

Bill Smiley

It seems to me that kids don't have much fun anymore. Today I was reading a short story with a group of eighteen-year-olds. It was about a shy, flutzy spinster out on her first public date with a widower who was courting her. They went to a dance. She tripped and fell and her man came tumbling down on top of her.

It was funny, but pathetic, and the kids, who are sensitive to humiliation, exuded sympathy, especially the girls. We talked for a bit about the things that make people shy or awkward or self-conscious: acne, obesity, a colostomy. Fine. A good discussion.

But then I asked if any of them had had the same experience — falling flat on the dance floor. Horrors, no!

Of course, the way they dance nowadays, it's almost impossible to measure your length on the hardwood. Most of them dance by themselves, and it's pretty hard to topple unless you're blind, stoned. On slow pieces, those rare occasions, they are clutched so tightly that it would take a bulldozer to knock them down.

Most of the time, in fact, they don't even dance, just listen to the clangor and thump. And it's pretty hard to fall down on a dance floor when you're not dancing. I mean, it's the sort of thing you have to work at.

Anyway, I just sat back, looked them over, and shook my head. "You kids haven't lived. Nobody has really lived who hasn't gone sprawling on a dance floor, preferably bringing down his or her partner in the process."

There's nothing like it to pare the ego down to size. And it helps if you do it before a large and appreciative audience.

I can recall at least two occasions on which it happened to me. Once was at the Cascades, of fond memory. The second was at the legion hall in Tobermory. And I have living witnesses. My wife doesn't know about the second one, so keep it quiet.

But I can well recall the sensation. One moment you are gliding about, leaping and pirouetting, a veritable Rudolph Nureyev in Swan Lake. The next, your pas des deux somehow turns into a pas des trois, you discover that your partner is not Margot Fonteyn, and you're flat on your back, head spinning from the thump on the floor, and a brood who a moment ago was light as a thistle-down, sprawled across you like Strangler Lewis winning the deciding fall.

There's only one thing to do. Leap to your feet, laughing hollowly, and so quickly that the spectators might think it was all part of the performance. They never do, of course. And it's pretty lonely out there in the middle of the floor when your partner, who has been shamed for life, gives you a look like a cold shower, and stalks away forever.

"What? Don't you people ever go to a country dance and get hurled about?" I bugged my students. Nope.

So I had to tell them what it was like. When I was their age, we used to strike off many a Friday night. Usually for Wemyss, where they had the prettiest girls (Jo and Vera Dewitt, Ursula Brady), and the best music (Lorne Conisit on the piano and Mr. Dewitt on the fiddle.)

There was no question of taking girls. We couldn't afford it. But there was always the hope that you'd get to take one home. However, they always seemed to have several huge brothers or cousins lurking about.

It was about one dollar for the evening. Fifty cents for the dance, eighty-five cents for a mucky of gin, split four ways, and the rest for gas for somebody's old man's car.

"Have you never got into a square dance and been literally swept off your feet?" I questioned my girl students. Nope. But some of them looked as though they rather liked the idea.

And I thought of those burly farm boys, getting into the spirit of things and whirling the girls around until the latter were actually flying. Occasionally, sweaty hands spelled disaster, and one of the girls would go flying off into the lunch ladies were organizing. The lunch was part of the admission fee of fifty cents.

And I thought of occasions when I had got into a doh-se-doh with a particularly enthusiastic and buxom farm wench, and, because I couldn't foot it like the farm boys, been swung around in circles with both feet three inches off the floor.

A couple of belts of raw gin, and a couple of dances like that, and you were ready and willing to go out into the snow and gaze, palely and greenly at the moon for a half hour or so.

Inside the hall, with a wood stove almost red hot, and a hundred or so bodies steaming, it was always about 130 degrees. And this was in the days before ultra-dry deodorants. But I don't remember anybody smelling anything except hot and perfume.

Eventually, there'd be a fight, or lunch would be served, then it was into the Model A and shiver home through the winter night. No heater.

But, Oh, what a night we'd had, and Oh, what stories we regaled our less venturesome school-mates with, when we foregathered at the pool room on Saturday afternoon.

Poor modern kids. Do they have any fun?



Should I or shouldn't I?

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY of deciding whether a trip up a posted hill is worth the danger of being caught or the fun going down again on a sled is a dilemma modern children find more and more in town and country. Guess what this young lad decided.

