



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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The lingering tragedy of the toothless tigers

How many of you understand the role of our town council, and the various departments councillors control? The biggest misunderstanding I find in talking to people is over the perception of how much clout council actually wields. It ain't much.

As councillor Brad Clements, a newly elected director of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) indicated in *The Champion* last Wednesday, municipalities don't get much respect from the provincial government.

What this means to us as citizens is that despite our input into local affairs, the layers of elected and non-elected fat above our councillors can, in most cases over-rule them.

Let's take the proposed 40-odd unit non-profit housing complex planned by the Milton Fairgrounds. It was opposed by council, yet Halton regional planners say it's okay. And the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) will likely support it. The citizens be damned.

The question of how to apply market value assessment (MVA), regardless of the recommendations of a citizens' committee set up to study it, will be decided by regional and provincial governments. We are considered too simple minded to know what's best for our community.

The feds and the province hold the big guns — money. Funding (I hate that word). If we don't tow the line, our funding will be cut.

We really end up with a bunch of caretakers as councillors and municipal department heads, because their authority is minimal. But they still have to be responsible. A bad way to run anything.

We recently spent approximately \$70,000 to hire a town chief planner. Let's assume his qualifications are impeccable. My question is, what can he plan? He's second-guessed or

VIEW POINT

with PATRICK KELLY

over-ruled by his regional counterparts, by the Niagara Escarpment Commission, by the OMB, by whatever other higher or parallel level of bureaucracy that decides to poke its nose into local affairs.

The man's skills and our money are wasted by the weight of bureaucracy stifling whatever creativity is brought to the job.

The same can be said for almost any local government position, elected officials included.

Our chief-administrative officer, David Hipgrave, was also elected to the AMO board. I wish both he and Mr. Clements the best of luck in what I hope will be their attempts to bring more authority back to the municipalities. Frankly, if they are unsuccessful, there is very little reason to have this level of government.

It would be interesting to hear Messrs. Clements and Hipgrave's views on the matter, as well as that of Mayor Gord Krantz. Maybe in the next municipal election, a job description for their positions should be published, covering their true responsibilities and authority. If they appear wanting in terms of true authority, who needs them?

To quote Mr. Krantz, "there's an old saying, 'if you pay, you say.'" The towns are currently paying, but they have very little say.

What about us? Josy and Joe Taxpayer? We are the real toothless tigers.



Teenagers don't feel invulnerable

Parents have this image that once their cute little munchkins turn into teenagers, they become rabid risk-takers, they feel invulnerable, experiment with everything from drugs and alcohol to sex and gangs.

Going to high school or college means they will be in a highly concentrated den of teenagers — some of whom will be even more risky and feel more invulnerable, even have bad upbringings and bad morals.

Putting our sheltered kids in the clutches of these other unbridled teenagers, without us to supervise and give them the do's and don'ts, will surely undo all the morals and values we tried to give them, in minutes. So, we worry.

When it's time for them to go to high school, or to live on a college campus, we play the martyrs, quietly have conniptions, watch Family Ties reruns in their memory, waiting for the phone call that tells us they've ruined their lives.

As a beginning-to-get-worried father of my first pre-adolescent, it was tremendously comforting to find out that teenagers are not really risk-takers, they do not feel invulnerable any more than you or I.

A recent study in the *American Psychologist* (February) was one of the first to look at feelings of invulnerability in teenagers. They compared groups of troubled teens, untroubled teens, and the parents of untroubled teens, and found that feelings of invulnerability were no



PSYCHOLOGY IN THE '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

more pronounced in teens than in adults.

The researchers asked all subjects to judge the probability that they would face various risks, compared to a parent, friend or an acquaintance. They rated the chances, in the next five years, of being in an auto accident, becoming an alcoholic, getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant (unwanted pregnancy), getting mugged or hurt in an explosion, becoming seriously ill.

They found that if subjects feel they have some control, feelings of invulnerability increase. For example, both kids and adults feel more vulnerable in an airplane than while driving a car.

