

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Schools must keep pace: Principal

By MICHAEL HOLLETT Herald editor

Howard Wrigglesworth Public School principal Eric Balkind believes educators today cannot afford to hide in ivory towers. He thinks that more and more those charged with educating the young people of

this country must develop closer links with the outside community.

He says that public education is now "definitely at a crossroads" and it is essential that there be a dialogue within the community as to which direction, or directions, should

be pursued.

"There is tremendous public scrutiny of education today, there is great concern and some confusion.

"A problem with the teaching profession is that some people think we can communicate with the public because

we are teachers. This is not necessarily so."

Mr. Balkind acknowledges that education is a controversial field today and thinks some of this controversy may have arisen due to lack of understanding by parents and failure to communicate information about the systems by teachers.

He thinks educators should not be afraid to speak out about education. It is necessary for educators to voice their opinions and, at the same time, be receptive to input from the community, he says.

OUTSPOKEN PRINCIPAL Mr. Balkind practices what he preaches and has become known as one of Halton's more outspoken principals since he began advocating that parenting courses be added to school curriculum.

In his proposal which is currently being considered by the school board, Mr. Balkind thinks school children should be given formal instruction in the 'science' of being a proper parent.

"Being a parent is the most demanding, difficult and rewarding job one can face yet we give no training for young people.

"You need a license to drive a truck but nothing to raise a child.

"This might have been sufficient when the grandparents were close by and the extended family existed but we are very mobile today and many young parents have no one to turn to."

MAY HELP

Mr. Balkind thinks that parenting courses would help provide young parents with the knowledge and help they may have received from other family members in the past.

While the school board has indicated interest in the idea, not everyone agreed with Mr. Balkind's decisions to speak out through the newspapers and public meetings.

"I think we have to be honest and speak up."

Mr. Balkind would like to see schools become more integrated with the communities they serve.

"I see school buildings as the only public building that remains a focus in the community. They could become, with the community's help, really dynamic.

BECOME CENTRES "I think schools should become centres for human development."

He thinks the community at large should have more access and more use of school buildings.

"But, to do that means changes, not the least of which would be in the design of the buildings themselves."

Despite Mr. Balkind's impassioned thoughts on education, he did not always intend to pursue teaching as a career and, in fact, enter the field comparatively late in life.

Mr. Balkind was born and raised in London, England and says that as a child, university was not really a consideration for him.

BECAME BANKER When he did graduate from school he became a banker. His family immigrated to Canada in 1951 and Mr. Balkind conituted his career in bank-



Howard Wrigglesworth principal Eric Balkind, shown here in his school office, wonders if the problem with education is

that it has failed to keep up with society rather than moved too fast.

(Herald photo by Michael Hollett)



Roy Gillett is shown here with the new 1938 Chevrolet he was driving in the spring of 1938, just after the first taxi union was established in Toronto. The building

behind him is the Royal York as seen from a side door. The big hotels and Union Station were the best places to pick up fares, he recalls.

New taxi union is not the first

By MAGGIE HANNAH Herald staff writer

While union, management and anyone else involved with it was busily pointing out that they had set a precedent by establishing a taxi union in Georgetown last week one town resident was laughing up his sleeve at their ignorance of the past.

Roy Gillett, who lives in the Durham Street senior citizens' apartment was one of three men who organized a taxi drivers' union in the city of Toronto in 1937 which flourished until 1950.

"We wanted \$12.50 a week and union recognition," he says, "and we went on strike for 16 days in the middle of the Depression to get what we wanted."

Prior to the formation of the union Mr. Gillett says, the companies had everything their way.

"If you even looked cross-ways at them they'd tell you to park the car against the wall. Someone else would take it out. You were fired immediately."

THREE MEN

The three men, including Mr. Gillett, got together and made up notices and the drivers themselves contributed the funds to rent a room in the Labour Temple in which the meeting was held.

The turnout for the meeting was tremendous, he says, and the original men stepped aside and let the "more intellectual types" take over once the meeting was convened.

"We hired Mike Nichols as an organizer," he says. "I'll never forget him. He was a fiery young Irishman associated with the Teamsters Union. We only paid him about \$20 a week."

