



Petunia Patch

By Esther Taylor

Gang warfare in Acton?

Esther Taylor used to write for the Toronto Telegram, the Guelph Mercury and the Acton Voice. This column was written in August of 1985, so pull up a chair and reminisce with The Petunia Patch.

Gang warfare in Acton? Shades of the lone police constable who used to patrol our streets!

At least three kid gangs flourished in Acton during the late Twenties and early Thirties. They never tangled with the law, although sometimes irate parents exchanged complaints about the shenanigans of urchins belonging to the Crescent Gang, the School Lane Gang, and the Main Street Gang. Backsides were thumped, unrepentant members were threatened, but the feuding troops went about their business as if the adult world did not exist.

The two downtown bands of warriors who loathed one another, kept a safe distance - from the Crescent crew, avoiding confrontation like the plague. In the event of an unplanned encounter, Mainstreeters and Schoolaners closed ranks against a foe with a lurid reputation for mayhem. Exaggerated of course, as we learned when we were older and wiser.

The Crescenters operated mostly in their own bailiwick, ranging from the Tannery bunkhouses through their home streets and backyards and along the old Radial tracks. On rare downtown forays, usually at dusk, they lay in wait for the weaker, less confident gangs who fled like minute-milers unless they could summon reinforcements. One memorable Sabbath, they surprised an even dozen Schoolaners on an afternoon jaunt in the swamp below the old Sawmill. Trapped and unable to run through the swamp, the School lane kids had to stand their ground, using every available missile, including mud, bulrushes, and wild cucumbers.

It was a glorious, memorable battle, ending in a draw, due to exhaustion on both sides.

After this clash, we Schoolaners lost some awe of the dreaded Uptowners, although we still did not go looking for trouble in that direction. Instead, foolishly puffed with pride we redoubled our friction with the Mainstreeters, who retaliated at every opportunity. One hot afternoon, they caught us swimming near the dam at Henderson's pond. Armed with bags of hard green apples, they bombarded us furiously, drawing shrieks from the younger water babies. Without argument, it was one up for the hated Mainstreeters.

That evening we held a council of war and plotted our revenge. We decided to strike at the home of two brothers whose Scottish father crafted tombstones, some on display in the front yard. When darkness fell, we armed ourselves with wet bulrushes and crept down the street towards our target. Moving in a file of shadows, we flung our rushes among the stones. Dolt that I was, and by my own nomination for the silly deed, I hammered on the front door and gave an Indian howl.

The rest of the culprits were already off and running when the front door burst open. Out dashed the irate stonemason, with me only a few gallops ahead. Just in front fled the gang leader lifting his feet like a penguin. I spotted the likeness and was lost to weak laughter. It's impossible to laugh and run at the same time, as I discovered when a bony hand caught my skinny shoulder.

While the rest of the gang vanished in the misty night, I remained, a scapegoat on the receiving end of a well-deserved lecture. The Scottish father threatened to tell my mother, but he did not, Lord love him. That cured me of doorknocking, even for revenge.

The summer of my twelfth birthday, we Schoolaners decided to arm ourselves with bows and arrows, an idea purloined from a book I was reading *Two Little Savages*, by Ernest Thompson Seton. I was hooked when I came to this paragraph: "He made himself a bow and arrows. They were badly made, and he could hit nothing with them, but he felt so like an Indian when he drew the arrow to its head, that it was another pleasure."

If Yan could do it, so could we. What a clutch of dreamers! With the exception of my best friend Marian who had artistic talent, we were a ham-fisted lot. I couldn't even make an arrow, and to fashion a bow was an exercise in frustration. In the end, Marian made most of our Indian weapons and she also proved to be an unerring marksman.

We practiced our shooting in the Old Tannery, a glorious wilderness full of rusted tanks and snakes. Spies (little sisters) informed the Mainstreeters of our latest project. They came full force to deride and jeer, ambushing us, because our dopey lookouts were snoozing in the milkweed. "Some Indians. Couldn't hit a barn door!" they howled with justification, as our frantic arrows landed harmlessly. Only Maid Marian kept her cool. She took deadly aim, and her arrow found its target, the rosy brow of the stonemason's younger son. While we looked on aghast, the stricken warrior bled all over his bare chest. This was TROUBLE with a capital T.

