

Opinion

Time out for family car

It was one of those hectic mornings. We had a 10 o'clock appointment in Bramalea. It was already 9:30 and my husband had just phoned from his Mississauga office to warn me about icy roads.

The children were dragging their feet. No one had eaten breakfast. Mean, old Mummy pushed the grumblers out the door.

Visiting Grandma got the seat of honour in the front. The four-year-old announced she'd be safer in the front too, away from big brother. I buckled the youngest in his carseat and we were ready to go.

I turned the key in the ignition. There was evidence of life under the hood but not enough. I tried again and again. Nothing.

I exploded in a stream of expletives. My passengers were uncustomarily quiet. I got out of the car and slammed the door shut.

Back into the house we trudged. Off with mitts, boots, hats and coats. Time for breakfast, after all.

I phoned my husband who was to blame for the morning's predicament. Wasn't he the culprit who had forgotten to plug in my car?

I interrupted him at a meeting. "The car won't start," I whined. "What do I do?"

"I don't know," he snapped back. "I'm not there to see what's the matter. Try the battery charger."

Why hadn't I thought of that? I clamped on the battery charger and also plugged in the block heater. Life-support systems were in place. I waited half an hour. Still no go. I phoned my husband.

"What do you want me to do about it? That's why we belong to the auto club, you know."

So I called the auto club and 20 minutes later a young man arrived in a tow truck. He raised the hood, removed the air filter cover and checked to ensure the choke was operating. I sat in the driver's seat, obeying his instructions to turn the ignition on and off.

On the Home Front

with ESTHER CALDWELL

"It won't start," he said. Keen observation, I thought.

"What about the booster cables?" I asked. "The battery's not the problem," he replied. "It'll have to go to the garage."

"Oh." What could I say? Two night-school courses in auto mechanics had failed to enlighten me on the workings of an automobile.

The entire family watched nervously as the fellow struggled to secure the car to the truck. My oldest and I accompanied him in the truck. I kept turning my head to see if the car was still following. We made it to the garage.

A mechanic took a look under the hood. He unfastened then pulled out a hunk of metal that fitted in the palm of his hand. He pointed to a small wire.

"You need a pick-up coil."

"Oh."

Fortunately, we had brought books and magazines to read. We sat in the chilly car and I alternated between reading a magazine and starting the car for the mechanic. Suddenly, a flash and a puff of smoke.

"Faulty part," the mechanic said as he went to get another new coil.

Three hours later, we backed out of the garage into the late afternoon sunlight. Oh well, one less magazine to read when we get home.



Have we really lost faith?

A disquieting revelation, which has been gnawing within me, is the marked increase I perceive in the cynicism with which many Canadian view their politicians, particularly federal politicians. Ottawa-bashing has become a national pastime.

If you have ever had the patience to watch Question Period on television, you have some idea of why the voters, of whatever persuasion, are losing the fragile faith they had in the people they have sent to the nation's capital.

I have often wondered if there is something wrong with the ventilation system in the House of Commons. How else can you explain the remarkable change in the affable person who shook your hand warmly, during the election campaign, saying "I'd surely appreciate your support. After all, it's your government, you know" — to the party-pleasing wimp who is "serving" you by acting like an ill-mannered, shouting, desk-thumping boor from his or her back seat in the House?

But it's not just the back-benchers who act like the rear end of a horse. If anything, the honourable gentlemen (and I use both terms loosely) who occupy the prestigious, front seats are even a greater disappointment, if that's possible.

There have been enough "cans of worms" exposed in the last few years, to provide all Canadians with sufficient bait to go fishing for the rest of our lives. (If there's enough fresh water left in which to cast a line).

I am not about to recount the screwups and scandals in this space, the national media have already done a thorough job of that — so thorough the government has whined about being attacked by a "hostile press". And, in an attempt to ensure their message gets across, they have instituted prepared, broadcast "news packages" which are provided free to small radio and television stations, whose news editors are too cheap or too lazy to cover major stories themselves.

The stories which have got the government in a snit have described, in detail, everything



from downright malpractice to all-out ineptness. The national press did not make these events up, it simply reported them. This is, apparently, a "no-no" in Canada today — a fact that should rattle the hell out of all of us.

