

'Putting your best foot forward'

The woman behind the man in blue

Editor's Note:

The dangers of the police profession are well known and frequently the subject of news stories.

But what of the wife and family behind the policeman? They too, must contend with the fears associated with the particular trade.

Police shift schedules are often hard on family life and a wife must look after many of the home problems on her own.

The following are interviews with wives of Halton Regional Police officers.

The names of the women and their husbands are changed to protect their privacy. Everything else is true.

By Linda Kirby

It's midnight and the end of a shift for police Sgt. Tom Williams.

But a fatal car crash at 11 p.m. has left him the job of notifying the parents of a dead 16-year-old girl.

With another constable, he visits the parents, then heads back to the police station to complete reports.

It's four a.m. when he reaches home.

His wife, Frances, is fast asleep. She watched television, waiting for him, but finally went to bed.

Married 14 years, Frances accepts the fact there are many times when she doesn't know where her husband is or what he is doing.

There are enough occasions when he comes home four hours late or not at all.

There are the missed parties, cold dinners and trips to the skating rink with her two sons without Dad.

A 17-year veteran of the Halton Regional Police force, Sgt. Williams has spent the majority of those years in the patrol car, working the various shifts.

Frances first met her husband when she was 17, soon after he had joined the force.

"So right from day one, I learned to accept the shifts. I knew that was the way it was going to be."

But learning to deal with the ever-changing shifts — combined with overtime hours and court — was not always easy, she admits.

Being a policeman's wife means plenty of evenings as well as days by one's self.

"I found when we were first married, it

learned to adjust to police hours.

"You really have no choice about it. If you love your husband, you adjust to it."

Unlike other jobs, it is rare for a policeman to come home and discuss his day with his wife.

A suicide, fatality or bar fight is not dinner table conversation. And yet, it is not always easy for the policeman to climb into his family clothes when he sheds his uniform.

"A lot of times, family problems get neglected because a policeman devotes so much time to listening to other people's problems and solving them," explains Christine.

"You learn to look after a lot of the little family problems at home without bothering him."

"You have to be very self-sacrificing for the job," she stressed. "If you expect things to be 50-50 with your husband, forget it, because he won't be there 50 per cent of the time."

The realities of police work have not left her resentful of the job, she said.

"Geoff loves his job, and because he enjoys his work, the quality of the time spent at home is better."

At one time in his police career, Geoff left the force to go into business for himself. The result was disaster, according to his wife.

"It was a regular job, he was home evenings and weekends and he was absolutely miserable."

"If he is happy with police work, I will adjust to it."

Being a cop demands more than a normal amount of time and energy. To be a good cop, it requires a particular degree of dedication that frequently intrudes upon family life.

Susan Blake 37, has been married 17 years to her police sergeant husband.

His dedication to the job has meant hard times, she said.

She knew her husband before he joined the force and noticed a change with the job.

