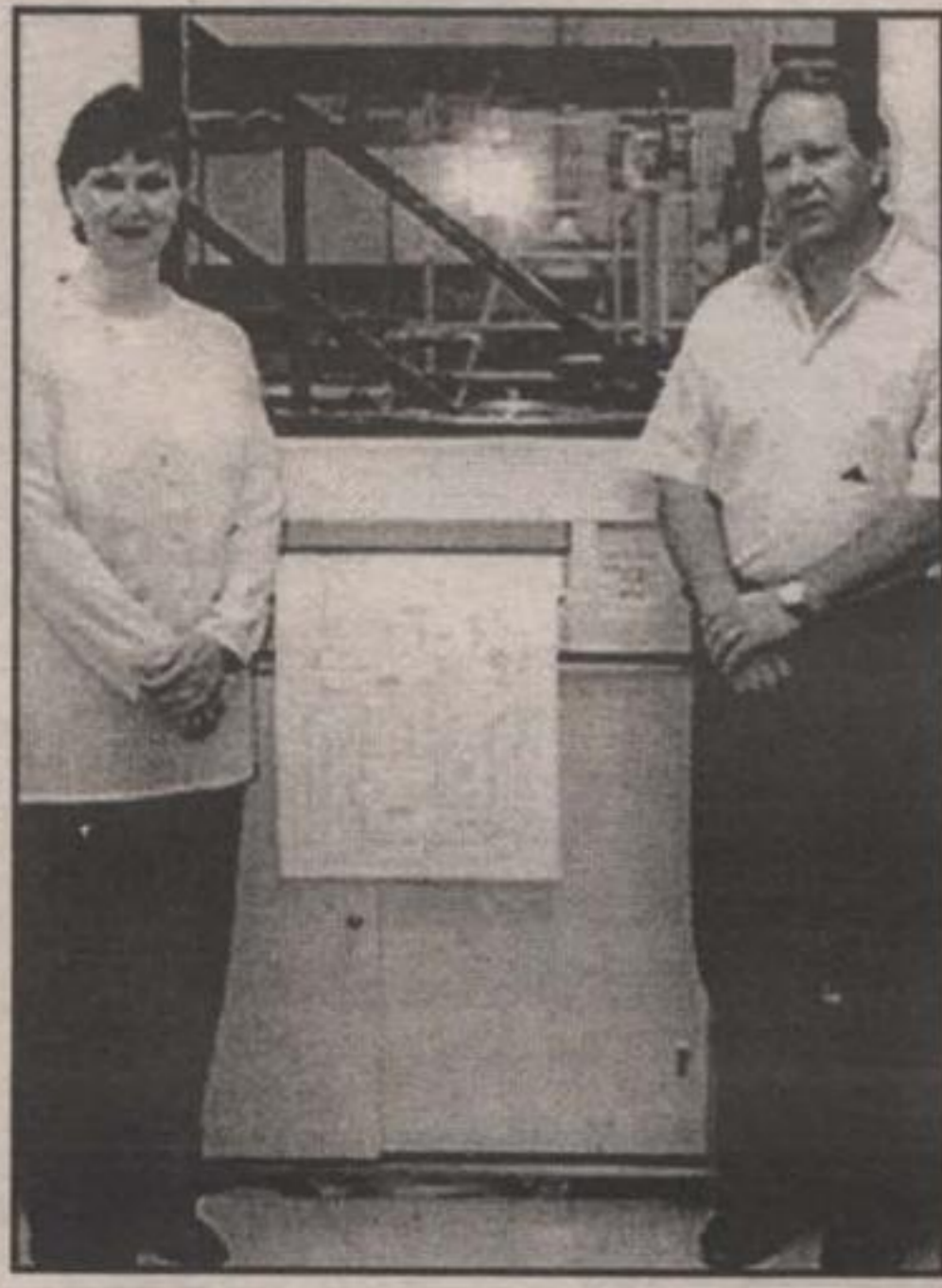


GRAPEVINE



Acton's Bev Gray, of Bev Gray and Associates poses with Acton High instructor Norbert Axtmann in front of a plotter that Gray generously donated to the school.