"You have to realize how different things were then," he says. "It was the middle of the Depression and we were on strike for 16 days. We had a lot of married men with families and things were very hard for them."

"We sent out a fleet of cars every morning to hit the vegetable market, and the bread, meat and milk companies begging donations," he says. "The public was really behind us. Their support was surprising. The goon squad as we called the foragers, came home with their cars literally full of food every night. Then we'd divide it all up and send it to the married men with families. The restaurants staked the single men to a 29c meal voucher each day. And you got a good meal for 29c then too."

"We shut the companies down completely," he says. "Only the independent owners were operating and they were raking money in so they kicked

in 50c a day to us. A few of the bigger companies tried to keep their cabs on the road during the first couple of days but they'd either find their keys gone or their cabs rolled over or something so they gave it up pretty quickly."

NO RECOGNITION

"They offered us \$15 a week and no union recognition," he says, "but we wouldn't accept it. Finally they came around. By the time the companies began selling out their cars we were up to \$32 a week." Originally the union had around 200 members.

After the initial organizational problems Mr. Gillett says contract negotiations always went very smoothly. Raises arrived as they were demanded and there was never any further need to strike. Union members paid \$2 a month in dues to the Teamsters and everything worked very well.

Until around 1950. At that time companies were installing radios in the cabs and many companies saw a chance to get out of the expensive part of the business and hang onto the lucrative end. They sold all their cars to drivers who became independent operators and kept only a dispatch office from which calls were dispensed to drivers. For the privilege of having calls relayed to them drivers paid the dispatch companies a set amount (it's now up to \$300 a month) on top of all their other expenses.

When he first began driving a cab in 1937 cabbies were gentlemen, Mr. Gillett says.

"No one tried to beat another driver out of a fare," he says. "since the hotels downtown and the railway station were the best places to get fares you always tried to get back down to that area. But if another driver passed you in the tunnel (near Union Station) you'd find him waiting for you when you got to the station. He'd have left a spot for you because he knew you should have been first in the line up to collect passengers."

While drivers weren't about to beat each other out of fares they figured beating the company was a fair deal and everyone did it," Mr. Gillett says.

Toronto was divided into zones, in the days before cabs had meters, and every time a driver passed a zone line he added 25c to the fare.

ONLY A BLOCK

"If you only went a block over the zone line you simply put it on your run sheet stopping short of that line and pocketed the 25c," he explains. "That was part of how you made your extra money."

"The companies used to use

Pinkerton men to try and check up on who was cheating them, but they rarely caught anyone. There was something about them. You just knew who they were."

"They tried it on me once. I picked this guy up and he wanted me to take him to some place and wait for him. That jacked the fare automatically. He was only a couple of minutes then when he came out I took him some other place and waited again. We drove to three or four stops and never went outside of the same zone. It was a natural for not turning in the extra fares for all these stops but I was suspicious. There was something funny about it all.

"When I got in that night the boss fairly grabbed the run sheet out of my hand. I asked him if he was looking for that Pinkerton run and he turned beet red. I'd put it down and turned in all my money, though, so I had no trouble about it," he chuckles.

Although there was no particular uniform the drivers were required to dress neatly, wear a tie and above all, remember to wear their hats. They were forbidden to advertise on their cars. There was no restriction on the colour of the cars but they must be perfectly plain. They were just allowed to put a cardboard in the window with the word "Taxi" printed on it when they didn't have a fare in the car.

LIKE CHAUFFEURS

"We acted like chauffeurs," he says, "opening doors for people and helping the elderly. Of course we got more tips that way too, but we thought of ourselves as gentlemen. I remember one Toronto mayor, I think it was Alan Lamport, saying that Toronto cabbies were comprised of a bunch of thugs and crooks. I remember how mad I was at the time. But now, I have to admit I think he's right."

"The business is really rotten now," he continues. "I'm very glad to be out of it after 40 years. It's full of payoffs. The Metro Licensing Board, for example, tells you exactly who you can sell your cab to and how much you can charge him and it doesn't matter who you have lined up as a buyer. You sell to the person they say or you don't sell."

