

## Acres of Memory

BY D A CAMPBELL

I will never forget the day that Jeremy Fraser, the undertaker, came into the "Grunt and Thunder" office to cancel his ad. He was dressed in a black suit, immaculate as a tailor's dummy, and his face was like those which received his expert attention. His glassy eyes looked through me, and his voice was a monotone, carried on a breath of peppermint - the camouflage for his secret nips at the bottle.

Jeremy was like no other undertaker I had ever met. He was not just an odd ball - he was weird! To this day, I am not sure if he was a poker-faced comedian, or merely repeated stock phrases which had a double meaning.

He held out his hand, and I thought I had grasped a cold, damp fish. When he spoke, his glazed eyes seemed to be analysing my skeleton, as if he were measuring me for a casket!

"I deeply regret that I must cancel my weekly advertisement. There is no competition in this area and mine is strictly none repeat business". His face was expressionless. "Actually," he droned, "my establishment is an advertisement in itself. It is ideally located on the main street - the dead centre of Redtree, if you know what I mean".

I knew precisely both meanings! For a moment, I was about to lose control of myself and burst into laughter, but the loss of eight dollars per month advertising revenue was not exactly funny. A dollar was a dollar in those days!

Jeremy Fraser could not have operated his business without assistance. Unfortunately, his continuous binges and alcoholic fogs, did not create a good employment climate. Hires and firings were frequent, but I suspect that more assistants quit than were actually fired. One case in point was an apprentice called Willie Simpson.

Willie was a bag of nerves with a vivid imagination - hardly a "natural" for the profession. He was goaded into taking the job by a widowed mother, who found it necessary to have her son in very steady employment. Willie was her sole means of support.

After a period of preliminary instruction, (which did nothing to improve the lad's neurotic state), he was launched on his first solo mission. Willie dropped off

at an isolated farmhouse to prepare an old bachelor for his last journey.

"I'll be back for you in one hour," Jeremy told the boy. "Here's the key. Be sure to lock the door when you've finished".

It was almost dusk, and the sky was pregnant with storm, as Willie, case in hand, reluctantly made his way up the driveway to the lonely house. There was a strong warm wind blowing, cutting swaths through the overgrown grassland and turning the blades of an ancient windmill, causing it to screech in rustling pain. Across the black clouds in the west, a blue streak of lightning snaked to earth and thunder echoed ominously over the rolling land.

To a stronger character than Willie, the scene would have been eerie and foreboding. The lad shivered involuntarily. On this otherwise warm evening, he felt the icy hand of fear clutching at his innards, and his mouth was parched and dry.

"A man who sez 'e 'as no fear, is either a liar or a lunatic," his mother had told him, to compensate for his nervousness. "You'll git used to it - so yer will - somebody 'as ter do it".

Willie wondered why he had to be the one. There must be some other way to make a buck - any way but this! He leaned into the wind, eyes half closed against the blowing dust, and gripped the brim of his hat with his free hand.

When he reached the house, he paused to catch his

breath and debated whether he should go inside, or return and tell Jeremy what he could do with his job. The recollection of his mother's face, both demanding and appealing, decided the issue.

He fished in his pocket for the key and with trembling hand opened the door and groped for a light switch. The late (or present) owner had not advanced with the times. In the fading gloom, he found a dirty oil lamp on the kitchen table and touched a lighted match to the wick.

Fighting against his fear, Willie found his way to the staircase. He climbed slowly, carrying his case in one hand, and holding the lamp in front of him with the other, like a protective weapon. Every squeak of the stair treads added to his terror. By the time he reached the landing his nerves were on a razor's edge.

He guessed at the room and picked the right one, the yellow glow lighting the silent form which required attention. Placing the lamp on a littered dresser, he opened his case and prepared to go to work.

Willie never knew what triggered the fiendish noise which instantly reduced him to jelly. It was human (or was it inhuman?), like a groan of agonizing pain, drawn out and terrifying. At the same moment the room was lit to brilliance by a nearby lightning bolt, and the house was rocked on its foundations by a boom of deafening thunder. As far as Willie was concerned, he stood at the very gates of hell!