—W. Thomson Photo

Free Press Editorial Page

B2 The Acton Free Press, Wednesday, December 6, 1972

Mini-Comment . . .

Did you know the federal government has given a grant of \$50,000 for the installation of artificial turf at the Canadian National Exhibition stadium in Toronto? The Minister indicated the installation would result in expanded use of the stadium but certainly the people who will benefit most are the Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian Football League. To our way of thinking it is partly a grant to a profit-making institution.

Some Christmas lighting is already sparking in homes around Acton and the next few weeks will see the town lit up as it never has been before. All homes are in the running for Acton Hydro's Christmas lighting contest which will have some worthwhile prizes.

Rene Levesque and the Parti Quebecois must be distressed by the federal election results since French-speaking voters ignored the separatist party's appeal for a boycott of ballot boxes. The fact is that 84 per cent of Quebecers voted as against 74 per cent of eligible voters nationally. It seems to be a clear indication that most people in Quebec want to stay in Canada despite propaganda to the contrary.

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Finding it hard to get time to do your Christmas shopping? That's a good reason for patronizing local and district stores where distance won't eat up time and money.

While Acton is discussing fixing up the community centre, Georgetown is probing the possibility of building a second arena and community centre. Let's hope we see the result of the Acton effort before Georgetown completes that project.

Those who insist that it was French power which kept the Liberals in power in Quebec must also be distressed by the fact that the Libs were returned heavily in the English-speaking Quebec ridings. Those who have sat down and attempted to analyze the results of the last federal election have found that the more they interpret the vote the more confused it becomes.

Next week is Snowmobile Safety Week, a time to reflect on the number of snowmobile accidents which have resulted in death and injury to several people already this season. Machine operators might take into account that over three-quarters of all fatal accidents in Ontario occurred on public thoroughfares where snowmobiles are often hard to steer or stop. It is also noteworthy that drunken operators were involved in a high percentage of snowmobile accidents in Ontario in 1971-72. The lesson from these statistics is that if snowmobilers want to eliminate over 75 per cent of all snowmobile accidents, they should stay off public thoroughfares and quit drinking when driving machines.

A writer from the Financial Post spent a week in an old-age home and found that many of his ideas about old people were complete misconceptions. Society, he says, has prostituted the word senile to suit the needs of a population suspicious of old people; we use it to cover the gamut from cantankerous to cynical, to stubborn to anything that old people do, which doesn't fit in with the way we want them to be. We do not treat them as human beings, he claims. The way to do that is to stop hiding them away, and to realize they have as much — if not more — to give us as we have to give them. To this we say a loud Amen.

Voters opt for the familiar

Unlike the City of Toronto where voters elected a so-called radical slate to office, electors in this district seemed content to depend on those who have served in office over the last term in preference to new names and new platforms.

There were exceptions in some of the townships but in most cases those returned to council and other elected posts were mainly veterans of the political scene.

In Acton, for instance the mood of caution was prevalent in acclamations for mayor, reeve and deputy reeve. Elections for council on Monday produced two new faces to replace Reeve Frank Oakes and Councillor Jack Greer who are retiring this year, but the nucleus of last year's council was returned intact. New councillors are Barry Insoce and Bill Yundt.

Esquusing gave Reeve Tom Hill a few frightening moments before they decided they would return him to office instead of challenger Russell Miller, an able candidate with a lot of support. Voters also returned Councillor Len Cox, to the deputy reeve's post, vacated by Miller, in an easy win over challenger C. F. (Pat) Patterson.

In Nassagaweya, the same mood was prevalent when electors decided Anne McArthur was the most able of three candidates to hold the township's highest elected post. Anne is a lady the voters respect — and opponents, too. The deputy reeve's chair went to an experienced councillor in the face of a threat from newcomer Hugh MacMillan. Council seats went to

incumbents Cal McIntyre and Art Gibson with a new member in Russell Powadiuk. A similar situation in Esquusing saw sitting members Dick Howitt and Wilfrid Leslie lead Esquusing polls and elected newcomer George Malby to replace Len Cox, who like Jim Watson had gone higher to the deputy's post.

