



# OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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## Grocery bills down, phone bills up

The phone rang. It was our teenager. Did he need a ride home from school? ("My French horn and all my books are too heavy to carry.") Did he need a ride from work? ("It's late and I have a lot of homework to do.") Did he need a ride from downtown? (No particular excuse; he just thought it wouldn't hurt to ask.) No to all of those reasons for phoning us. A ride home we could not help him with, since he was calling from Milan, Italy. But yes, he did need something from us. In fact, he started reading his list. (So far, it has not included a cry for cash.)

Could we send him our pancake recipe? Apparently, he plans to prepare a Canadian meal for his Italian family. Before he flew to Italy, we agonized over what he should take as a gift. We finally decided on a bottle of maple syrup. What better way to highlight an all-Canadian product than with a feed of pancakes?

Could we go to his school and pick up his report card? What's the rush, kid? It will be waiting for you in June. While we were at it, could we also send him the booklet on his course options?

And, oh yes (there was desperation in his voice), he was scheduled to do a presentation in history class on the Canadian system of government. Could we mail him that information ASAP? Hopefully, it will reach him before his stay is over. The speed with which mail has been travelling back and forth between the two countries makes it doubtful.

He suggested hubby and I attend the parent-teacher night to meet his only teacher of the second semester, a physical education instructor who probably would not be able to put a face to his name since his class was so huge. But, the teen said, this guy was "neat". This was one instance where neatness would not count for ma and pa.

Would his sister please turn on the computer



## On the Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

and see if he had any e-mail? She tried but soon realized she had forgotten how to do it, and since the teen had neglected to instruct the rest of us computer illiterates, he'll have to pick up that mail in June, too.

Once he worked his way through the list, he detailed every activity he had done, every food he had eaten, and every observation he had made so far of the Italian culture — so many people, and loud too, primitive plumbing, manic-al drivers.

Our grocery bill has shot down dramatically since our constantly starving teen left home, but our escalating phone bills exceed whatever we may have saved in groceries.

Although he is supposed to be attending school in Milan, he informed us he had wrangled a trip with year-long exchange students. He may be a better salesperson than I imagined. He and his all-female entourage headed for Sardinia for a 10-day visit.

Do we miss him? Hubby says he does — a lot. I don't have a great ache in my heart for our wandering son, but I do note his absence from time to time.

Just when I start wondering what he's up to and whether he's happy and healthy, the phone will ring and I'll hear his deep voice as if he were only a minute away.

## Excuse me, pardon me ... hey, you!

Although it may be hard to believe, I don't bask in a tidal wave of admiration due to my appearance.

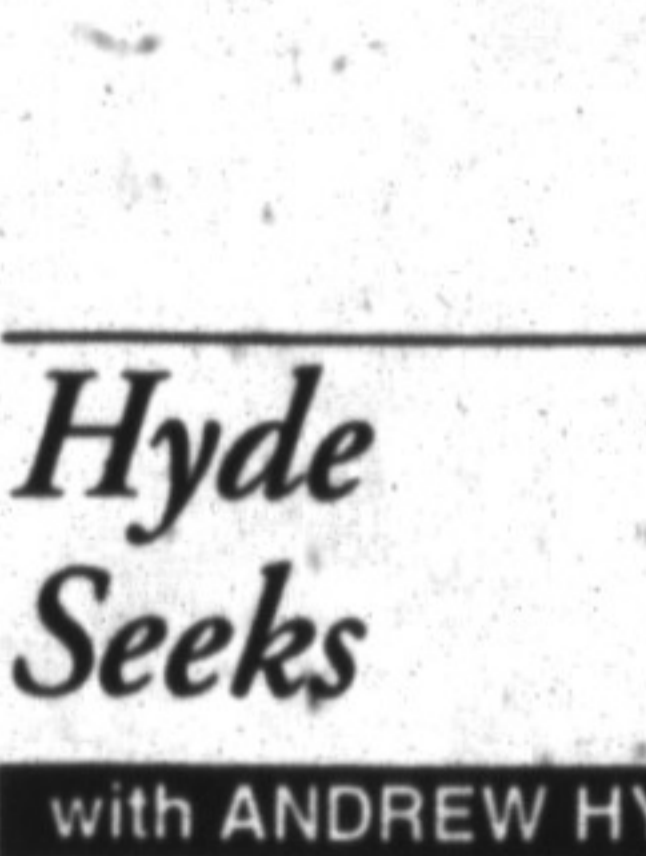
Not once has my striking face or chiseled physique caused a young lady to stare, or even cast a backward sly glance in my direction, for that matter.