He left everything, his bag, lamp still burning and stumbled down the dark stairway and out into the night, sobbing like a child. The house was left open at the mercy of the storm, and the door swung to and fro in the wind. It is said that he ran all the way back to Redtree in a torrential rain and little was seen of Willie or his mother again. Perhaps she found him a steady job in another community!

Shortly after the incident, Jeremy Fraser placed a "Help Wanted" ad in the "Grunt and Thunder". At that time, he gave me a few more samples of his double talk.

"I may not be very popular," he reflected in his usual monotonous tone, "but sooner or later, everybody pays me a visit."

As a parting glance, he measured me again with his glassy eyes.

"I'll be seeing you," he said. e 9

## The law and you . . .

(Continued from page 5)

Under this latter jurisdiction, some judges have been quite innovative and have ordered that juveniles undertake various community projects in lieu of more traditional punishment.

10. Q: Can the Family Court make orders respecting the care and custody of children?

A: Yes, however the jurisdiction of the court to make an award as to custody under the Deserted Wives and Children's Maintenance Act is restricted to where a financial award has been made. Since only wives can apply for maintenance under this Act, only wives can be awarded custody. If a judge decides the husband should have custody, then he will so indicate with reasons but no maintenance or custody order is made in his favour. Most of this will be radically changed by the proposed Family Law Reform Act, whereby it will be possible for either spouse to apply for maintenance and therefore custody of the children as well.

11. Q: Rather than convict an offender, Judges will often hand down a stern warning and give the person charged an absolute discharge. What are the implications of this?

A: An absolute discharge means that the accused has been found guilty of the charge but that he has not been convicted of the charge. The accused does not have a criminal record as such, but while there has been no conviction recorded or registered by the court, the court will have registered a record of the discharge. The Criminal Records Act treats the discharge the same as a conviction and in this sense, it will be necessary for an accused person to apply for a pardon one year from the date of the discharge.

12. Q: One often finds Judges or Justices of the Peace asking an accused person whether he has or desires legal counsel. What if a person can't afford a lawyer?

A: If a Judge does not mention it to a person, that person will usually request an opportunity to speak to counsel before they enter a plea on a charge, whether guilty or not guilty. For those who cannot afford a lawyer the Ontario Legal Aid Plan may provide a certificate.

The granting of these certificates is based on financial criteria and in terms of the offence or cause of action involved. An individual can then take the certificate to a lawyer willing to take his case.

As well, duty counsel service is available at provincial and family courts. Their primary function is to advise accused persons on their first appearance.

## Ontario's Workplace

Strikes, lockouts, man-hours lost, collective bargaining, arbitration. A whole new language. A whole new reality.

Since World War II the growth for trade unions and the passage of provincial legislation has greatly changed the climate and activity in the area of industrial relations in this province.

More workers in more industries were organized and more unions earned the right to bargain with management for wages, benefits and working conditions. In 1948 and 1950 Ontario passed its own labour relations legislation. The Ontario Labour Relations Act we have today is the result of the last 25 years of experience and growing pains.

The Labour Relations Act determines how a union is certified with the exclusive right to bargain with management for all employees in their bargaining unit. It outlines the procedures whereby a group of employees can choose a union to represent them, without interference from management during the organizing period.

Once a union is chosen, provisions in the Act promote orderly collective bargaining and obliges the parties, management and the union to bargain in good faith. The Act lays down the rules for the bargaining process and timing of strikes or lockouts.

The Act also provides for fair representation by the union and the provision of information about the conduct of union affairs.

In recent years Canada has had one of the world's highest rates of man-hours lost by strikes and lockouts among industrialized nations. This record seriously affects our economy and hurts our international competitive position. There appears to be a trend lately to lower our man-hours lost position, and Ontario, as Canada's leading industrial province, has a great deal to do with the overall figures.

Industrial relations seems to be entering a new phase in its evolution and the outcome of these developments will, to a great extent, determine our future as a people and a trading nation.

Co-operation can replace conflict in management-labour relationships. Quality of working life needs to be given priority over short-term material gains.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour is part of this important debate and the day-to-day realities of its application. The Ministry invites and welcomes your participation. It is most important; for information contact:

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