

ACROSS THE FENCE

With Joanne Stevenson



Read on! Literacy Awareness Week

By the time you read this we'll already be well into Literacy Awareness Week, an event sponsored by the North Halton Literacy Guild that runs until Friday.

The work the Guild does might not be needed by you or anyone you know, but for those adults who can't read, or who have difficulty reading, the assistance the Guild offers is invaluable.

Just think for a moment what it would be like not to be able to read a road map, a menu, a job application, or this column. The windows of opportunity close – rapidly and firmly.

Illiteracy does *not* mean a lack of intelligence – to manage as an adult without literacy skills in this day and age shows a marked resourcefulness we don't always see in people who *can* read.

The Literacy Guild is a volunteer tutor organization dedicated to teaching those who can't read, the basic reading skills they'll need to get by. Volunteer tutors are trained and matched with students, based on scheduling, location and compatibility.

But as Mary Crammond, co-ordinator of client services, points out, "We're getting more advanced students – students who want to fine-tune their education, either to pass entrance exams to college, or to be eligible when job promotions become available at their place of employment."

The Guild can also help with math literacy, and Mary says demand in this area is increasing.

"We're always on the look-out for volunteer tutors, especially in the Acton area, where transportation to our office in Georgetown can be a problem. We have a few off-site locations, like ASSIC, McKenzie-Smith Bennett, church basements and so on."

The hope of workers at the Guild is that Awareness Week will offer information and support to those who may need help with reading, writing and basic math. They also wish to highlight the need for volunteers.

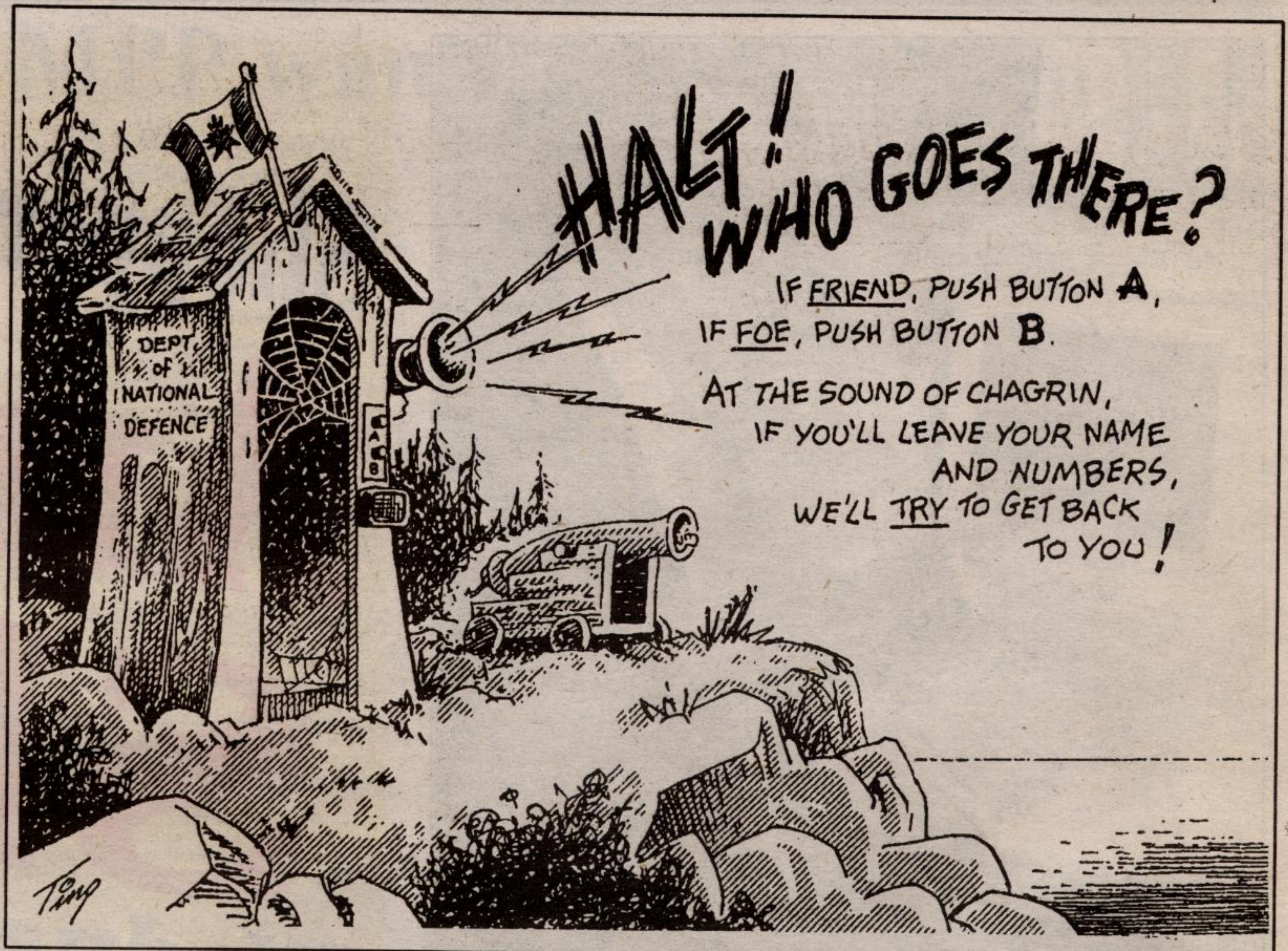
For more information, check out their displays at ASSIC, the Acton Public Library or McKenzie-Smith Bennett school. Or contact the Guild's Read* Spell* Write program at 873-2200, or drop into their office at 328 Guelph Street, Georgetown.