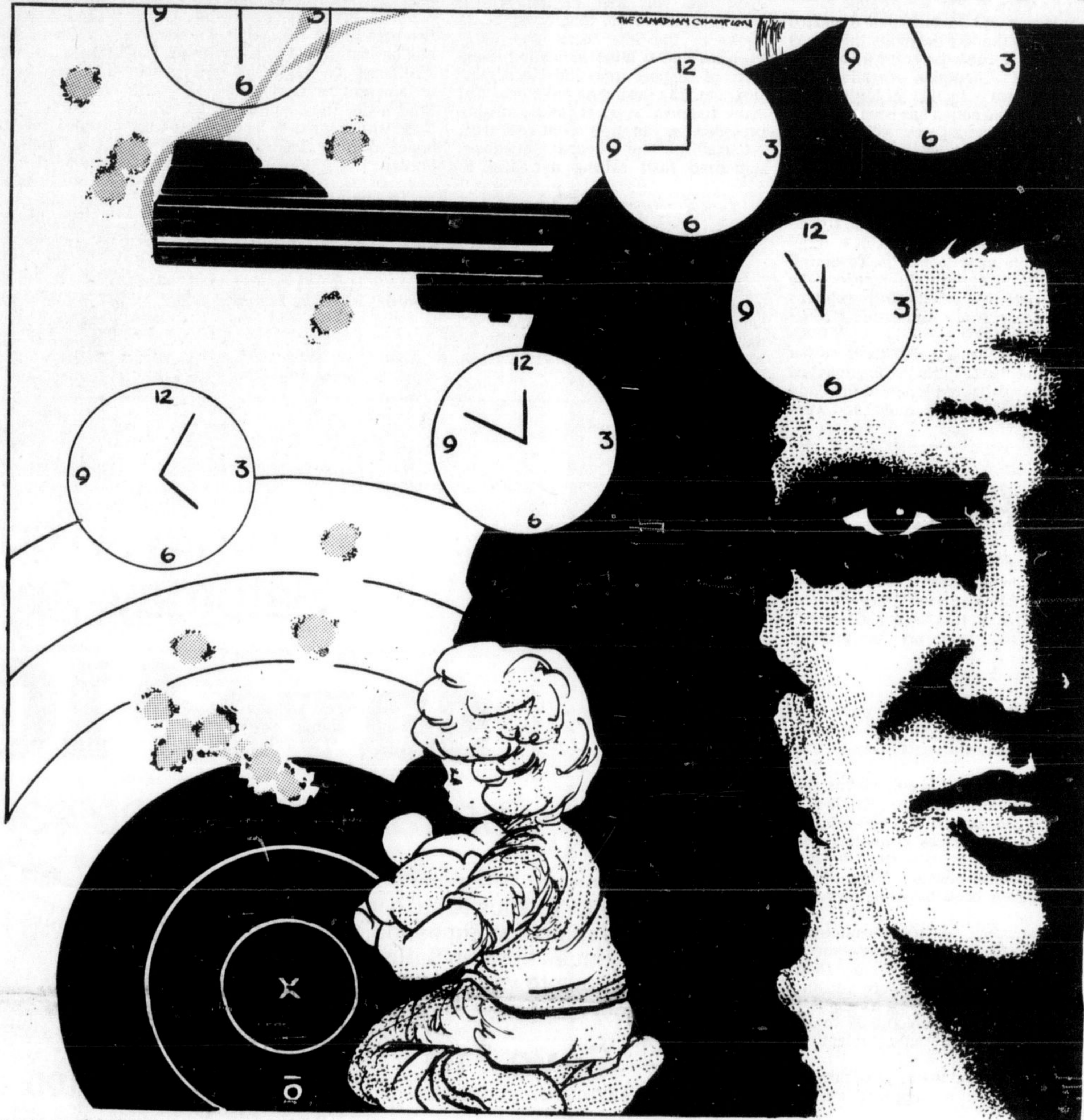
"I knew him before he was a cop, when he had much more emotions. He got angry, happy. But since he became a cop, he is all cop. He has controlled feelings and is very self-disciplined."

"I admire that because that is part of his job, but there is also a person inside of that policeman."

The mother of three children, she admitted the problem grew to the extent the couple visited a sociologist in an effort to get help.

"The children weren't people to him. He often treated them as a member of the public and it got to the point where he noticed it too."

"It upset him, because he thought he



was a good father."

Times have improved, said Susan, but not without a lot of work on the part of both herself and her husband.

"The best cops are not always the best fathers or family persons," she said.

"I have often thought a good cop should stay single."

Just as policemen accept the dangers of

their jobs, so the wives must deal with their private fears.

There is no place for a woman to dwell on what might or could happen to her husband in the line of duty.

Christine's husband at one time worked in the "gun car" while serving with the

Metro Toronto police force.

His sole task was to answer gun calls.

"I admit it scared me to death, when I thought about it," said Christine. "But my defense mechanism was to think of him driving in a cruiser or being in the station."

Her views are confirmed by the opinions of others.

Frances said, "I know there are times when he has to go down a dark alley. You just have to have the confidence in him that he can do his job without getting hurt."

She recalls only one incident where she really shook. Her husband was hurt in a car crash while on duty.

When an officer arrived at the door at 3 a.m. he was shaking and didn't even know to what extent he was injured, she said.

Most of the wives take comfort in the knowledge that police work makes for a unique closeness between the officers.

"They stick together and rely on each other for backup," explained Frances.

"I can't think of any other profession where they are so close."

"I am glad they are close, because you know they really look after each other," agreed Christine.

While many officers attempt to shut the door on police work when they are home, there is still the need to blow off pressure.

A tradition for most shifts is a monthly party "just for the guys."

"It's a therapy session," explained Lynn Johnstone, wife of a Halton Regional Police constable.

"They play cards, shoot pool, drink and talk shop."

"They want to talk about certain incidents and get it out of their systems."

Traffic fatalities and grisly deaths are not always easy for any policeman to deal with.

"You may hear them (police) laughing

about something perfectly awful, but it is not because they are inhuman.

"If they don't laugh, they will crack up," continued Lynn.

At 23, she is a newlywed and expecting her first baby.

