



An early winter afternoon

—Photo by Bob Dye

Bill SMILEY



Perhaps someone who has gone the whole course can tell me when one's children stop depending on their parents when it comes to the clutch.

Is it in their forties, fifties, sixties? Certainly it is not in their twenties.

Recently, we received a note from our son Hugh, to tell us he was taking some holidays and would be home for a few days' visit.

I thought, "Good. He's saved some money and won't arrive broke, as usual." He had.

Some days later, in a telephone conversation with daughter Kim, we learned that Hugh had dropped in to see her, and had drifted off, muttering something about going to Chicago. That is a slightly roundabout way of getting to our place.

And a few days later there was a collect call from Houston, Texas. You guessed it. Hugh, flat broke. Could we wire him money for bus fare to get home?

He was crafty enough to call when I was at work. I would probably have refused the collect call, and regretted later. Or I'd have shouted, "No, I will not send you the price of one serving of Kentucky fried chicken", and slammed up the receiver.

But he sweet-talked his mother for five minutes before he popped the question. She was not only affronted but taken aback and didn't think quickly enough to tell him we were just off to Florida or the west coast or anywhere.

She waffled a bit, and eventually said she'd see what his Dad said but not to expect anything. He sighed with relief and told her where to send the money.

I came home from work on a Friday after a hard week. All I wanted was to get my shoes off, have a quiet drink before dinner, and read the latest goodies about the energy crisis.

And all I got was a family crisis, a scramble to the bank, and a dash to get to the telegraph office before it closed for the weekend.

At first I stood my ground. Not a penny. Let him starve in Houston. At least he won't freeze to death (he'd airily told his mother it was 90 degrees down there.)

And she agreed with me. "He doesn't deserve a cent. He was told he was never to do that again. Ungrateful young pup. Why doesn't he hitchhike home?"

"Well," I said, "some of those southern states are pretty tough on hitchhikers. Throw them in jail for a month."

I could just see her thinking of her first-born slaving on a Georgia chain-gang or something of the sort. After a heated half-hour, we agreed that money isn't everything, that you can't take it with you, that he's the only son we have, that it would be nice to see him, and that I'd better hustle if I wanted to get to the bank in time.

It cost me about \$115, counting the bus fare and grub to get home, the cost of the collect call, and the charge for sending the money.

That's what I call sending good money after good. Of course, Hugh wouldn't dream of accepting a gift. It was strictly a loan. According to his figures, he now owes me \$380, without interest, and will have the whole thing paid off any time now. According to my figures, he owes me \$880.46, at eight per cent interest, and he'll never pay it off.

This has been happening to me for years. First the kids go to their mother, and soften her up. Then she comes to me, and softens me up. Then I go back to the kids and practically apologize for being so slow with the loot.

Of course, I reason, Hugh's only a kid. Practically a baby. He won't be twenty-seven until July. You can't expect him, at that tender age, to know enough to SAVE SOME MONEY FOR BUS FARE HOME!

But that other kid. She's a different matter. She's almost a mother. And she pulled a swifty on us this week. Another collect call, on Sunday. Nice to hear her. Asked how big the tummy was. All very matey and maternal.

Then came the punch line. Don, her husband, was on the way up from the city with their cat, to put in our care. He had to hitchhike because he couldn't bring the cat on a bus. Her mother nearly blew a cork. The danged cat isn't trained.

So we have two additions to the household this week. Two fat cats. One in the backyard, yowling to get in. The other watching TV, sleeping till noon, and waiting to put the bite on me for more bus fare back to his job in Quebec.

I shoulda been a cranky old bachelor.

Planning board's demise significant

Members of Acton Planning Board officially dissolved last Thursday evening under sad circumstances. The death of chairman Sid Saitz the previous week postponed end of the term Yuletide festivities creating a void which members filled with a few minutes of remembrance.

It was also a sad occasion because the last Acton planning board was being incorporated into the town of Halton Hills and some of the town's autonomy went with it.

