

ACROSS THE FENCE

With Joanne Stevenson



Is it September yet?

Maybe it's because I've spent seven weeks with the kids out of school and there is still one more week to go, or perhaps it's all the back-to-school sales that the department stores are advertising, but I've been thinking about September with more than a little longing.

The first week or two of summer vacation is great — the novelty of sleeping-in and the freedom of not having to do anything in particular for days on end seems pretty attractive.

My family was fortunate to be away on vacation for the last two weeks of July, so those days were fully occupied as well.

But by mid-August, kids are bored, and caregivers are at their wits' end to keep the kids occupied.

If your children have been snarling at each other for the last two weeks, take comfort in the fact that you are not alone, and you are probably not a bad parent. This has been the "hot" topic at the soccer field and baseball diamond lately.

And it's only one argument, albeit a selfish one, for changing the current vacation schedule in our school system.

Back in the 1800s, Ontarians, by and large, earned their living in agriculture. Farmers needed their children during the summer months to help on the farm. Summer vacation wasn't really a vacation for children — it was more like a summer job without pay.

As Ontario became more urban and industrialized and agriculture took a less-dominant role in children's lives, the tradition of summer's off remained. The feeling was that it was too hot for kids to go to school during the summer.

There have been rumblings of change for several years however, and London, Ontario is trying something new by July of 1996.

Faced with overcrowding and budget cut-backs, pilot schools in London will try a year-round, multi-track system, which would allow two or more "schools" to operate in the same building during the year by staggering vacation times. It is believed this would reduce the need to build new schools, thereby saving tax dollars.

While Acton schools do not have a problem with overcrowding, many educators feel that the two month summer vacation is an inefficient use of time.

Most of September, and sometimes October too, are spent re-establishing rules and reviewing old material. And June is a blur as classes scramble to complete their subjects and teachers teeter on the edge of burn-out.

As it stands now, in addition to the eight week summer holiday, schools will be closed for two weeks at Christmas and two weeks for March Break. If school boards took these 12 weeks of vacation and spread them out over the year — say three months on, one month off — it might make for a better system.

I know my kids were happiest this summer (apart from our two weeks at the lake) when they were signed up for the organized day camp programs offered through the Rec and Parks department. They saw their friends and there was plenty to do. They needed some structure after being loose and carefree for so long. But I can't afford these programs for the whole summer.

I realize there is opposition to this plan: it would impact businesses that rely on student employees; amusement parks would worry about lower attendance levels; and I'm sure there would be resistance from teachers as well.

Still, in a system that needs shaking up, it is an idea that deserves serious consideration. I know I'll be watching the London "experiment" with great interest over the next few years. And I'm looking forward to Sept. 6 with great anticipation as well.

LETTERS

Acton has tradition of caring for needy

To the Editor,

In the August 10 edition of the Acton Free Press I read the comments made by Georgetown resident/would-be Town Councillor Carol Ann Whitehead-Perrott, where she called Acton a low income Town, troubled by derelicts, with a lake that is 60 per cent goose s — and accusing a builder of glorifying Fairy Lake.

I have lived and worked in Acton for many years and have chosen to continue living here in one of the houses on Fairy Lake, the houses built by the builder that Mrs. Whitehead-Perrott says likens Fairy Lake to "North of Superior".

I know the lake has its problems, but let's look at the positive, as the builder did: Swimming, boating, skating, skiing, fishing, biking, hiking, golfing, shopping and wildlife (feeding the ducks) a nice array of activities to enjoy!

Yes, we do have some low-income families and we have cared for them by providing support services and appropriate housing, but we do have higher-income families too. Why else would builders



LETTERS

Consider where her ideas come from

To the Editor,

I was appalled at the number of *Letters to the Editor* refuting Carol Ann Whitehead-Perrott's disparaging remarks about Acton. Have we become so politically correct that we cannot even allow someone to express an opinion? Must we go into a state of denial whenever we hear criticism?

Acton is indeed a nice place to live. I live here because it is my home town; I was born and raised in this community. My husband and I feel blessed to live among so many good people. But, let's not gild the lily. Acton is not an Eden — it has the same problems which afflict most other communities.

There is one element of people here who behave badly. They throw litter everywhere, commit vandalism and act irresponsibly. Unfortunately such undesirable behavior, or the results of it, is probably the first thing a newcomer to town will see. A passerby will not see the quiet, clean, respectable areas, or the good people who live in them.

Consider the impression a traveller might get if he stopped for a late night snack at a downtown

Acton coffee shop. He would likely see a group of rowdies hanging out in a parking lot, right under a "no loitering" sign, drinking beer, shouting obscenities at one another, blaring their radios at full blast or driving their vehicles in circles to make the tires squeal.

An early morning visitor would see the filthy litter of paper cups, food wrappers and broken glass left behind by revellers of the previous night.

Acton residents who live in quiet areas, off the beaten path, may not be aware of what goes on almost nightly downtown. Maybe we don't question why we can no longer have public washrooms and drinking fountains, why so many people are afraid to go walking alone or why we must lock our cars when they are parked on our own property. Maybe we should be more aware and questioning, but we should not be overly defensive because these conditions do exist in our community. The same conditions, nowadays, exist in every community.

We recently had a weekend guest from out of the province. After two nights of being assaulted by loud music from one direction, incessant dog barking from another and a parking lot party until 3 am he finally asked us, "Don't they have laws around here? Does this go on all the time? How the hell do you stand it?"

We assured him that what he had witnessed was not the behaviour of the average Actonite, but that of a small minority. I don't think he was favourably impressed. He very likely went away thinking, like Ms. Whitehead-Perrott, that Acton has an uncommonly high number of derelicts.

Surely those of us who like living in Acton can take Ms. Whitehead-Perrott's remarks with a grain of salt. Remember that she has a right to her opinion and a right to express it. If we don't agree, we don't need to vote for her.

But maybe we should also consider where her ideas could have come from. Maybe we should not be overly affronted by her criticism and start thinking instead about what would make our town even better than it is.

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