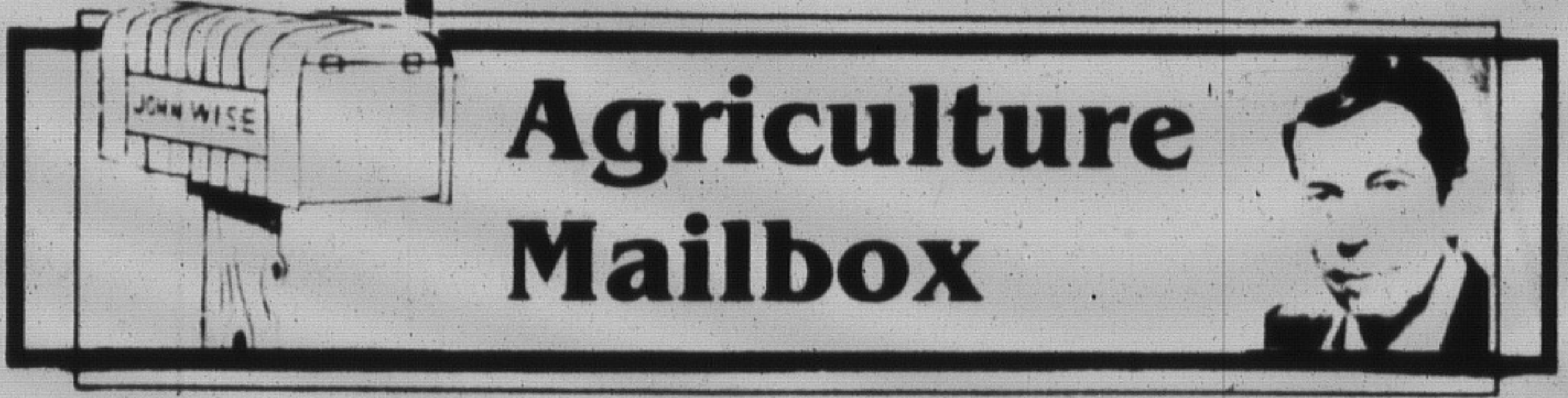
It would provide me with some solace if I saw, on the political scene, a viable alternative to the present collection of clowns. Alas, I cannot.

At times, the sparks seems to be strong but the flame is weak. It quickly dies from a serious lack of fuel.

Many people have said to me: "It doesn't matter who's in power, eventually, they all act the same. Anymore, Don, I just don't give a damn."

Hearing those words, and I do, with alarming regularity, is the reason I got onto this subject in the first place. It brought up many questions for which there are no easy answers: What really brought on such apathy, now turning into cynicism? If this perception continues to spread, are we, as a nation, becoming more vulnerable to mismanagement of our country's affairs, or worse? Will anyone with integrity and honour run for office, only to be faced with the oblivion and dogged discipline of political party loyalty?

Will one more voice from the wilderness change anything? I really doubt it. In any event I'll see you back here next week. I promise a lighter topic. You can have faith in that.



Dear Mr. Wise:
Congratulations on the new pest control research centre in London. We expect great things to come out of it, including a cleaner, safer environment.
H.B., London, Ont.

Dear H.B.:
I share your hopes for a cleaner environment. At research facilities like London's Pest Control Research Centre, my department is studying integrated pest management and biological alternatives to chemical pesticides. However, for the time being, chemicals remain a frontline defence for food production in Canada.

That's why every effort is made to ensure chemical pesticides are used properly. All pesticides must be registered by the government before they can be sold in this country.

This process includes an assessment of pesticides' impact on health and the environment.

We ensure that product labels contain important information for applying the pesticides safely.

We also monitor pesticide use in the field to guard against health or environmental problems.

Dear Mr. Wise:
Like many other farmers in the area, I diversified by seeding lentils. I thought I was doing my part to help ease the grain surplus. When you consider special assistance for producers this year, please think about adding lentils to the list of eligible crops.
V.S., Waldheim, Sask.

Dear V.S.:
You will be pleased to learn that crops eligible for the 1987 extension of the Special Canadian Grains Program include lentils.

Following my discussions with farm leaders, it was decided that benefits should be paid on crops both directly and indirectly affected by the international trade war.

The latter includes special crops such as lentils, mustard, dry peas, canaryseed, safflower, buckwheat, fababeans, triticale, popcorn and dry beans.

Application forms for the \$1.1-billion program will be sent to anyone who applied to the program last year.

Forms will be available at Agriculture Canada and Farm Credit Corporation offices, grain elevators and some agri-businesses.

Producers can also obtain application forms or get further information, by phoning toll-free 1-800-267-6343 on weekdays between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. EST.

Dear Mr. Wise:
I am worried about what is going to happen to vegetable producers under free trade with the United States. I have heard that the agreement contains some special provisions. What exactly are they?
P.B., Richmond, B.C.

Dear P.B.:
Many vegetable producers will benefit from increased market opportunities in the U.S. under our free trade agreement. However, the federal government recognizes the unique circumstances in horticulture.

In fact, it is the only sector that has special tariff considerations in the agreement.

As with all other products, tariffs will be phased out over a 10-year period beginning Jan. 1, 1989.

However, for a 20-year period, the current tariff on fresh fruits and vegetables can be reimposed under certain circumstances.

It is also important to note that nothing in the free trade agreement prevents Canada from continuing its restrictions on bulk container shipments and consignment selling.

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