

Opinion

Luckily, they can't hear me

I love to sing — I mean really belt it out. There is a problem, however. I'm bad.

Real bad.

Well, it's not like I can't hit a note. It's just that I have an extremely narrow vocal range. Too high and my voice cracks, too low and it wavers uncontrollably, like a bridge in a high wind.

Within my vocal range I'm a master, almost, if I may be so bold, a virtuoso. I'm pure quality across each and every one of those four notes.

With such a narrow range it is sometimes difficult to find songs within my capabilities. Thus some songs have a number of unexpected changes of key, my own personal touch, which renders them instantly unrecognizable and unfit for human consumption.

I have been banished to the shower, where off-key singing is an institution, and to the car, where it is a necessity.

Cars are great for singing. You crank the volume up enough so you can't hear your own voice, even at full belt. Then you start groovin' to your favourite songs.

Other motorists usually get a charge out of my machinations. The hand held, palm out at arm's length, as I'm singing *Stop! In The Name Of Love* is a show stopper, especially to oncoming traffic.

You have to mimic the classic poses of the various guitar heroes as well. It's hard while driving a car.

Occasionally I'll be in the middle of a traffic tie-up and my antics in car concert manage to greatly amuse those around, unless they're tuned to the same radio station.

It gives a whole new meaning to the term



**Reaume
With a View**
with BRAD REAUME

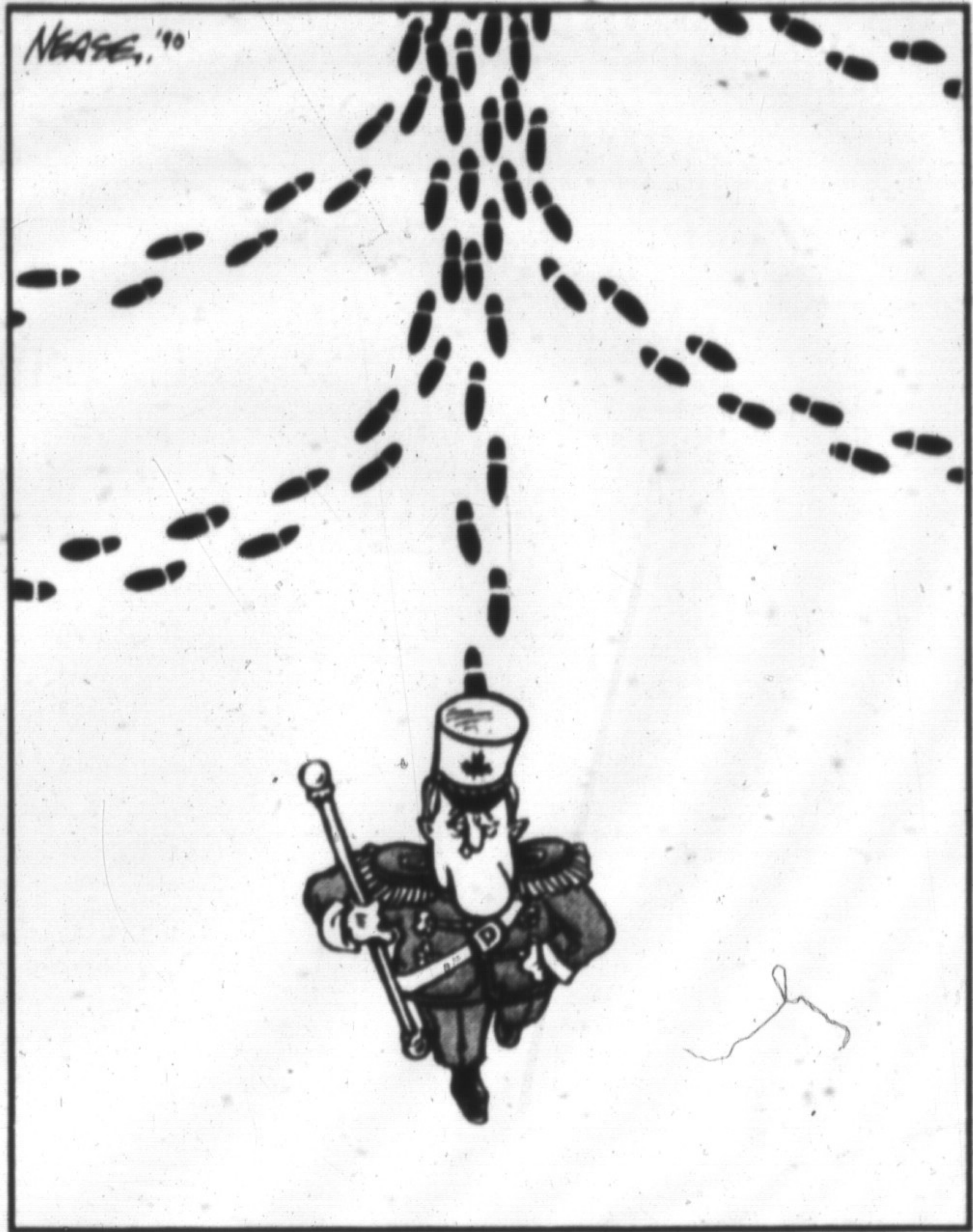
traffic jam. I do my best lounge lizard. "Hey! thank you very much, and, I *REALLY* mean that" routine, pointing and gesturing to various members of my captive audience.

