughill’s companion gone and no hope left in sight, his friend Steve came to the rescue, finding a new companion at the Orillia SPCA for Caughill.

“This guy saved my life,” said Caughill as he pointed at his second dog, also named Muckwah, a middle-aged Husky lying on the grass in the shade.

Caughill and Muckwah had to find a spot to rest during an Ontario heat wave in late August this year. A resident in Glen Miller in Quinte West put up their yard for Caughill to pitch his tent, where the duo spent five days in the shade waiting out the end-of-summer heatwave.

The pair expects to reach the Napanee area this year before the weather gets too cold.

Caughill says he will stay in the Odessa area until spring and hit the road again when it’s warm enough to continue.

Along the journey, Caughill has written and published six volumes of books about the travel, “Walking To The Rockies With Muckwah.” The books are available on Amazon and have sold in nine different countries, explained Caughill.

Caughill is currently working on volume seven to complete the series. Ninety per cent of the royalties from sales go into a trust fund that Caughill says has accumulated to over \$500,000.

# TenFootPole performs new album in Kingston

By Isidore Champagne

The punk rock band TenFootPole played from their newest album, titled *Winning*, on Sept. 19 at the Boiler Room in Kingston, Ont., as part of their tour across Canada.

The hard-hitting album features two painted fighters going at each other for the album cover.

“The idea of winning, or you know, competition, like the price you pay for competing was kinda like a theme in the song Can We Stop Trying to Win, and I thought it was cool to have the graphic violence, but it was supposed to be kinda ironic, we’re winning but we’re really getting beat up heavily,” said Dennis Jagard, lead vocalist of the band, after finishing the show in Kingston.

The production was also handled by Jagard, who was producing and mixing without external help. For their past albums, the band had hired producers to help them with the process.

“On this album, I mixed and produced it. So that was a huge difference because I take a higher level of responsibility for if something is good or not.

“The sound of it, the parts, everything, I had a final say on, so it was a little nerve-racking because it’s like my baby.”

The rollout of five singles before the official album release helped mitigate the stress associated with the release date. This strategy also incentivized



Photo by Isidore Champagne

Dennis Jagard preforms at the Boiler Room, performing his new album “Winning” as well as some of his popular older songs.

Spotify to put more of their songs on playlists, which is a popular modern technique also used by artists like Joyner Lucas.

The creative control of the album was handled by Jagard, who has learned from the creative process of industry giants such as Prince and Weird Al.

“I’m the dictator. That’s all there is. In the ‘80s and ‘90s, we thought we were egalitarian and democratic, but then sometimes decisions would be made where we didn’t all discuss it.”

This also has helped him dive deeper into the album and put more of his heart and soul into the creation, as he does not have to worry about everyone doing their fair share, instead being able to just focus on the music.

“It just works better if there’s just one person who the buck stops here.”

If you want to see the band live, their final Canadian show happens in Kelowna on Oct. 6, after which they will fly to the United Kingdom and tour until mid-November.

Despite still touring for *Winning*, Jagard is already thinking about new music.

“One cool thing about writing songs is it can always be better, so I just consider this part of the process, like, as far as I’m concerned, this is this year’s album and I’m going to try to write new stuff and hopefully we’ll come out with a better one.”