"There are people in the city who own 200 cab licences or more and never operate a car. They lease them out to other people at \$200 or so a month. These people may operate cabs under these licences or they may re-lease them for a higher fee. In the end the poor driver who leases and operates the licence works like made to meet his bills, let alone earn a living."

ing with Barclay's in Canada for another 18 months.

He says, "Basically I went to work in the bank because I really didn't know what else I wanted to do. Schools then didn't have any real guidance programs for young people."

After leaving his bank job in Canada, Mr. Balkind went to work for the A.V. Roe company in Malton, developers of the ill-fated Avro Arrow jet fighter.

He worked there for 18 months and then resigned because he felt "there wasn't much future in that job."

He went to teachers' college in Toronto where he was told "I might make a very fine teacher if only I could lose my accent."

"I haven't managed to do that," he smiles.

After completing the one year program, Mr. Balkind says he was offered three different teaching jobs. He finally settled on a job in Toronto's North York.

He says teaching appealed to

him as a profession because he viewed it as a challenge. He also likes working with people, especially young people.

"I hoped that perhaps I could make a contribution."

Mr. Balkind taught in North York for four years and then went west to teach in British Columbia in New Westminster.

"BC always fascinated me and I love living beside the ocean."

A CHALLENGE

However, after a year Mr. Balkind was back in Ontario teaching in North York for another year before being offered the post of first principal of the Limehouse School, which was then under the Esqueping School Board.

Mr. Balkind was principal of Limehouse school from 1962 until 1967.

He then became a supervisor for the Esqueping Board and was responsible for seven schools. That position disappeared when the board be-

came absorbed into the Halton board.

HEAD OFFICE

Mr. Balkind then worked as an administrative assistant in the board's head office for a year before becoming principal of Harrison School in Georgetown.

Mr. Balkind spent one year on educational leave in Toronto where he concentrated on child study. He then returned to Halton and took over at Wrigglesworth School where he has been principal for the past three years.

As a long time teacher, Mr. Balkind has seen schools, and criticism of the change regularly of the last 23 years.

While Mr. Balkind says schools today are receiving criticism from all sides, he acknowledges that the majority of this criticism does come from the conservative sector.

"In times of economic recession people become more conservative and draw back. We are in that now. In times of problems, people look back

when things were better and think the same for schools.

Mr. Balkind acknowledges the need for fiscal responsibility but he doesn't believe across the board cutting back of educational spending is a good approach.

BE PREPARED

He argues "we should be prepared to invest money now for savings later. For example figures show that something like 90 per cent of the people in prisons had learning disabilities or had extremely unhappy homes. The cost of keeping someone in prison for a year is \$25,000.

"The same money would be better used in prevention. That \$25,000 is more than you would pay a special education teacher."

"We must be prepared to save money where we can but also be prepared to spend where we must."

Mr. Balkind readily acknowledges that there are problems with the educational system but says he doesn't think schools have strayed that far from the three 'R's'.

"I'm more worried that we haven't kept up. The problem may be not that we have strayed so far from the past but that we haven't kept up with the future."

FACE CHANGES

"To survive schools have to face changes. It is idle to leave schools in the 19th century when the rest of us are living in the 20th and 21st.

Mr. Balkind argues that schools have never really come to grips with television. When he was a child, reading was a common past-time for adults and children but now television is the most common form of entertainment.

TV IS THE NEW LITERACY

He cites dealing with the phenomenon of television as one example of where education must move into the 20th century.

Mr. Balkind is also an advocate of publicly supported alternative schools.

"The diversity of public opinion is a good argument for alternative schools so people within a community can send their children to the kind of school they really believe in."

ALL CONCERNS

"As it stands now we can't encompass all of the public's concerns."

Mr. Balkind is an Acton resident where he lives with his wife, Peggie and their children, Joe, 13, Jeff, 12, Nadine, 10, and Jillian 7.



WEEDLESS WEEK

Mary Ellen Bridge holds one of the signs on display at the Georgetown library last week as part of the National Education Week on Smoking. The display was set up by the local chapter of

the Canadian Cancer Society as part of the Halton Council on Smoking and Health.

(Herald photo by Maggie Hannah)