Acclamations in Erin township for reeve and deputy reeve followed the same pattern with incumbents Bert Wheeler and William McLean being returned at the head of the polls. One interesting sidelight to the Erin township election was the defeat of veteran Harold Griffin, a councillor who has given many years of faithful and thoughtful service to the community. His seat on council went to newcomer John K. Reid who also has an impressive background and a native son's desire to assist the township in years ahead.

In Eramosa township the present deputy reeve Duncan McPhedran chalked up a good-sized margin over challenger Don Gordon, making his first try at political office, again following the trend.

Councillor Bill Adsett was returned to office by a whopping margin but the next two seats were a surprise. Former deputy reeve Jim Milne took the second council seat and Betty Lou Clark, an attractive woman, surprised some electors in a male-dominated body by latching onto the third and final council seat, knocking off present councillor Ken Fair in the process.

And so the pattern went.

Milton returned Mayor Brian Best, the kingpin who has been preparing the town for great expectations. Georgetown returned Mayor Bill Smith by acclamation and contentious reeve Ric Morrow.

It is a case of the electorate putting their faith in the tried and true instead of taking a chance on new faces.

We were disappointed that not even 25 per cent of the voters in Acton thought it worthwhile to turn out to mark a ballot. If there is any criticism of council in the term ahead it should emanate from those who took the time and effort to brave the inclement weather and register their choices for council.

If there was any special surprise in the Acton election it was the defeat of Bob Drinkwater, who has proved in the past as an able and capable administrator. However, both successful candidates Barry Insoce and Bill Yundt have demonstrated a willingness to tackle the municipal job and we are sure council will benefit from their experience in other fields and make full use of their talents on appropriate committees.

Perhaps the imminence of regional government has something to do with the poor turnout in Acton but it surely does not excuse electors from exercising their franchise, following as it does on the heels of less than 17 per cent turnout on the liquor questions.

Hamilton can take a bow

Hamilton may be one of the smaller cities in the Canadian Football League but football people there showed the larger and most sophisticated centres in the country that they know how to run a Grey Cup festival that ranked as one of the best, if not the best ever.

The week-long program had something to appeal to almost all segments of the community at home and across the country, culminating in a gigantic parade Saturday and finishing up with the spectacle everyone was waiting for — the Grey Cup game.

There are those of course, who will think anything Canadian ranks inferior to shows which emanate from south of the border, where the climate, circumstances and cash all collaborate to stage lavish and costly productions. An unbiased observer would have to give high marks to the Hamilton game and parade as equal to or surpassing many of the shows which give U.S. football much of its gloss.

You don't have to be a patriot either to see that the Grey Cup game and its attendant celebrations have grown into the country's biggest sporting event, bar none.

Canadian football may be a reflection of the U.S. brand as has been said many times by many "experts" (as it was once said it was a pale imitation of English rugby) but it has evolved into something peculiarly Canadian. It

should be nurtured and protected until it is hale and hearty enough to operate without expanding into the bigger U.S. market, as has been proposed.

It's for the birds!

I've got a brand new feeder now,
To keep wild birds alive,
With sunflower seeds and other weeds,
I hope that they'll survive.

Of course, I now must pay more tax,
To the Government for my food,
The birds and I would surely die,
If we didn't get some food.

For the sake of "Conservation"
And the environment I've soiled,
A little feed, for those in need,
Might pay for some I've spoiled.

The woods and fields, once their home,
We've over-run with wheels,
To get around, we've cleared the ground,
For our precious automobiles,

Each day we do our very best,
To fill the air with planes,
And in our greed, we tax the seed,
To add to all their pains.

Our jungle life, is vicious,
On everything that breathes,
We poison air, leave none to spare,
We are Nature's greatest thieves.

So, I'll do my best, to save the birds,
And try to play the game,
I'll buy some "snacks" and pay the tax,
May God forgive this shame.

Victor Smith
R.R. 2 Rockwood.

Football people who are eager to crack the U.S. market with the Canadian product should keep in mind the object lessons the National Hockey League expansion taught Canadians. Hockey may be our national game but professionally it is controlled by big money from the United States.

Take the case of Bobby Hull who was ordered by a U.S. judge to refrain from playing for the Winnipeg Jets until a U.S. court cleared him from the Chicago Black Hawks. We realize this has many controversial overtones but at the same time we think it ridiculous that an American court should decide the disposition of a Canadian citizen playing a Canadian game.

It proves that our national sovereignty has been eroded in more places than the industrial field.