It is fitting, during Literacy Awareness Week, that Halton School Board trustees are approaching parent groups, teachers and individuals, asking how the system is measuring up. With budget cuts a certainty, trustees need to know what we value, what services are being delivered well, and what we would pay extra for.

Would you pay extra for lunch-time supervision if it meant the instrumental music program would remain? Would you pay for your child to attend Kindergarten? Estimates for this optional program are roughly \$2,000 per student.

Right now, there are more questions than answers, but we need to let our trustees know what really matters to us when it comes to education.

And I think all the tutors and students at the Literacy Guild would agree that mastering literacy and numeracy should be at the top of the list of education priorities.



LETTERS

'Sale of smokes' law has mother fuming

To the Editor,

I am a parent of a non-smoking teenager. He goes to high school and works at a part-time job, as many teenagers do, not only because of today's economy but because that is the way it has been for many generations of teenagers.

He is up at 6:30 am and home to bed at 12 am three days a week.

My point in writing this letter is that today's teenagers often work where cigarettes are sold. They also have to monitor under-age teenagers buying smokes.

My teenager was given a summons to go to court, where he could be fined up to \$150, which is two days' pay, by a tobacco by-law officer.

If this by-law is to be effective, why are:

1. Teenagers not charged for possession;
2. Parents who expose their children to second-hand smoke not held accountable; and
3. By-law officers not handing out summons at every street corner and public event, and one foot off every school yard.

What a tax grab!

My teenager is busy doing a good job for his employer, looking after customers and being courteous. He also has to ask for I.D. from supposed teenagers before selling cigarettes. And who can tell, by just looking, a 15-year-old from a 19-year-old?

In my knowledge of teenagers who smoke, most come from a home where at least one, if not

both, parents smoke.

With all the cutbacks in our police department, I think our tax dollars could be more useful if these "tobacco police officers" were used in other areas, dealing with more serious crimes. They could fill a summons book more quickly in the above-mentioned areas.

Why are our courts being used for this purpose? It should be the same as a parking violation.

Roberta Holmes
Birchway Place

Editor's Note: We checked with local Halton Region police about the argument made by Ms. Holmes.

The officer we spoke with agreed that under-age teens should probably be charged for possession of tobacco products, but in his words, "We can't enforce a law that doesn't exist."

The sale of cigarettes is governed by the provincial Minors Protection Act, not a by-law, which makes it illegal to sell to persons under 19 years of age.

At the outset of the Minors Protection Act there was no provision made to charge anyone for possession of cigarettes while under age. The possession charge was formerly under the Tobacco Restraint Act, which has been rescinded.

The officers who enforced the Minors Protection Act in this case were not police officers of the Halton Regional Police, but Provincial Offences officers, who have been assigned by the Province to enforce the Tobacco Control Act. Police officers do have the authority to enforce the Act.

The Provincial Offences officers who are assigned to enforce the Minors Protection Act are not trained in the same manner as federal, provincial or municipal police forces to investigate Criminal Code matters.

The police officer we spoke with said that "store owners and operators should be aware and should make aware all employees that sales to persons under 19 years is an offence against the Act, and if the store clerk is unsure of the age of the customer and the customer has no identification, the clerk is responsible for the sale. In a case where the clerk is unsure, no sale should be made."

WHAT'S YOUR BEEF?

Let us know!

Write a letter to the Editor – deadline is Monday at noon.

THE ACTON Tanner

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