

OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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We're all drawn back to the coast

The three of us looked at the map. There we were in the Gaspé, New Carlisle to be exact. It was a cool Monday night. We were roughing it, so to speak, in a cabin — four walls, floor and ceiling — the not-much-else variety.

By the light of the two overhead bulbs, our fingers traced a route south. Should we or shouldn't we? We had to be back in Ontario by the following Sunday. That was our only deadline. Our itinerary was wide open.

Why not go to Prince Edward Island? Yes, indeed, why not? We were a mere 530 kilometres away from the point of departure on the mainland and from there just a stone's throw — okay, a 45-minute ferry ride — to the island.

My 13 year old was ecstatic with out P.E.I. decision. Having sung the Anne of Green Gables medley in her children's choir, she was especially eager to see the musical in Charlottetown. And so we did, sitting five rows from the stage.

I wanted to see the red soil and the sand dunes. And so I did. Along the Dufferin during our stay in P.E.I., we attended a ceilidh (pronounced kay-lee), a Celtic music festival held in Summerside. The bagpipers deafened us, as did the drummer. And we tapped our feet along with the singers and highland dancers.

P.E.I., we discovered quickly, is not a huge chunk of land as is Ontario, and we kept reaching our destinations sooner than anticipated. Only having two days to explore the province, however, barely acquainted us with its charms.

We often heard about the fathers of Confederation and their pivotal gathering in Charlottetown. On our mostly boring, dou-



On the Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

bledecker bus tour of the city, our guide must have mentioned those fellows 10 times. We forced my daughter to sit through a historical slide presentation when I knew she would rather be across the street at Cow's ice cream shop licking some delectable flavour. (We rewarded her later with a cone).

Back in New Brunswick, we handed over \$2 and checked out Magnetic Hill which hit me in one of my cynical moments. The fact that my van mysteriously rolled uphill failed to impress me.

The following morning I cajoled my companions into travelling to the northeast corner of New Brunswick to tour a historical Acadian village. The expulsion of the Acadians is not a part of Canadian history I recalled learning in school.

That bit of sidetracking cost us a gruelling, final day of driving 1,000 kilometres to reach our cottage.

We're already talking about Nova Scotia next summer. So much for staying on the home front. The travel bug has struck again.



Who cheats at college, and why

Is cheating a major problem at universities? Recent surveys says it is and the powers that be seem to be turning a blind eye to it.

A recent US survey, reported in the January issue of the American Psychology Association Monitor, found that 40 to 60 percent of students had cheated at least once at college. Half of them cheated more than once. This is scary stuff. These are our creme de la creme, our future leaders, yet about 25 percent of these future leaders haven't got the moral foundation to understand that cheating is wrong.

To make matters worse, the survey states that 20 percent of professors report that they have ignored strong evidence of cheating. Why? Some don't think it's their job — they're educators, not policemen, and it's the parents' job to instill morals.

Who is the typical cheater? The child with the Type B personality is most apt to cheat. While Type A students are aggressive, achievement-oriented and competitive, they usually plan ahead, over-learn the material, prepare well for the exam. They want to be in control, studying



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

and mastering the material is the best way to do it.

Type B kids, on the other hand, are more relaxed, less goal-oriented, and less likely to believe that they control their own future. As a result, they are typically less concerned with learning the material and more grade oriented. They want to make good grades, but they're less interested in learning or mastery.

What can we do to prevent cheating in universities? We can work on two fronts. First parents can forewarn their kids, help them to plan their schedule so it is not so tight. Outside work should be cut down or eliminated, if it interferes with course work. More important, we need to teach our children that learning is the most important thing, the grades will follow. We need to instill in them a sense of fairness, why cheating is wrong.

We also need some new approaches at the university. Most people think that universities have strong policies against cheating. This is not true. Some have a very strict honour code, some provide guidelines, others leave it to individual departments to decide how to handle it. The truth is, without a consistent and strong university-wide policy, cheating will be rampant.

Even if a strong honour code is developed, how can we give it some clout without being too severe? The University of Maryland at College Park recently started an experimental policy for cheating: they give a student a mark of "X/F" if he cheats, and this grade goes on his permanent academic record. The "X" denotes cheating, and the "F" indicates that the class was failed.

The "X" can be removed after a year if the student takes a six week course on ethics and community responsibility. In this course, they are also required to write letters of apology to relevant others, and explain why they cheated. Early returns suggest that cheating is down substantially at the University of Maryland.

How one state battled high property taxes

It put state and local politicians on notice that taxpayers were taking charge.

The date was June 6, 1978, when Californians approved Proposition 13 by an overwhelming margin of two to one. This citizen-initiated referendum rolled back property taxes, limited future tax hikes, and put taxpayers in the driver's seat by requiring voter approval before new or increased taxes could be imposed.

While Proposition 13 sparked tax revolts in other states, for the average California homeowner it meant the threat of losing their homes because of skyrocketing property taxes was finally over.

Before Californians voted on Proposition 13, property taxes averaged 3 per cent of a property's assessed value. Properties not only could be, but were, re-assessed annually at actual values.

With high inflation fuelling increased housing costs, annual re-assessment resulted in windfall tax revenues, while hurting those on fixed incomes by forcing them to sell or lose their property to the tax collector.

Proposition 13 was a sanity check on a property tax assessment system that was out of control. It forced a roll-back of property taxes to 1975/76

Let's Talk Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

levels, placed a 1 percent cap on property tax assessments, and limited future annual increases to 2 percent.

Actual Price Acquisition, or the APA system in California, applies to apartments and business property, as well as to single-family homes.

The California APA system means that long-time property owners end up with lower assessments and taxes over a period of time, compared to recently sold similar homes in the same neighbourhood, where the assessed value and taxes would be much higher.

Politicians and other 'tax and spend' advocates

have painted Proposition 13 as having had a disastrous effect on local government services. But despite the efforts of the public sector to hammer away at its success with taxpayers, Proposition 13 remains basically intact some 18 years later.

As a taxpayer-designed assessment system, APA is difficult to attack on grounds of equity. Although homes of equal value may carry different assessments and pay different taxes, equity is what taxpayers perceive it to be. In California, the taxpayer standard or equity is that properties purchased for the same price, regardless as to when they were bought, should pay the same tax.

Shortly after a 1992 Supreme Court ruling upheld Proposition 13, Florida voters also ditched Actual Value Assessment in favour of APA.

APA may not be the system that Ontarians would favour. But with the Mike Harris government ready to ram Actual Value Assessment down the throats of municipal taxpayers, without first consulting them through a referendum to find which option they prefer, Ontarians can only do a little wishful 'California Dreaming'.