No more plodding

Thanks to a very generous gift from a former student, Computer Aided Design (CAD) students at Acton High won't be stuck in the computer lab until midnight waiting for design prints out any more.

Acton's Bev Gray, of Bev Gray & Associates, donated a used plotter to the school. It's a large printer, worth \$2,500, that can do in minutes what the school's ancient plotter does in an hour.

"It was payback time," Gray said when asked about the donation. "When I first started out (Acton High teacher) Norbert Axtmann was a

great help and got me good deals on equipment and software that I needed. It was time for me to upgrade and I wanted my old plotter to go where it would do the most good."

For Axtmann, who said he's had to beg, borrow and steal computer equipment to keep students current, the donation was like Christmas.

"Anyone with old computers or equipment should give me a call. If it's broken, we can try and fix it or scavenge parts," Axtmann said.

Halton's top cop leaving

Halton Police Chief Peter Campbell, apparently fed up with the politics of the job, will leave his post at the end of the year when his five-year contract is up. Word is that the Chief has had enough of the yearly budget showdown with regional councillors, who this year approved a \$43.5 million budget. The police services board will meet at the end of the month to plan the search for a new chief.

Watch your mail

Acton letter carriers will volunteer their time this week to deliver some very important information to every house in town. Along with a flyer detailing all of the services offered by Halton Hills Community Support and Information (formerly ASSIC), and a request for volunteers, there's an application for the Letter Carriers Alert program. If you register, your mailman will keep an eye on your home and if they notice mail or newspapers left at your door, they will make sure that you are okay. Anyone wanting reassurance in the Acton area is eligible for the free program.



CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? This is the garbage and litter Acton Rotary Club and helpers picked up along both sides of Highway 7 between Churchill Road and the Sixth Line. - Ted Tyler photo

Let's talk about terror

The Way I See It

with Mike O'Leary



We've all seen the posters. In stores, on the backs of trucks, in the malls: row upon row of missing children look to us for rescue. We scan the faces, feel a moment of compassion for the parents involved, then carry on with our busy schedule secure in the knowledge it couldn't happen to us. But it could, you know. It could be your child's picture on the Visa envelopes. The Bride and I had a brush with terror over 20 years ago. Here's what happened:

Dinner was ready and I was dispatched to bring Cathy (a.k.a. The Ancient Kid) in. When I couldn't find her my first reaction was annoyance; as in "When I find her she is in sooooo much trouble." I checked with all the neighbours and looked in the local park. She was nowhere to be found. We lived in a nice area of Mississauga so the possibility of foul play didn't enter my mind. We recruited a few of the neighbours and began a house to house search. Nothing. Fear began to seep in. Someone said quietly, "We should call the police."

By the time the cops arrived our child had been missing for about a half-hour. Now, several of our neighbours were out in the street with us talking about areas to look in and questioning other children as to possible hiding places.

The officer reviewed what ground we had covered and then said, "Have you seen any strangers around?" I thought my knees would give out. By this time the street was full of concerned parents and children. Every so often, someone would get a new idea and dart off to check it out. Always, they returned downhearted.

Satisfied that we had talked to all our neighbours, the officer looked me in the eye: "We should search the bottom of all the pools in the area." Fear turned into panic. Pools were checked and the search area expanded by several blocks. No one had seen her.

About that time the horrific possibility that someone might have taken our child began to sink in. That's when the terror took hold. I think I was shaking.

"What about the house at the end of the street?" the cop asked. "No - she couldn't be there," I said. The people there were new, no one knew them and they spoke only French. I wasn't sure but I thought they had a little girl. The house was dark and we assumed they were away for the weekend as they had a cottage.

"Let's check it out," said the cop. We looked around the house and in the garden shed. They had an above ground pool that was green with algae. The policeman looked at me and, clothes and all,

in I went searching the bottom with my feet while praying with all my might I wouldn't step on anything. The cop rapped on the side door with his flashlight. I was about to yell at him that no one was home when the door opened and Cathy walked out. She had been in the downstairs rec room playing with the little French girl. No lights were visible from the outside.