Some members of the board are applying to serve on the new Halton Hills planning advisory sub-committee where their experience and knowledge of the area should be invaluable. But it won't be the same. Members of the advisory board will be selected from written

applications from residents of Halton Hills who have signified they would like to serve.

Planning will be mainly a regional responsibility after January 1, as a joint planning area under the Planning Act, to be known as the Halton Planning area. Each area municipality is constituted a subsidiary planning area and the council shall have all the powers of a planning board under the Planning Act and no area municipality shall establish a planning board, the Act to establish regional government in Halton states.

When the Minister has approved an official plan adopted by the regional council every official plan and every by-law passed under section 35 of the Planning Act or a predecessor in effect in the plan-

ning area affected must be amended to conform and no official plan of subsidiary planning area shall be approved that does not conform.

So plans for this municipality have been taken mainly out of our hands and placed in a wider sphere of interest. That is why it was so important Acton Planning Board completed their study of the town so recommendations could be made to its successors regarding the town's future.

They have done a commendable job despite the criticism levelled at some aspects of the study. It has also been done with the best interests of the municipality at heart.

As planning board and other town bodies close their official duties we can't help but feel a little of ourselves goes with them.

Free Press Editorial Page

B4 The Acton Free Press, Wed., Dec. 19, 1973

Old-time Christmas hard

Christmas Cheer among the earliest pioneers in Upper Canada (Ontario) varied greatly, for what we think of as Christmas fare was very scant.

In the earliest period before the War of 1812, salt pork, potatoes and Indian corn were the only supplies available. To obtain flour, the settler's grain had to be carried—often on his back—to a distant mill for grinding. Children were fed porridge made from Indian corn, boiled sometimes for a whole day to produce a soft mush.

Occasionally the settlers were able to shoot partridge, pigeon or game, but powder and shot were scarce, and fish, while plentiful, took time to catch. With little or no

fencing, chickens and livestock could not be kept because of the all-enclosing forest, into which they were likely to stray and be lost.

As for the quality of pioneer cooking, Dr. William Dunlop, the "Backwoodsman", who wrote one of the earliest accounts of life in Canada, quotes the old saw: "God sends meat and the devil cooks". Not surprising, since without cold storage facilities, butter, milk and cheese soon became rancid.

As the years passed and conditions improved, holiday fare became more plentiful. Ann Langton, in her journal (published as "A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada") describes a Christmas party in 1838, just a year after the

Rebellion. She tells of "popping three plum puddings into the pot" for a holiday dinner, which included "soup, boiled pork (the national dish), roast goose, chicken pie and vegetables, with a second course of plum pudding, apple tart and a trifle".

Winters were really cold in those early days. The winter of 1833, the mercury froze in the thermometer, which touched 40 below zero. But travel on Upper Canada's primitive roads was better when they were snow-packed. And Christmas visiting was popular, the snugly dressed guests arriving in sleighs or even in wagon boxes mounted on runners.

Too commercialized?

Christmas is too "commercialized? Humbug!

Christmas is what we as individuals make it. It might as easily be said to be too romanticized or too selfish a season.

If we think of the birth of the season signifies and turn off our understanding at that age of Jesus' childhood we lose the heart of Christianity and fall prey to the theory of it being too romanticized a season.

It is true that Christmas is too commercialized if we decide it is necessary to spend more than we have, to display the love or affection which we scrimped on during the year.

There is a pattern, perhaps rationalized by the gifts of the Wise Men, of giving gifts at Christmas. We doubt the wise men's gifts impoverished them or put them into debt for months ahead. Their gifts were symbols.

It is not required that gifts at Christmas should deprive us of necessities. The simplest gift will

be as appreciatively received if given and received in respect and understanding. And the simplest gift may be nothing more tangible than a visit, a letter or a personal greeting.