We would not want to see the same thing happen to Canadian football in spite of the fact many U.S. citizens play the game here.

So bouquets are in order to both Hamilton organizers and the team for upgrading the annual Grey Cup festivities to new levels. We hope they can be matched and improved on as the years go by, making the week a national celebration of interest to the entire country.

Back Issues of The Free Press

20 years ago

50 years ago

75 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 11, 1952.

A raging fire destroyed a building in which sawdust and shavings were stored at Ajax Engineering Tuesday at 9 p.m. The fire threatened the plant and huge piles of lumber. Prompt action of the men in the plant and the fire brigade kept the fire from spreading.

Canada's largest producers of quality refractory special shapes, the Acton branch of A.P. Green Ltd., inaugurated production this week just four months after the devastating fire wiped out the year and a half old L'Anch. Marking the occasion the plant was represented by local and United States representatives, when members of Acton council, Rotary club, Acton Fire brigade, Y's Men's club, A.P. Green employees and representatives of Smith and Stone were entertained at the plant on Monday evening. Acton manager George Barbeau said he felt the first products would be passed through the kiln by Wednesday of this week.

Climaxing many months of negotiating and planning, Acton signed an agreement providing for the establishment of a Rural Fire Area to cover Northern sections of Esquusing and Nassagaweya.

The Y's Men's Annual turkey draw was held after their bingo in the town hall. Winners, Mr. Phalen, A. Kentner, E. Dawkins, O.E. Robins, J. Wilson, J. Wood, T. Nellis, N. Hurren, J. Benton, R. Nellis. Winners were asked to contact Lorraine Farms and J. W. Wolfe will make arrangements for delivery.

The Y.M.C.A. boxing class under Don Clayton has grown so large it has to split into two groups.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 14, 1922.

For 50 years Acton has been the home of David Henderson, a native of the county of Halifax, who for 30 years was an outstanding character as a member of the House of Commons. Last Thursday the noted career of this prominent man quietly ended when he peacefully passed away. The shock of Mrs. Henderson's tragic death in 1914 materially lessened his activities in public life. He was born in 1841 near Milton, the son of an esteemed pioneer. He and his wife Alison Christie moved to Acton the year it was incorporated, 1873. Having formed a partnership with Mr. Christie they bought the mercantile business of C. and J. Symon. About 35 years ago the first banking business was organized in Acton under the firm name of Storey, Christie and Co. and Mr. Henderson was the manager. When the Merchants Bank opened a branch here this private bank, which had been a great convenience, dissolved its business and closed its doors. He was council member and Reeve and began his parliamentary career in 1887 as conservative member from Halifax.

Mr. Henderson was always loyal to Acton. The splendid government building in which the Post Office and Customs House have commodious quarters, is a monument to his loyalty to his adopted home. The funeral was quiet and unostentatious.

The 22nd ball and supper of the fire brigade was well attended in the town hall. Our county jail at Milton is practically empty now. Billy Dundas, a Georgetown man who makes jail a house of refuge in the winter and spends his time painting, is the only man there. He is king of the castle going in and out when he likes.

Taken from the issue of the Free Press of Thursday, December 9, 1897.

Christmas will soon be here! Come and sit for that portrait. Two dozen photos 50 c. H. Ramshaw, Photo artist.

Mr. Fred Ryder has been promoted to a position on the road for Messrs. W.H. Storey and Son. He is working east this week. Fred is a very worthy young man and deserves his preferment.

The annual concerts by the member of Acton Fire Brigade have become a feature of the fall entertainments. Standing room in the town hall was at a premium. There were choruses by the united church choirs and many vocal and instrumental numbers.

There has been considerable talk about wide tires here. They will soon be required in California.

Public examination was held at Limehouse school by Miss Ford, with parents and friends attending.

The people of Halifax have cause to congratulate themselves on the absence of crime and litigation in the county. When the general session opened there was not a single case. This is a marked contrast to a number of other counties, especially the half dozen where murder trials have been heard.

On the 27th of September Miss Annie Forbes was united in holy wedlock to Mr. Thos. McPhail. This afternoon her mortal remains will be laid in the tomb at Fairview cemetery. After great suffering the spirit took its flight from the earthly clay on Tuesday.

Lieut. Peary was presented with models for flying machines, submarine boats and other devices supposed to be likely to facilitate his explorations of the polar regions.