What had happened was that Cathy's best friend then was deaf and, in the way children have, they had developed a simple sign language. Somehow, the little French girl had joined in and they were playing together and communicating with this sign language. The parents, happy that their little girl had a playmate, took the kids in for milk and cookies and had lost track of the time. When the cop knocked on the door they were sending her home for supper. They had no idea a search was on. They were very apologetic.

Everyone was, of course, ecstatic. Quite frankly, I wanted to take a swing at the guy who had put us through all this but I was so relieved the impulse quickly passed.

I apologized to the police and still remember his response. "Call us anytime. That's why we're here. This call turned out just great. We'd rather have 100 false alarms than one where we don't find the missing child." Then, with a smile and a pat on my back the police went back to work. We went home for diner and, as I remember it, a stiff drink. The terror began to fade.

I remember the incident every time I see a poster or read a story about a missing child. Our story turned out fine but what about all the ones which don't?

In 1996 over 18,000 children were reported missing in Ontario alone. While the majority were runaways, 202 were parental abductions (usually due to marriage breakups) and 14 were stranger abductions. Many are still missing.

Child Find Ontario is a volunteer organization dedicated to helping get these children home. Working with police and other agencies, they publish those posters we see. They also believe that prevention through education is a key to reducing abductions. Towards that end they staff information booths giving out helpful tips for parents and children. They also run fingerprinting booths so you can have this important identification on file.

All such organizations need two things: volunteers and money. If you have 4-8 hours per month to help out or can spare a few bucks you can contact them in Oakville at (905) 842-5353.

This month is the 7th Annual Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. The green ribbon was adopted by the students of Holy Cross Secondary School in St. Catharines following the 1992 disappearance and subsequent murder Kristen French. The national campaign is to focus our attention on the plight of missing children. It's a huge problem. At any given time there are about 1,600 missing children in Canada. "So what can I do about it," you ask? Well, actually, quite a bit.

Firstly, educate yourself and your children on the dangers out there. We don't want our kids to be paranoid but we must face today's realities.

Child Find uses a 1-900 system as a cost efficient way to fundraise. By calling a 900 number, Bell Canada forwards the money monthly to Child Find. Your donation then appears on your next phone bill. It's actually quite painless. Call 1-900-451-8080 to donate \$30; call 1-900-451-2445 to donate \$20; call 1-900-451-2273 to donate \$10.

If your company has a fleet of trucks, why not contact Child Find and find out about the truck poster program. It usually costs about \$10 per truck. If you are in an employee group or association Child Find can arrange a speaker to come to you.

Mostly though, we all have to be aware of what's going on around us. If you think a child is in danger call the cops immediately. If you wish to report a missing child, or think you may have sighted a missing child, call the national toll free number, 1-800-387-7962.

Take an extra few seconds the next time you see one of the posters. It only takes a one person to recognize a missing child. One person can make a difference. It could be you.

Kristen French would be 22 this year. In her memory and in memory of all missing children, wear a green ribbon. Remember them on National Missing Children's Day, May 25.

I can't imagine how horrible it must be for those parents whose children remain missing. Our missing child was, thankfully, a false alarm. She was gone maybe 45 minutes. Even so, trust me, you never want to feel the terror. After 20 years I can still taste it.

Like they say on Channel 7 News, "It's 11 o'clock - do you know where your children are?"

"Our Survey Says..."

We asked spectators at the Beardmore fire, 'Were you surprised to see the 'old' Beardmore building on fire? Are you concerned about the dark smoke?'



I've been expecting it. The building's been abandoned. There could be a lot of chemicals in the smoke, it's definitely bad for the environment.

Pete Holmes



The fire is unexpected. We're concerned about the chemicals. We saw the fire from Milton.

Nora Tarr



I'm worried about the pollution and the black smoke. It was kind of unexpected.

Steven Haefner



I've been in the leather business 20 years. I'm concerned about what's burning. I don't want to breathe that smoke. The buildings are old; I'm surprised it didn't happen sooner.

Jim Fendley

This week's New Tanner survey by Angela Tyler