

Basic Black by Arthur Black

Bumper to bumper

Ever hear of Joseph Thomson? He was one of those 19th century Doctor Livingston/Lord Stanley intrepid Brit explorer types. Trekged all over darkest Africa at a time when no one had a clue just how dark it was.

Persevered through blinding sandstorms, blistering droughts, blizzards of tsetse flies, bouts of fever and ague, hostile natives and man-eating crocodiles. Thomson eventually staggered back to England, a hero. In the sunset of his life he was interviewed by a reporter from the London Times who asked him to describe the most dangerous part of his travels.

Thomson replied without batting an eye, "Crossing Piccadilly Circus".

Yes, indeed. Anyone who's been exposed to that snarling maelstrom of honking cars and tooting lorries in the very bosom of downtown London can only nod ruefully.

What's sobering is the fact that Thomson was talking about a traffic nightmare that pre-dated the automobile. He wouldn't believe what traffic is like in London now-a-days although ironically, the pace of modern-day traffic probably wouldn't alarm him. A couple of years ago an expert reckoned that it took as long to drive through downtown

London in a Porsche today as it did in a horse and carriage a century ago.

We're not that far behind here in Canada. Trying to drive out of Toronto on the eve of a holiday weekend is like a scene from Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. Attempting to drive into Vancouver on a Monday morning (hint: sooner or later you have to cross a bridge—along with eleven kazillion other commuters) is like trying to dog-paddle across a vat of Skippy peanut butter. Could be that London solves its traffic problem before we do. This past year the city has been conducting an experiment in which each car venturing into the heart of the city during weekday business hours got dinged 5 quid (about \$12) for the privilege.

Drivers howled with outrage. Business soothsayers predicted economic ruin for the city merchants. Drive-in restaurant owners and operators of strip malls wailed and moaned. Civil servants grumbled and threatened to go on strike.

But none of that happened. Instead, the city streets became more pedestrian (and bicycle and moped) friendly, the air is more breathable, people on the streets can converse in a normal tone of voice, not having to shout

over the din of car horns, grinding gears, squealing brakes and revving motors and.

The traffic is moving again. The average speeds in downtown London are now around 40 km/h.

And the city fathers have a brand new pot of money to play with, because tens of thousands of motorists chose to pony up the five pounds a day for the continued convenience of driving downtown. But about 50,000 vehicles per day have been eliminated from the metropolitan mix, and London's mayor, Ken Livingstone is ecstatic. "People who have to drive are over the moon," says the mayor. "Most people are saving money hand over fist because they are not spending so much of each day stuck in traffic."

Cars. Someday archeologists will look back on our civilization, at our multi-lane freeways and concrete cloverleaves, our paved-over farmland and our acres of parking lots and they'll wonder "Why would they design their living spaces for the convenience of vehicles at the expense of human comfort? What the hell were they thinking?"

No accounting for human nature. Take the case of Shanghai, China's largest city. Traffic police there feel they've identified the number one problem in the city's burgeoning traffic congestion and they're cracking down. But not on automobiles. There are only about 120,000 private cars in Shanghai - piddly for a city of 20 million.

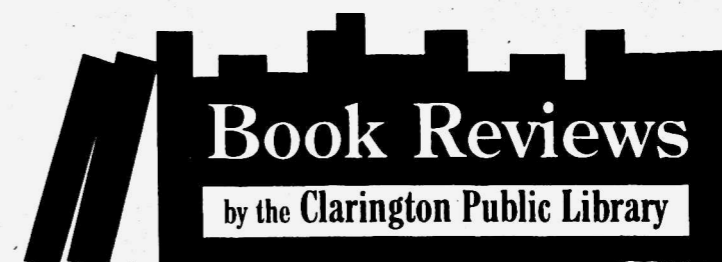
Shanghaianders are too poor to buy cars, but they can afford bicycles. There are 9 million bikes in the city and the police say it's the cyclists who are the problem.

"Bicycles put great pressure on Shanghai's troubled traffic situation," says police chief Chen Yuangao.

Ah, yes. Those pesky bicycles.

Ex-US president Ronald Reagan once named trees as the primary cause of air pollution.

Fella who reasons like that could've been an honorary citizen of Shanghai.



Book picks for the month of March from the Clarington Public Library

Lucy the Giant - by Sherri L. Smith

(Young Adult Fiction) Lucy Otsego is a victim of her height; in her small Alaskan town she has been nicknamed Lucy the giant. It doesn't help that her father is an alcoholic and she is growing tired of the pitying looks of adults and the cruel remarks of classmates. When she runs away she takes advantage of a window of opportunity and becomes a member of the crew on a crabbing boat. Suddenly Lucy is an adult, earning her own way and life is good. Lucy soon realizes that being an adult comes with responsibilities she had not expected and she may not be as ready as she thought to take on an adult world and all its challenges.

Search of the Moon King's Daughter - by Linda Holeman

(Young Adult Fiction) Victorian England was a difficult place to survive if you were born poor and Emmaline's family is no exception to this rule. They have had their share of difficulties since her father died, including an accident that injures her mother and leaves her addicted to pain killers. As the result of her mother's terrible decision to sell her son to be a chimney sweep, Emmaline must take on the role of the head of the household while attempting to bring her family back together. This poignant story takes the reader from England's villages and countryside to London, where Emmaline desperately searches for her brother Tommy.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: the Fab 5's Guide to Looking Better, Cooking Better, Dressing Better, Behaving Better, and Living Better - by Ted Allen

Based on the "You-Only Better" motto of their television show, this self-help book, this is an intriguing read for both men and women! The format is user friendly, informative and shockingly funny. Tips are provided on everything from skin care to decorating, all neatly packaged in high gloss, with terrific illustrations. If the title doesn't grab you, the content surely will.

The Vendetta Defense - by Lisa Scottoline

A 79-year old man with a love for carrier pigeons seems an unlikely candidate to stand trial for murder. But when Pigeon Tony finally acts out on a 60-year-old vendetta against his family that started in Italy during the time of Il Duce, it will take all of Judy Carrier's legal expertise to protect both her client and herself against old-world justice. Often hailed as the female equivalent of John Grisham, Scottoline continues to deliver legal thrillers that will hold you captive.



PORT GRANBY
PROJECT

Southeast Clarington Residents Special Meeting

Weds. March 17, 2004 7:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
Newtonville Hall

The Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Office is currently seeking community input on the results of the alternative means study process for the Port Granby Long-Term Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Project.

A special meeting has been arranged with the Southeast Clarington Ratepayers Association to present the recommendation to move the low-level radioactive waste to a new, engineered above-ground mound facility away from the shoreline of Lake Ontario. The recommended facility, proposed for a site north of Lakeshore Road, and the recommended transportation routes result from environmental, technical and community input.

Southeast Clarington Ratepayers Association members and non-member residents are invited to attend to discuss this important issue.

ADDITIONAL INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

Drop in to the Port Granby Project Information Exchange every Friday from Noon - 5 p.m. upstairs in the Newcastle Community Hall.

Three upcoming Open Houses for the Port Granby Project:

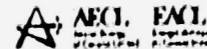
March 31, 2004 - Orono Hall 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.
April 6, 2004 - Newcastle Hall Noon - 8:00 p.m.
April 7, 2004 - Newtonville Hall 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Low Level Radioactive Waste Management Office



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