

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Father started councillor in career

By MAGGIE HANNAH Herald staff writer

In a time when teenagers are allowed to choose their own school courses and have a major say in their life, it seems incredible that parents once controlled their children so well they could buy a business for them and expect them to give up careers to run that business.

Georgetown councillor Walter Biehn did just that when he became Jack-of-most-trades with the Georgetown Herald in 1940.

Mr. Biehn was learning accounting with a firm in Toronto when his father telephoned him to say he had heard the Herald was for sale and he wanted to buy it and expected Walter to run it.

"I more or less told him I was in accounting and happy at it and I didn't want to run a newspaper," Mr. Biehn said. "So he told me he was going to buy it anyway and if I wouldn't

run it then he'd hire somebody else to do it."

That was in February. Mr. Biehn put out his first edition of the Herald on March 12, 1940. He retired April 5, 1973.

DIAL TELEPHONES

"I never aspired to be a millionaire," Mr. Biehn laughs. "The Herald was a very personal paper for the town. The coming of dial telephones was probably the biggest boost we got. Before that the telephone operators heard all the news so people bought the paper more to find out what we had missed rather than to see what we knew. After that they got the paper to find out the news."

When he first arrived in town he was a "new boy" and totally green to both the community and the news game. He credits his backshop people and Garfield McGilvray in particular with breaking him in so that he was able to carry on for 33 years at a job he never

really wanted but eventually came to enjoy.

"Mac took over the paper when Mr. Moore (the Herald's former owner) took sick and he knew it well," he says. "He helped me a great deal and we're still good friends."

Breaking him in to the newspaper game wasn't all done that neatly, however. Some things he picked up by trial and error. At one point, he says, he used to do a sort of news digest of world events and national affairs too.

"Then I got too busy for a few weeks and I didn't do it. Nobody noticed," he chuckles. "That's when I learned that the world outside Georgetown didn't exist as far as the paper was concerned. All that mattered for us was the town and the immediate surroundings."

Originally the Herald consisted of four people. Mac McGilvray, the late Les Clarke and Reg Broomhead took care of the back shop and the job

printing the Herald did, while Mr. Biehn "wrote what copy there was, proof read it, sold the ads, answered the phone, kept the books, sent out the bills, and assembled most of the paper on printing day".

In the beginning the Herald was produced on an old Campbell flatbed press that printed four pages at a time.

FOUR PAGES

"We ran four pages through then we turned them over and ran the next four through," Mr. Biehn says. "Then we cut them on our cutter and folded them all by hand. When we got enough ahead that the boys in the back could manage by themselves then I'd start in on the mailing."

Finally when their circulation got up around the 6,000 mark it got too bad and they farmed out the actual printing of the paper to other papers. It has been printed in Guelph, Oakville, Brampton and even Galt at various times.

"We were up to about 26 pages then so you can imagine what it was like in that back shop with 6,000 pages in one pile and 6,000 in another pile and 6,000 somewhere else," he says. "You couldn't turn a found in there so we had to go to a different press."

Mr. Biehn sold the paper to the Thomson chain in 1959 and remained as the publisher until 1973. By the time he sold the paper he had added front office staff and part time reporting staff.

"The only change Thomson made was to bring in an ad manager," he says. "John Ollivier was ad manager and the whole ad staff, in fact, at that time. I never had more than one ad person the whole time I was there."

Mr. Biehn was born in Chesley, Ontario, the son of a school dentist. Although the family moved to Windsor when he was six they returned to the town every school holiday and each summer because Mr. Biehn senior was a partner in a Ford car dealership there.

Mr. Biehn attended the University of Western Ontario because it was expected of him and went into a business administration course with a Toronto firm after he graduated from Western.

HAD THE MONEY

"In those days the kids who went to university were mostly the ones whose parents had the money to send them," he says. "There were no government grants then so a lot of the students were there because their parents expected it of them rather than because they had any burning ambition to enter some field that required a degree. The others were the ones who had scrimped and saved and worked themselves to the bone to get the money to go."

Mr. Biehn says at one point he considered entering law but he changed his mind and opted for accounting instead. It was about that time that his father decided the publisher of the Chesley newspaper led a reasonably good life and was well respected in the community. Maybe that would be a good field for Walter to explore.

There were a lot of newspapers up for sale in 1939, Mr. Biehn remembers. He and his father looked at papers in Chesley, Grimsby, Tweed and Smith's Falls and stepped in Georgetown on their way



Taking orders to speed up the service during the noon hour rush at McDonald's has become a regular occurrence for councillor Walter Biehn. Here he takes an order from Bill Cook.