The really interesting finding is that all groups — kids and adults — felt unrealistically invulnerable. It's not just teenagers who feel they are invulnerable, it's their parents. There were no significant differences between teens and adults on their ratings of their own invulnerability.

Studies with adults have consistently shown they feel invulnerable, much less vulnerable than their neighbours or the average stranger. Adults think they are more likely than other people to have positive experiences in most areas, such as business transactions, social events, the avoidance of natural disasters.

They were more unrealistically optimistic than their teenagers in predicting the likelihood of health problems. Adults saw themselves as facing less risk than their children three times more often than they saw themselves as being more at risk.

There were, however, differences between adults and teens when it came to some of the specific risks. Students felt they were more vulnerable than their parents to auto accidents, developing alcoholism, having an unwanted pregnancy or getting mugged.

Kids, on the other hand, felt less risk than parents felt when it came to experimenting with smoking, sex, driving and drugs — despite the clear research on the risks of smoking, the fact that sexually transmitted disease is twice the rate in teenagers than it is for young adults in their 20s, and that they get into significantly more accidents than adults.

It may be "folk wisdom" that teenagers feel any more invulnerable than adults do. Yet, they do seem to get into scrapes more often. Why? We don't know if they are good at judging how risky an activity is. They may not intend to take more risks, but haven't figured out what is a risk and what isn't.

I hugged him, then he was gone to Belarus

I've put my Russian-English dictionary back on the bookshelf. I may never again have the opportunity to use it. Dima, the 15-year-old from Belarus, has returned to his family after spending six weeks with us.

When we said our goodbyes, it was with the thought that it could most likely be the last time we would ever see him. It seemed so final and sad.

I didn't realize until near the end of Dima's visit how much I would miss him. Six weeks doesn't seem like a long time but it was obviously long enough to develop an affectionate attachment for him.

Oh sure, Dima was trying at times, but only because he was a teenager with a mind of his own — no different from our 15-year-old. He lived in our midst, not as a guest but as a member of our family, participating in all of our activities, including tedious dishwashing.

We suffered greatly because of our ignorance of one another's language, and we only scratched the surface of the real Dima. We do know he had a terrific sense of humour. We laughed at his purposeful combinations of his limited English with facial expressions and body movements.

And he was a tyrant about punctuality. If I told him supper would be ready at six p.m., he was right on my case if I missed the deadline.



ON THE HOMEFRONT

with ESTHER CALDWELL

After all, he needed to be out fishing as soon as possible after the meal.

But how did he feel? Did he feel homesick at times? Did he get fed up with my son's constant teasing? Was his visit to Canada an experience of a lifetime? Did we as a family meet his expectations? Were there things he wanted to see during his stay in Canada that he was unable to communicate to us? Will he think of us from time to time? These are questions for which we'll never have answers.

What souvenirs does he have of his summer in Canada? An album of photos, a t-shirt, running shoes, sunglasses, a fishing rod and reel — and a large bottle of ketchup which he has by now no doubt consumed.

If I could have, I would have sent him home with a crate of bananas. He loved them. We didn't realize at the beginning of his stay that he wasn't helping himself to the bananas the

way he was to the bread and cereal — until we indicated that he was free at any time to eat them. We can only deduce that in Belarus, bananas are a rare treat.

He went fishing as usual on his final day at the cottage. By that time he had learned to run the motor — no more rowing for him. He brought back a huge pike, insisting that I cook it up for him for his last dinner with us. Will his new rod and reel remind him of the hundreds of hours he spent on our lake?

Although I never buy Coca Cola for my children, I finally broke down and bought him a bottle of the soft drink that he had been bugging me to purchase everytime we were in a store. And our relatives loaded him up with chocolate bars and chewing gum — goodies that excited him more than salads ever did during his stay.

On his departure day, Dima and I drove to the Ottawa bus terminal, where he was to catch the bus to Mirabel Airport. A crush of people were seeing the children off. Adults and children alike were weeping. The Canadian families were already missing the Belarusian children, who were clinging to their newfound friends. I tucked my tears in my pocket and hugged Dima, kissing him on the cheek. He returned my hug and boarded the bus. And then he was gone.