She knew her husband as a policeman for a couple of years prior to their marriage and speaks like a seasoned police wife.

Most women interviewed, admitted it is common for them to be questioned on a variety of police and legal matters as soon as they are recognized as police wives.

"When we first were married, I couldn't go to a party without somebody button-

"I always got questioned on the law. I was considered an authority on all police matters."

holing me to tell me about a ticket they got," Christine said.

Susan found a similar problem with her part time office job.

Although the comments did not affect her work, she admitted it did not help her attitude.

"I got bored with it. I'm looking to be my own person, as well as a cop's wife and mother."

There are few problems with children accepting their father's line of work, according to the wives.

"Child adjustment to the changing shifts and his type of job depends upon your own adjustment," said Christine.

Her young daughter is often up at 8 a.m. when Dad gets off midnight shift. She "tucks him into bed" when he comes home she said.

"It's all they have ever known about it," says Frances of her three children.

"We busy ourselves and if he can make it, fine. If not, we understand."

Understanding and appreciation of the pressures involved in police work are the essential ingredients for a happy marriage, testified the wives.

Broken marriages and a high rate of divorce for policemen are common statistics show.

"Because of the shifts, last minute overtime and court appearances, there are plenty of opportunities for a cop to meet other girls," stated Lynn.

As well, there are the frequent propositions, according to Frances.

"Tom has told me, he along with many other cops get propositioned on a regular basis."

"You have to have absolute trust in them."

And broken marriages are not always due to the wandering husband, she added.

"The shift work has a lot to do with it. The wives get bored and start looking for something or someone. They don't want to spend so much time alone."

Because of the nature of police work, most wives admitted they make an extra effort to keep the home a happy place to return to.

"You have to try to keep yourself on a happier level because he does face depressing situations and he doesn't want to come home to more problems," said Lynn.

"You have to trust him and really put your best foot forward."

Maplehurst resident seeks future as commercial artist-cartoonist

As a commercial artist, John Latham has a great future ahead of him. All he needs is a chance.

In June, he will be released from the Maplehurst Adult Training Centre, where he has been since May of 1978—doing time for armed robbery.

At Maplehurst, he has realized he can make money by doing something that just comes naturally to him.

"I've been drawing all the time. I've never had any great ambition to be a cartoonist. Only recently have I begun to realize I can make money from it," he said.

Mr. Latham was born 20 years ago in Stratford, and still has friends and family in the Stratford-London area.

He has sent most of his artwork home in preparation for his release.

"I'm not particular about where I go to get a job. I'd like to try the Stratford-London area because that's where I'm from and I have friends there."

"I'd like to become a cartoonist. It seems to be a job I'd be good at."

Cartoons come in many different forms. Which

form would he like best?

"I'd prefer to do single-panel cartoons rather than comic strips. It costs a lot of money to get a strip started."

He said he never had much interest in politics, so he wouldn't want to do editorial-page cartoons for newspapers as much as other cartoons.

"I'd be more into the type of cartoon you'd find in Playboy magazine."

"I've sent some drawings to Playboy, hoping they'd get published. There's something about Playboy that appeals to me. It's not (he paused) respectable. You know what I mean?"

When he's not drawing, Mr. Latham likes to read.

"On the street, I read a lot of non-fiction, but now, I'll read anything."

"I also like history, particularly the British Empire and the Victorian Era. There was such a tremendous variety of cultures back then."

"There was a strong undercurrent then. Like, on the surface, they were all proper and respectable, but actually they weren't, you know?"

Mr. Latham said he has gained some idea of 19th century Britain by reading the works of Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Dickens.

His reading also acts as a source of inspiration.

"I'll read a book and get inspired to draw characters. I'll draw characters from books by H. P. Lovecraft or Tolkien."

A quick glance at his work bears this out.

There is a strong hint of unpleasantness in the drawings. Many of them are of monsters and some scenes have evil overtones.

"Drawing something like that helps get the tension out. It's true a lot of the drawings aren't what you would call 'happy', but it's hard to be optimistic in jail."

"I've always been kind of a cynic. Maybe my drawings reflect that."

"I'm not really into still lifes and landscapes, I like to draw stuff that's

created in my mind," he added, laughing. "The only trouble is, my mind's pretty decadent."

"Lately it's been changing though. Most of the monster drawings are my older works."

"As far as my personal style is concerned, I don't really pattern myself after anyone, although there is a similarity between me and Russell Myers (BroomHilda)."

"My personal favorite is Gilbert Shelton. He's the guy who draws the Freak Brothers, and some stuff for National Lampoon."