It is one way to keep him in touch with people, Mr. Biehn says, and he never was too proud to do any honest job. Besides it keeps him busy. (Herald photo)

through one afternoon. Mr. Moore was ill then but Mr. Biehn senior felt it might be worth keeping an eye on the place in case he decided to sell it in the near future.

Mr. Biehn married Mary Feller from Georgetown in 1940 and joined the army the next year. Mrs. Biehn took over the paper and ran it while her husband was away as well as looking after their infant daughter, Carolyn.

"My wife was one Hell of a smart girl," Mr. Biehn says. "Some people used to tell me that her Chatting column was the one decent thing in the whole paper. She was a polished writer. I'm not. I'm what I call a production writer. I need the pressure, but she could have worked for any daily."

"I'd go to council Monday night. Then Tuesday morning I'd hammer out my council stories with Mac screaming in my ear for more copy and yanking each page out of my hand as I tore it out of the typewriter. In between I'd be answering the phone and having to plug my ear to hear the caller over the noise of the press on the other side of the

glass partition. The shop was much smaller then. It would never do today."

PERSONAL PAPER

"The paper was a very personal part of the town then. There were a bunch of us who got meals regularly at the restaurant and Mrs. Long just fed us all together at a big table in the kitchen, sort of like a boarding house. Anyway, right after what she called the 'hatched, matched and dispatched' columns, Mrs. Long would go through the classified ads and I heard her saying to her daughters things like 'I guess there won't be any more babies at the so-and-so's. They're selling their carriage.' Or, 'the so-and-so's must have some new furniture. I see they're selling their chesterfield.' A lot of people put their names in the ads in those days but if they didn't the telephone numbers were so small it was no trick to look a number up in the book and find out who was selling what. The classified ads were what sold us then because the town was so small that by the time we got on the street everyone knew all the news already as gossip."

Classified ads were news in the early days of Mr. Biehn's acquaintance with Georgetown.

"I'll bet you never thought of the ads as news, did you?" Mr. Biehn laughs. "But I found out how to read them so they were news almost as soon as I came

to town. I was part of what they called the kitchen gang at Long's restaurant. (Today it's the Green Dragon). There were a bunch of us who got meals regularly at the restaurant and Mrs. Long just fed us all together at a big table in the kitchen, sort of like a boarding house.

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If readers need an example

of how small the town was they have only to hear Mr. Biehn say he got many items for the personal column by driving around on a Sunday and noticing who had strange cars parked in front of their house. Then Monday he'd call them up and find out who their visitor was for the personal column.

The biggest story The Herald covered in his 33 years was the coming of the Deirex subdivision, Mr. Biehn says. The whole affair was shrouded in secrecy and no one knew until council and Mr. Heslop were ready to announce it that such a move was planned. It was even bigger than the end of World War II, because it was local.

"I found out strictly by accident that something was going on with council and it involved Heslop of Rexdale," he says. "Then I didn't know what to do about it. If I spilled the beans and there was a big outcry that stopped it, would I be the man that stopped progress? I spent a lot of sleepless nights over that."

Mr. Biehn says that Heslop didn't need to bribe council or use the underhanded tricks rumour credits him with using. He was a very smart businessman and could flatter them into what he wanted between the thrill of being involved in such a big deal and the immortality of having streets named after them.

Mr. Biehn says upon reflection that he wasn't a terribly good newsman. He was always afraid of hurting someone so he didn't cover all the events others might have done in his place.

JUDGE, JURY

Mr. Biehn's wife died in 1977 and he became a councillor in the municipal election that year. He is also involved in the Chamber of Commerce and spends a couple of hours helping out at McDonald's most days.

He has three children and four grandchildren.

He began taking orders on McDonald's Day when crippled children and found he enjoyed being out with people again, so he has carried it on.

"I kid Pete (Pomeroy) that he's going to have to watch out in about 18 years. I should be a shoe in for mayor when all these little kids grow up. They all associate me with McDonald's and you see them nudging their mothers on the street and whispering about me," he chuckles.



LIONS PRESENT

(Herald photo)

Elmer Lloyd of the Georgetown Lions Club made a presentation on behalf of the Lions to Scoutmaster Hank Martin of the 8th Georgetown Cubs and Scouts last Tuesday as part of the club's celebration of World Day of Service, when Lions Clubs around the world do something in recognition of another community group. In this case, the Lions Club held a barbecue for the cubs and scouts, and followed it with an evening of fun and games. The club also donated a number of useful items to the boys, including a camp stove, a tent and a flag and flag pole.