On the open road, strange looks predominate as I'm bobbing and weaving to the music. Do I care? Actually, yeah, it bugs me when people think a little harmless fun is a form of insanity. Drum parts encourage car dancing the most, and thus the most strange looks.

At the same time it's the reverb and feedback parts which are the hardest to do. You can loll your head, do a series of short nods, or a fake guitar refrain on your steering wheel but none of those moves seem to do justice to the music. The opening of *I Feel Fine* or *Magic Carpet Ride* fails utterly in automotive reproduction.

Car dancing is an entirely different thing. It merely requires a dance from the waist up. Hand movements are of course the easiest but some consideration is necessary regarding the steering wheel. This is usually done by professionals. Do not attempt to do this on your own. The true car dance is a mixture of bouncing, swaying and hand moving; much like real dancing, while negotiating traffic.

I always like passing people on the down beat.



CANADA DAY PARADE

The lure of fresh berries

Ah, berries! I love them all.

I wasn't so enthusiastic the other morning, however, when we reached the strawberry patch. For starters, I was grudgingly making amends for having completely missed last year's strawberry picking season. My eldest had not forgotten this unforgivable oversight.

"I don't like this," I grumbled to my children as I waited impatiently for us to be allotted rows to pick clean.

So far the day had not gone as planned. I had wanted to leave home around 8 a.m. But there we were, only just arrived and it was already 10 a.m. The sun was beating down and we were sweating in long-sleeved shirts, pants and hats.

My mood improved as we beheld a bumper crop of ripe, red berries. Our fingers moved swiftly from one laden plant to the next. Even the four year old kept up, filling almost an entire basket. After half an hour, we ran out of baskets and hands to carry them. Thirty litres of strawberries. I can live with that.

Before the baskets even reached the car, we were devouring the berries, juice running down our chins. At home, the two eldest children hulled and washed most of the berries, then spread them out on cookie sheets and put them into the freezer. Later they bagged them and returned them to the freezer.

"Are you going to put them down?" asked my aunt. The only "down" for these berries is down the hatch — au naturel. No pies, jams or strawberry crisps for this lot.

I thought I had gone to heaven the summer my husband and I spent in New Zealand. The strawberry season went on forever. I picked and picked and picked. Photos show me gloating over large baskets of strawberries, my berry-stained fingers poised for another drop into the delicious fruit.

I would set a container of berries on my desk at work and nibble on them all day long. For-



**On the
Home Front**
with ESTHER CALDWELL

tunately, no one complained about mysterious pink blotches on the invoices and time sheets.

Last summer we located a raspberry patch near our cottage — if 45 minutes away could be considered close. Accustomed to tasking thorny wild raspberry bushes, I found this domesticated variety delightfully accessible and plentiful.

I had never before picked such a great quantity of raspberries so I was distressed when they sunk dejectedly into the bottom of the basket, threatening to turn to mush. All the more reason, of course, to gobble them up quickly. We added them to our cereal, dropped them into our pancake mix, made yogurt ice cream or just grabbed handfuls. My mouth waters just thinking about those sweet berries.

The bees like raspberries too. My youngest and an assertive bee fought for supremacy over one particular bush. My son lost. If the other two children remind him of the painful experience, he may be reluctant to return to that spot this summer.

When I was a teenager, my aunt and uncle invited me to their cottage. They didn't warn me that our main diet would be blueberries. We kids and the adults would cover up against the pesky deerflies, and with sand pails and other odd containers in our hands, trudge into the hot bush. We took turns being the storyreader to help pass the time. I acquired a taste for blueberries that summer.

Ah berries, I love them all.

Sad state of institutional care

In the last 10 years there has been a widespread and healthy movement to get all possible mentally handicapped people out of institutions and into community group homes.

One problem it has created, however, is that the most severely handicapped people are the ones who are staying in the institutions.

Consequently, there is a much greater burden on the institutions and the staff working there. They are continuously faced with the toughest clients to work with, yet they have no added staff, training or expertise.

