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* Stevens et al. International Symposium on Dental Hygiene (1999)
** Quintessence International Volume 21, Number 6/1995
*** 2004, Georgia University, Geneva et al.

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plus

Sweet home, Chicago

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ **STEVEN SHALOWITZ** embarked on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. This week, the Chicago resident wraps up his travels with an affectionate look at his hometown.

I WAS mesmerised when I drew back my bedroom curtains on a recent morning. Eight inches of snow had fallen on Chicago while I slept, whitewashing the view outside my window. Much like a tropical rain, I've always thought snow has a calming effect. Not everybody agrees. In Singapore when I'd mention I was from Chicago, people would wince. They'd recount with horror being stuck at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport during a blizzard, or how in the dead of winter they feared leaving their hotel lest they turn into a human icicle.

Let's face it. Chicago gets a bad rap for its weather. For starters, countless other cities, such as Buffalo and Syracuse, New York are far snowier places. As for the moniker "The Windy City"? Certainly, it can get gusty in Chicago, especially if one is walking near Lake Michigan (simply called "The Lake" here). However, according to the United States National Climatic Data Center, Dodge City, Kansas is the windiest American city. Hang on to your hat though on your next visit to Boston, Milwaukee or Honolulu, which experts tell us are all windier than Chicago. I will, however, leave the origins of the label "The Windy City" for another time. But to think of Chicago simply in terms of its wintry weather is wrong. Yes, sometimes when the temperature



LOVE COMING HOME TO YOU: Whether it's innovative architecture such as the Cloud Gate (above) or great jazz and blues music, Chicago has it all.

dips below zero Fahrenheit and the pristine white snow turns into grey slush, I wonder why my great-grandparents chose to settle here rather than in the Bahamas. Then I console myself and remember all the things I love about this city — things

collection outside of France. Or, the fabulous works of art on the street by Picasso, Chagall, Calder and Miro. Who here doesn't savour a stroll through the new Millennium Park to admire Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate sculpture, which resembles a shiny bean? Or, weather permitting, splashing about in its Crown Fountain. And how about Chicago's ethnic neighbourhoods? It is the second largest Polish city outside of Warsaw, and the home for some of the world's largest Greek, Italian, and Mexican communities. The city's sizable Irish population gets a nod on St Patrick's Day, when the Chicago River is dyed green. All this diversity translates into a feeding frenzy — jazz and blues for the soul and food for the body. Chicago is famous for its steak, ribs, cheese-cake and, my favourite, the Chicago deep-dish pizza. For me, the magic is in the crust — the secrets of which only a Chicago chef will know. In part, it was the food that led Jennifer Aniston to declare that Chicago was her kind of town when she was in town last summer filming *The Break-Up* with Vince Vaughn. While Hollywood has long used Chicago as a backdrop for its films, the city's theatre scene couldn't be

stronger. Stage productions routinely start here before they move to Broadway, and actors often learn the ropes in Chicago's theatres and comedy clubs before making it big. The first of many names that comes to mind are the three Johns: Belushi, Malkovich and Cusack. But we don't have to wait for Hollywood to come calling to add a little stardust to our streets. Chicago has its own resident celebrities. Such as Oprah. And film directors John Hughes and Harold Ramis. And author Scott Turow. And Michael Jordan. Indeed, when playing basketball for the Chicago Bulls, he became as synonymous with the city as Al Capone once was (albeit for far better reasons). Truly, those supporting Chicago sports teams put the "fan" in fanatic. When the Chicago White Sox won the baseball World Series last October, the city erupted. Winning the title for the first time in 88 years was as astonishing as if, well, it were to snow in Singapore. So, after 16 years in Asia, here I am, back in my hometown of Chicago. Snow or not, I intend to enjoy it. That is, after I shovel the driveway.

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CALL it a period of stasis. Over the past year, theatre groups in Singapore have been planning seasons, reading scripts and consolidating their finances while cooperating with and supporting each other. This year, their work blooms with a slew of theatre festivals that showcase the efforts of an increasingly robust artistic community. Surprisingly, with the exception of Wild Rice's three-week festival that will focus on works by homegrown playwrights, there remains an unhealthy threadbare forum for new Singaporean writing. This issue remains a pressing one, not just in Singapore, but around the world. Michael Billington, a theatre critic for *The Guardian* newspaper, maintains that theatre must continue to produce strong classical works in tandem with new writing. New writing, he has said in lectures and articles, is a way of exploring current social issues and behaviour patterns. Theatre is a means of taking the moral temperature of society. Haresh Sharma's *Boxing Day*, for example, was a reconstruction of the Asian tsunami survivor stories. It depicted the grief survivors faced and

tion and greed. Actor Lim Kay Tong, one of the founding members of TheatreWorks, agreed: "Playwrights need to push themselves to explore issues, ideas, boundaries." Pushing means not having to worry about staging. Stephen Jeffries — a British playwright and screenwriter of the upcoming Johnny Depp movie *The Libertine* — said last year in a playwrighting seminar in London: "Just write your play. Let the director and producer worry about staging it." "Never compromise on characters and story," he continued. "Don't censor yourself. If the issues are large enough, the audience will sense it as part of a character's personal history". Many playwrights have innovated theatrical traditions. Carol Churchill used cross-gender casting in her allegory on race, sex and religion *Cloud Nine*, while Sarah Kane took poetic vulgarity to an extreme with her treatise on the Balkans, *Blasted*. Kudos to those championing new writing here. Now, let's have all those potential playwrights inundate our stages with their creativity. A lovely start would be a fresh festival dedicated exclusively to new local writing.

plus point

tapped into the Singaporean fear of similar disasters happening here. Certainly, many in Singapore have taken script development in the right direction. Last year, Action Theatre held *Theatre Idol* to solicit scripts while companies such as TheatreWorks hold frequent writing workshops (and play-readings) to develop up-and-coming young playwrights. Such steps, however, develop a number of "new writers", but not, "new writing". With few exceptions, the same tired language is used alongside familiar stories about competi-

PLAYWRIGHTS, PLEASE! We need more homegrown talents such as Haresh Sharma who gave us *Boxing Day* (above).

What's your view? Email us at plus@newstoday.com.sg

SUDOKU plus

HOW TO PLAY: The rules are easy. Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION:

6	2	1	8	4	7	5	9	3
3	4	8	1	9	5	6	7	2
5	9	7	2	3	6	1	4	8
9	3	2	6	5	4	7	8	1
7	1	6	3	8	9	2	5	4
8	5	4	7	1	2	9	3	6
2	6	3	5	7	8	4	1	9
1	7	9	4	2	3	8	6	5
4	8	5	9	6	1	3	2	7

What are your views on Sudoku Plus? Email us at plus@newstoday.com.sg

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