No allergy cure Actonians told

Once a person has been diagnosed as allergic he can never be cured. His symptoms may change and the allergy may seem to have been cured, but it isn't. It has simply exchanged the first symptoms for a new and different set, said the president of the Allergy Information Association.

Mrs. Daglish, said that the only common thing about allergies is their dissimilarity. No two people have exactly the same reaction to the same circumstances. While one person praises the benefit he has received from herbs, for example, the next person will blame herbs for causing the allergy.

Allergic reactions are really immune reactions, Mrs. Daglish explained. The mast cells in the allergic human body produce too much protective mucus to combat the particular foreign substance and as a result the allergic individual suffers for the over-reaction. The excessive mucus produces swelling and this results in the puffy, red, itchy symptoms often associated with allergy.

RAGWEED REACTION

Ragweed is the most sensitizing substance there is, Mrs. Daglish said. It is native to North America and this is why many European people develop allergies here which they didn't have in the old country. Once ragweed has triggered the reaction other substances also tend to cause it.

Mrs. Daglish said the sufferer begins by being allergic to ragweed. Then he finds he is also allergic to grass pollens. Then tree pollens trigger his allergy. And moulds. Finally he becomes allergic to house dust and he suffers from a constant allergy rather than a seasonal thing which comes with certain substances and goes when their season ends.

considered as non-specific irritants which all people with allergies are warned to avoid. They are animals, house dust, tobacco smoke, air pollutants and strong odours such as point and perfumes.

One doctor Mrs. Daglish knows of, tells his patients he won't even treat them unless they get rid of any sources of these irritants which may be in their homes. One of his patients complained that she couldn't rid herself of tobacco smoke in her home since her husband smoked and refused to quit. The doctor told her to get rid of her husband then, if she was really serious about controlling her allergies.

Allergies are considered to be a threshold disease, Mrs. Daglish said, and allergic people have a lower threshold than others when they come in contact with, ingest or inhale irritants. The irritants which cause reactions are really harmless substances to most people but trigger unreasonably severe reactions in allergic people.

FOOD PROBLEMS

Foods cause many allergies. Mrs. Daglish said that 80 per cent of the members of their association are allergic to milk while 40 per cent are allergic to what. Pork, shellfish, chocolate, nuts, milk, eggs, wheat and corn are among the most common allergy causing foods although other foods such as strawberries and tomatoes can cause reactions under certain circumstances.

Mrs. Daglish said that aversion to certain foods may be a clue that the body should avoid them. Cravings can also be a hint that the body should avoid a food. If a person eats an excessive amount of a food while it's in season, such as strawberries, it's no wonder they become allergic to it, she said. While they may always be allergic to the food they may be able to build a tolerance to it if they drop it entirely for a time, then eat only small quantities and remember to space out the times when they eat it.

Allergists may not want to

test for food allergies, Mrs. Daglish said, since tests have a low degree of accuracy.

The most reliable way to test for an allergy food is by a diet, she said. If a parent suspected her child had a food allergy she should insist that the family doctor refer the child to an allergist. Before tests are begun the child will be given a complete physical to rule out the possibility that the problem stems from some illness rather than an allergy. The second phase is to prepare a complete history of the patient to trace any pattern that may indicate what the allergy is. The third step will be an elimination diet which cures out most substances so that the allergy clears up. Then gradually one food at a time the person has items added to his diet. As items are added it can be determined what foods cause reactions. Mrs. Daglish warned against eating too much of any one substance once it has been determined that a food is safe since over-indulging in it may eventually bring about reaction with that food too.

TRICKY REACTION

Determining what substances cause the reaction to food can be tricky, she said, since reactions may appear immediately but may also be delayed by as much as 72 hours.

Hyperactivity is an allergic reaction to certain substances found naturally in foods such as fresh fruits, or artificially in artificial colourings and good preservatives and also in certain medications.

Mrs. Daglish said that the Allergy Information Association passes out information concerning ways to handle problems or causes of allergies and also offers moral support to fellow allergy sufferers and their families.

Anne Irvine, a member of the library staff, offered herself as a contact person for anyone in the community seeking more information on the Allergy Information Association. She said she can be contacted by calling the library during the evening.



YOUNG PUBLISHERS

(Herald photo)

These students from Howard Wrigglesworth School have the distinction of their tender age of being published authors. They, along with some other students not present when the picture was taken, are the creators of a book called "The

Adventures of the Stuffed Animals", which was written and illustrated as a school project. The authors are, left to right Michael Bellinger, Lynn Norton, Greg Peacock, Robert Matuws and Guy Spencer.