

Go ahead, look down

A psychiatrist searches for urban adventure — and finds it at the top of the CN Tower

BY *Dr Brad Bowins*

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Being accustomed to adventure outside of big cities, such as scuba diving and backcountry skiing, I was intrigued at the prospect of realizing it right

at home in Toronto. One sunny day in May 2012, I decided to take the **CN Tower EdgeWalk** (tel: 416-601-3833; edgewalkcntower.ca; \$175).

Arriving shortly before the scheduled time, I joined two other men visiting on their own, one a businessman needing a break from the conference he was attending, and the other a young man who had just moved to Toronto. Let the fun begin.

After signing the inevitable legal waiver, we were brought into a room where we dressed up in red prison-like jumpsuits. I asked whether they were recruiting for one of those corporate mega-jails supposedly favoured by Stephen Harper's government. Staff reassured us that this is not the case, though to complete the feeling they put restraining straps on us, which were checked three or four times.



Hanging out with friends: Dr Bowins (left) with fellow thrill-seekers at the top.

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The futuristic staging area for EdgeWalk has metallic walls and sliding glass doors that exit to you-know-where. A very solid-looking safety bar is fixed to the roof, one side leading out and the other in. Staff hooked us onto the bar with two cables, one positioned in front and the other behind. They went over the safety rules again. All these precautions were reassuring — it may have felt a little like jail, but at least it wouldn't be a form of capital punishment.

Our guide was a young and very spunky woman who clearly lived for adventure activities. As well she might — being a guide for the CN Tower EdgeWalk is not your average job. When most Torontonians say they work “right outside the CN Tower,” they're usually not referring to the top of it. She went out first and called me out next. It was time.

The feeling of stepping outside the CN Tower is exhilarating. I had a sense of being very connected to the surroundings in a way never experienced from the inside. It was a clear day, and

it felt like I could reach out and touch the Toronto Islands and airport. Looking up at the top of the Tower gives an equally unique perspective. After many years of wondering what it must have been like for the workers who built this world-renowned structure, I finally found out; our once-in-a-lifetime was their everyday.


With our feet firmly planted on the metal walkway the size of a city sidewalk, and feeling the breeze, so to speak, our guide explained it was time for some “exercises” to enhance the experience. She wanted each of us to place the front of our feet a couple of inches from the edge. The curvature of the CN Tower's base is very visible from the edge of the walkway, and the seemingly gravity-defying dimensions of the structure are more fully appreciated.

Our first warm-up exercise completed, our guide moved us on to a more advanced activity: leaning back over the edge of the walkway! Looking between your legs the view was straight to the ground, which was a very unnerving and exhilarating experience that I could only

describe to the guide as “freaky,” not a standard medical term, of course, but she knew what I meant. Looking up provides an equally impressive view of the top of the Tower that few will ever see close-up. The EdgeWalk takes place just above the 360 Restaurant at 356 metres giving a great perspective on the SkyPod. As you observe the Tower, people inside observe you — a good form of advertising for the walk.

Returning to a fully vertical position, with feet planted firmly on the platform, it was time for a walk around the Tower. Our guide provided a history of the structure and nearby section of the city. Walking around the outside of the Tower on a narrow ledge while discussing the city was a surreal experience, and one that gave, dare I say, a “lofty” perspective on Toronto.

Having stretched our legs it was time for another exercise, this time leaning off the Tower face-first. I have bungee jumped once and this felt like starting to leap over the edge, then immediately stopping to stare down at where the mind says your body should be going. Returning to the relative safety of the narrow ledge, we continued our walk and stooped over the cage used by window cleaners. Before completing the circle we posed for a group photo while leaning back over the edge. It seemed like nothing compared to the first time at the start of the walk, demonstrating how quickly people can adapt to different experiences.

The EdgeWalk runs May to October, rain or shine, although it's cancelled when there's lightning to prevent guests from having a too electrifying experience. Short-term sojourners won't have the choice of perfect weather for the walk, but each weather condition provides for a unique experience. If you have a fear of heights you might find the activity unnerving, but it's very safe and it might be good for you; what better way to confront your fears than by crossing your arms, leaning back and dangling over the abyss? 



In its third season, the EdgeWalk takes place on a narrow walkway above the CN Tower's restaurant.