Studies suggest the needs of clients in institutions are simply not being met. Patients spend a large majority of their time alone. They get little, if any, treatment. They spend most of each day engaging in bizarre and inappropriate behaviours.

I've seen it, here and in the United States. It is the rule, not the exception. Many (not all) staff want to avoid patients whenever possible. Many (not all) do not enjoy the work anymore, feel unappreciated and inadequately trained.

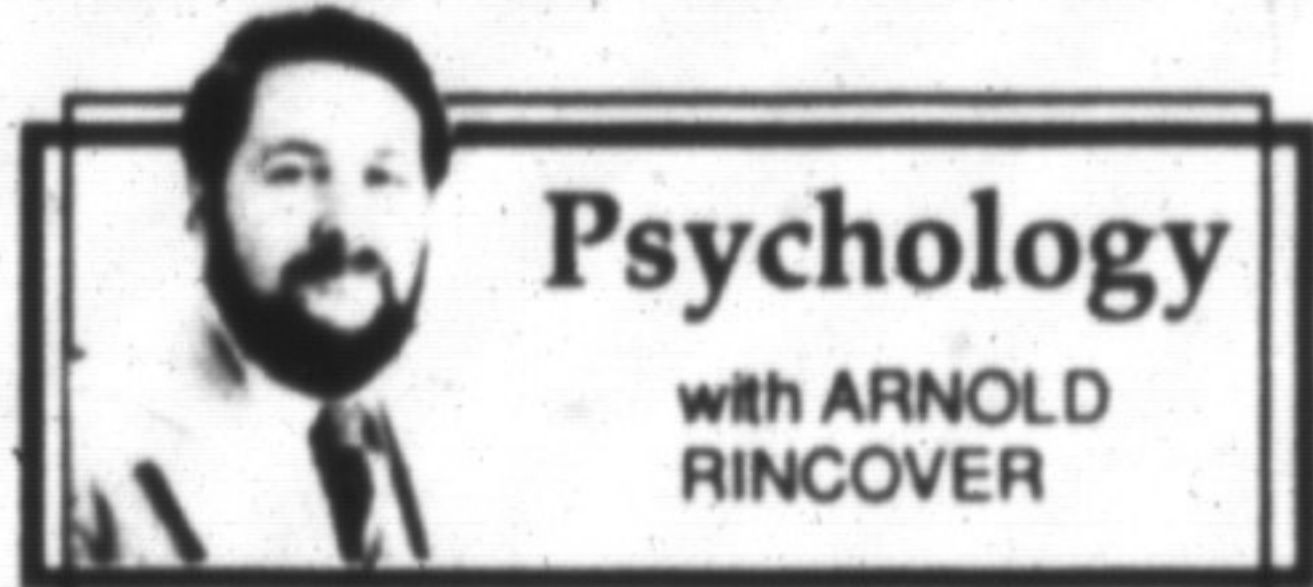
It would be easy to blame it all on the staff, but that would be unfair. Many of them started out bright-eyed and idealistic, with seemingly endless enthusiasm. Well, no one's enthusiasm is endless.

We assume that anyone in this field must be altruistic, in it for love. That's naive and untrue.

They may love their job, but they also want to move up the promotional ladder, get a raise, learn new skills and get some acknowledgement or credit for a job well done. If you do good things and nobody notices, you will soon stop doing them.

The United States and Canada have developed standards for facilities caring for mentally retarded persons. Studies suggest, however, that these standards are not being met.

For example, a study at Northern Illinois University looked at eight institutional wards



Psychology
with ARNOLD RINCOVER

and found that, in an average six-hour period that was supposed to be for programmed activities, clients had programs for less than 10 minutes.

They also interacted with staff for only 12-53 minutes and made strange, repetitive movements which have no social purpose, such as finger-flapping or body-rocking for as long as 113 minutes — more than 25 per cent of the time. On average, residents spent five times as long alone, ignored, as they spent learning.

To say these results are specific to the U.S. would be downright silly. Sure, there are different regulations in the U.S., but I'm talking about problems of motivation, morale and staff training.

There is no reason to think these problems are any less prevalent here.

Though much of this research was done in institutions, the same questions are begging an answer in group homes.

Group homes can offer these people a more natural and meaningful life, but it is not guaranteed. We don't know how much teaching is really going on, how often staff interact with residents, how often residents go out into the community.

It's easy to blame budgets, bureaucracies, or staff, yet research has shown that incentives, promotions, training, systems of supervision and accountability, can in fact turn wards (and group homes) into hotbeds of teamwork and treatment.

There are simply no excuses left for anything less.

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