"I also like Walt Kelly (Pogo). There's a lot of detail in his work. Some of his cartoons are practically works of art."

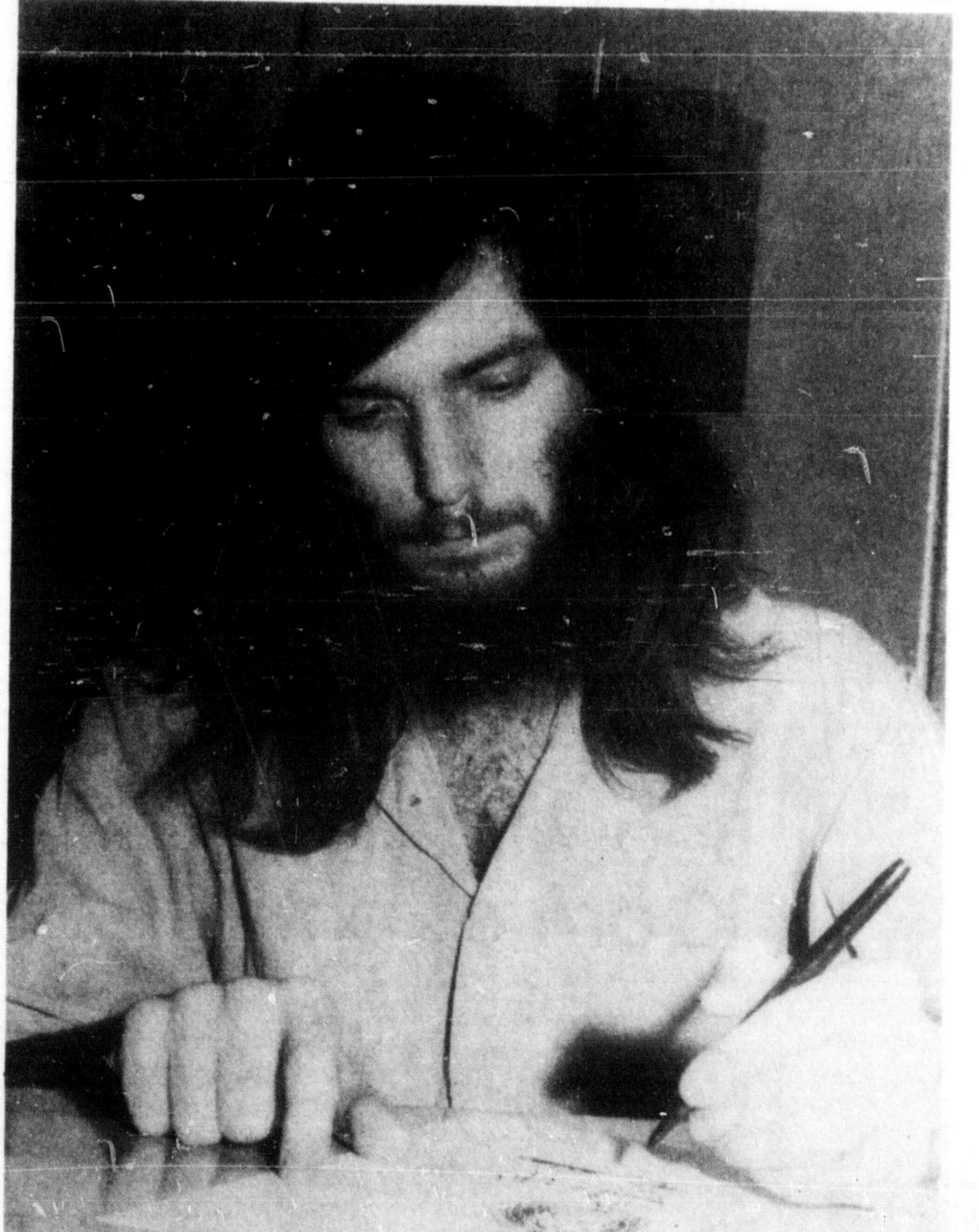
Does that mean he doesn't consider cartooning a form of art?

"No, I don't consider cartooning art. It's too simple. It doesn't really involve a lot of work for me."



THIS SELF-PORTRAIT of John Latham includes an odd-looking character. The little fellow defies description except to say it is his "trademark."

Feature by Peter Mills



JOHN LATHAM'S ARTISTRY is at its best when it is drawing cartoon characters or figures he has imagined in his mind. Most of his inspiration comes from books he reads. Here, he draws a self-portrait.