This caused me to take notice when, on a recent trip to the Maritimes, I ended up stopping traffic ... in both directions.

Surely these lucky bluenosers had realized what the Greater Toronto Area has long overlooked. They must have caught a glimpse of my rugged (yet sophisticated) demeanor and simply had to put on the brakes to get a better look.

However, as I looked up from my posing, I noticed a group of pedestrians pass me and walk across the street in front of the stopped cars. All too quickly did I realize that the drivers were not my audience.

They were instead practising the hospitable gesture of slowing down and stopping to let pedestrians cross the street. As I later found out, this is very common through the Maritimes. I



## Hyde Seeks

with ANDREW HYDE

buried my bright red, southern Ontario face in my jacket and quickly trotted across the intersection.

It's strange how it often takes a good dose of southern hospitality, prairie generosity, or maritime courtesy to realize how shabby our manners are in southern Ontario.

All too often we get lulled into a false sense of certainty regarding our courtesy when we hear how polite Canadians are, and how clean Toronto is.

The truth is, we in southern Ontario are a money-grubbing, pavement pounding, cellular-



## Tired of just fetching cookies?

The Ministry of Education is pushing for parent councils at each school in Ontario, and the responsibilities of these groups are being contemplated by a travelling road show of superintendents, trustees and other education officials. In other words, the foxes are designing the new chicken coop.

What must be clearly understood by parent councils is this: The educational establishment doesn't want you. You are being forced upon them.

They will use your last tax dollar to maintain control of standards, assessment and accountability. The idea of parents deciding student curricula, board salaries, and other spending directions is seen as dangerous and unpalatable.

Existing parent associations have been major contributors to our school systems. Their efforts, however, have been primarily guided towards fundraising and acting as supervisors on field trips.

A new direction may be emerging if the recently formed Halton Alliance of School Parent Organizations can get off the ground. Tired of being relegated to serving tea and cookies, this group is trying to organize all the

## View Point

with PATRICK KELLY



school councils in Halton under one umbrella. They are meeting with resistance from individual schools as well as the public board of education, which doesn't want to release the names and phone numbers of individual school council members. Not flattered for their cooperation when their turf is being compromised, board officials also appear reluctant to provide clear and accurate details of the budget process to this group. Why should that be a secret?

Like our Milton Ratepayers Association, they are asking for a five-year history of board spending. They also want to know what the board has done over this period to make cuts outside the classroom, to justify why cuts today must reach into the classroom, and they are asking why the board hasn't put pressure on the Ministry of Education and unions to moderate their demands.

Our ratepayers meeting next Wednesday (April 17, 7:30 p.m.) at the Milton Optimist centre will focus on the issue of cost. Where does our money go? Who is responsible for spending it? Who are the real decision makers?

Frankly, I hope as many teachers as possible show up. They appear to be as confused as the rest of us about board spending.

According to Halton public board figures it costs approximately \$190,000 per year to teach a class of 30 elementary kids and 70 to 80 per cent of that is instructional salary costs. The average teacher is supposedly paid less than \$50,000, so where does the rest of the money go?

Somebody is giving us a snow job and it was going on long before we ever heard of John Snoblen, our current minister of education. If you are tired of just serving tea and cookies, then start getting more involved. You can start by coming to our meeting.

Pat Kelly is a board member of the Milton Ratepayers Association.