It might be said Christmas is a selfish season. People don't share as openly with others less fortunate, it can be argued. It is true that the method of "sharing" has changed, however. Helping the "poor" at Christmas has now been altered to provide help on a year-round basis through a society that has built in such assistance.

Groups that have tried to find areas of need have often been frustrated when they find help from others has already filled freezers and stockings. The thought of caring cannot go unnoticed though.

Christmas will be as we make it—personally. It is a season with the ingredients for the sharing of goodwill and good fellowship but we become the container within

which the mix is made—successfully or otherwise.

The cheery greeting starts with us—the forgotten slight starts with us—the appreciation spoken for the efforts of others starts with us.

The Christmas spirit is within us year-round but at this season of the year some magic loosens it and we are inclined to allow that spirit freer reign. It sometimes surprises us.

We should all seek the happiness of the season for it is a festive celebration, enjoy the gaiety of the tinsel and colored lights for their welcome brightness, participate in the sharing of gifts and greetings, seek to spread the joy of Christmas to others who may be alone or lonely, unlock our reign on that intangible spirit that it might lighten the burden of others.

Too commercialized? Too romanticized? Too selfish?...humbug. Christmas is what we—personally—will make it in spirit and in deed.

Back Issues of The Free Press

20 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 24, 1853.

The largest number of children ever to be presented with gifts at the annual Beardmore Christmas party crowded the Roxy Theatre last Friday afternoon. Master of ceremonies R. R. Parker called the names of about 400 youngsters up to the age of 14 as they received their gifts from Santa. Entertainment was provided.

Junior and senior assemblies and parties in the kindergarten started the Christmas holidays happily. Lynne Masters presented Mr. Mann with a pair of gloves on behalf of the students. Keith Ranney was chairman for the senior assembly. Carol singing was led by E. Smith. Gloves and a scarf were presented to Mr. Price.

Christmas dinner was enjoyed by the Rotarians in the Dominion Hotel. Contests were directed and musical numbers were given by Ed Watson on his 12-stringed guitar. Hilarity was caused by the exchange of presents distributed by Bill Coon. Santa Claus delighted the children of the nursery school in the Y. The youngsters and about 40 mothers were gathered for the occasion.

Excitement ran high at the Baptist church at the annual Christmas entertainment. Taking part in the program were Ralph and John Tripp, Mrs. Ralph Tripp, with a duet by two of the tiny tots, Joanne Landsborough and Ruth Costerus. There were plays and a visit from Santa.

About 150 children of Wool Combining employees attended their first Christmas party in the Roxy theatre. Jack Smith, union president, was master of ceremonies. Mr. Knox spoke briefly. Mrs. Janet Rogers, union secretary, called the children's names.

Miss Margaret Blow received an award for high standing at the capping ceremony at St. Joseph's hospital.

After the Y's Men's dinner 14 couples went to the Brant Inn for dancing.

50 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 20, 1923.

The first of the long list of Christmas trees of this community for the festive season was held on Monday evening in the Methodist Sunday School room. There were choruses, piano solo by Marjorie Switzer, recitations by Helen Loraine Ostrander, solo by Rudolph Spielvogel with chorus by 10 young ladies; character sketches by Robert Kerr and selections by the Sunday School orchestra. Mrs. Ada Ostrander had charge of the programme. A feature which gave unbounded joy was the arrival of Santa Claus welcomed by superintendent A. T. Brown. The worthy impersonator of Santa was none other than Mr. Charles Wilson, the fatherly superintendent of the Hydro-Electric plant here.

The annual meeting of the Children's Aid Society was held in Milton. Inspector W. H. Stewart reported on the children in care at the Gordon Home. There have been 181 children involved the past year.

Acton lost one of its honored and venerable citizens last Saturday when death came to Mr. Thomas Statham. He was born in England in 1842 and came to Canada, living at Georgetown. He was wounded in the Civil War. He came to Acton 38 years ago and was a baker.

Christmas services at the Methodist church will be led by a choir of 60 voices.