Marian, pale under her tan, hauled the yelping victim down to the creek where she annointed his wound with cold water. With the bleeding under control, she marched him home, confessing to his mother "It was an accident. Sort of. I'm to blame."

After this episode, Marian dismantled her trusty bow and broke her arrows. We followed suit, not without regret. Our Indian phase was fun while it lasted. However, even though we were young hellions, we had no desire to hurt anyone.

The early teen years brought other interests. We Schoolaners outgrew our gang, although we remembered and still recall from time to time our escapades and misadventures. Every time I pass the Main Street home which we invaded with bulrushes, I picture our leader doing his penguin flight. Weak laughter returns, and I can almost feel a punitive hand on my skinny shoulder. It WAS fun to be an Acton kid back in the late Twenties.

Hartley Coles is taking a few deserved days off, his editorial column will return in a few weeks.



SPRING HAS SPRUNG: Record high temperatures on Tuesday brought out the mowers, rollers, and gardeners, a sure sign spring is officially here. Neighbours Ab Robinson left, and Ray Arbic get an early start to the season. - Ted Tyler photo

Science Matters

- by David Suzuki



Letting the big one get away

Fish is staple menu item in restaurants across the North America including cities far from the coast. It's even more important in developing countries. Around the world, 80 million tonnes of fish are consumed every year, making up 16 per cent of our total animal protein intake. But we don't often consider where that fish comes from, or how (or if!) those fish stocks are being managed to prevent overfishing.

That's why a new study on catch rates is so troubling. For years, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the only organization to formally track international fish-catch data, has been reporting stable or increasing catch sizes. This information has pushed further investment in the fishing industry in many countries under the assumption that there are still plenty of fish in the seas.

But are there? Studies around the world in recent years have concluded that most major fish stocks are in trouble. And the FAO itself classifies more than 70 per cent of major marine fisheries as fully or over-exploited. So how can these well-documented problems be reconciled with apparent increases in global fish catches?

The problem is that the FAO relies on member countries to provide catch data, and according to a new study published in the journal *Nature*, those data can be seriously misleading. The study, by Reg Watson

and Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia, used more detailed information to reanalyze the FAO data and create a model of expected catch sizes. Their calculated numbers corresponded pretty well with catch sizes reported by most countries, with one key exception. China's reported harvest was double what the model predicted.

The researchers surmise that Chinese officials, until very recently, have been promoted according to production increases in their respective fields. For fisheries managers, that means catching more fish - or at least reporting that more fish were caught - even when catches may actually be declining. The Chinese fishery is one of the largest in the world, representing 15 per cent of total global harvest. If officials have been misrepresenting catch rates for more than a decade as is suspected, then global fish stocks have actually declined by 10 per cent since 1988.

Marine biologist Jane Lubchenco says that this declining global trend can only be halted with a drastic overhaul of fishery management. That will prove contentious, as some commercial and many recreational fisheries groups strongly oppose stricter conservation measures.

However, new evidence suggests that such measures are in the long-term best interests of all groups. For example, a study on marine reserves (areas where all fishing is prohibited) recently published in the journal *Sci-*

ence found that these "underwater parks" can have a profound effect on neighboring fish stocks. The study, by an international team of marine scientists, found that the size of both commercial fish catches and recreational trophy fish catches off Florida and in the Caribbean greatly increased when small marine areas in the region were protected. In fact, near the island of St. Lucia, fish catches increased by up to 90 per cent in surrounding waters just five years after the creation of a protected area.

One of the key reasons for the success of the reserves is that they act as nurseries, offering a safe haven for fish to breed and grow to marketable and even record sizes. A recent examination of more than 100 studies of such reserves around the world has found that creating them often leads to rapid increases in the abundance and size of commercial species, as well as an increase in species diversity.

Fish are an important source of protein and livelihood for people around the world. But with so much demand and so many boats plying the waters, the need for effective fisheries management has never been greater. Creating marine reserves is one tool towards that end. If we want to ensure a bountiful catch in the future, we have to give the fish a fighting chance today.

To discuss this topic with others, visit the discussion forum at www.davidsuzuki.org.



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