German toys are flooding the Canadian market this year, being so cheap the toys made in Canada find it hard to compete.

Sleighs and cutters are running and the merry sleigh bells heard now.

The usual quiet of Limehouse was disturbed by a visit from the inspectors visiting a couple of citizens looking for moonshine. One resident has been summoned to court in Acton today.

75 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 15, 1898.

Halton elected Mr. Barber a second time in the by-election Thursday. The contest was a hot one.

Twenty-four brand new teachers have completed the model school courses at Milton. Among them are Minnie Bennett and Minnie Holmes.

An approaching wedding at Everton is making the dressmakers busy just now and is good for trade generally. Dame Rumor has it that there will be nearly 200 guests.

Mr. Chas. Humphries, tea merchant, was in Acton on Saturday and he says that during the 23 years that he has been travelling he never encountered roads drifted worse. He upset six times inside of three miles, and had to get out to break the road. This was on the cross road from Acton to the Eramosa Road. He says many of the side lines are drifted level with the fences.

Complaints have been made that in trimming the trees at various points in town, for the electric wires to pass through, the workmen have not trimmed them evenly, with a view to their future well-balanced appearance. The authorities explain that the present trimming is but temporary and in the spring the trees will be put in satisfactory shape.

Mr. W. A. Campbell, road instructor for the province, has been making a tour and it is likely statute labor will be abolished and money for improving main roads may be raised by the municipalities.

The nominations, coming on Christmas day, will be but thinly attended. Only the most ardent municipal politicians will jeopardize their Christmas dinner to attend the nominations.

Most of the electric light poles have been put in. There will be 56 electric lights on the streets.

Christmas examinations at the school Wednesday. The public will be welcomed.

OUR READERS WRITE:

Regional councillors' salaries questioned

December 14, 1973.

Dear Mr. Editor:

This is an open letter which I would like to direct to regional councillors in our area and in particular, Len Coxe and Tom Hill. I attended the ratepayers' meeting in Burlington a week ago and heard many eye-opening questions which I feel must be answered.

It is incomprehensible to me that if the job of a local councillor is full time, how a Regional Councillor can make a full time position of it; if in fact that is what is alleged by our councillors.

These regional councillors increased salaries from \$4,000 to \$8,500.00, in addition to which they get \$5,800.00 for sitting on local councils, for a total of \$14,300 annually, one-third of which is tax free giving them an effective salary of about \$17,000 to \$18,000 per year, in addition to which they receive 15c per mile gas allowance on their cars.

To add insult to injury, by law they are under no obligation to attend any local

council meetings for which they are being paid. Both the regional and local councillor jobs are considered part-time, taking about 15 hours a week in all. Should this command a healthy full time wage?

Even if the regional councillors take the position that they do not know as yet how much time is involved in this newly created job, would it not be more responsible to their electors to wait six months and then reset their wages? Or in the alternative, set up a study to find out what the country folk think of a raise in their taxes for this purpose? I noticed a distinct lack of their intention before these men were elected. No mention was made of it. They haven't even tackled the job yet and they have voted for more money.

Do the regional councillors believe that this is a full time job? If they do, then I expect any one of us could reach them during the course of most days at an office number and that they would diligently be working on being a councillor for us eight hours a day, five days a week. And, of course, they wouldn't have time for any

other full time job or for that matter most other part time jobs.

It brings to mind my husband's story of a fellow who applied for a position for which he was over-qualified. My husband stated that the job would be too easy for him. To which he replied, "But I could make it difficult."

Would a Ratepayers' Association be welcomed by the councillors to monitor their time and energy spent on council work? Not very likely!

My dear honourable councillors, do you feel that lining your pockets with the sweat and tears of people who had faith in you; hard working people who struggle along on one-quarter the money you voted yourself for a part-time job; people who in their trusting way will not realize why their farm taxes have increased to the point where they must sacrifice to meet their tax burdens; is much of an indication of our "just society"?

We await your justification!

Katherine Fee,
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