



by Shirley Whittington

## The stove strikes back

that stove, but I never cleaned it.

I once bought a tin of that miracle oven cleaner that is advertised on the television, but I never learned how to pry off the child-proof cap. Anyway, the first sentence in the directions advises that the stuff be kept away from the eyes, which precludes any further reading on the subject.

So while other homemakers cooked on stoves of avocado green and copper tone, I boiled up the porridge in one that was finished in old bacon grease and fingerprints. No matter - it matched the rest of the kitchen.

This year, as the festive season approached, I redecorated the kitchen. Armed with a scrubbing pail, I transferred it from early fingerprint to original white. The Grandmothers were coming, and I wanted to impress them.

Did I do the stove? Well, no. I still hadn't figured out how to open the childproof cap on the oven cleaner. I gave the grimy old thing a lick and a promise.

That was when it turned on me. Panel lights flickered and died. The automatic timer had a nervous breakdown. And when we were inserting the Christmas turkey, the oven door fell off.

You know how hard it is to get a repairman in the holiday season. For the next couple of days we lived on fried foods and everybody got a bit spotty. The stove gaped at us uselessly from the corner of the kitchen - a mute testimony to years of neglect.

When the repairman did arrive, he timed his entrance with the precision of a theatrical

prima donna. Everybody was home but me. I hustled in later, and found an astonishing tableau in my kitchen.

The repairman was lying on his side beside the stove which had been pulled out of its greasy niche in the kitchen cupboards.

The Little Kid was in the empty space behind, sweeping up mounds of dust, spoons, dimes, drinking straws, apple cores, and other debris that defies description.

In front of the stove was the Squire. With a pointed knife, he was grimly prying grime out of all the little cracks and crevices, and muttering about vermin, cockroaches and food poisoning.

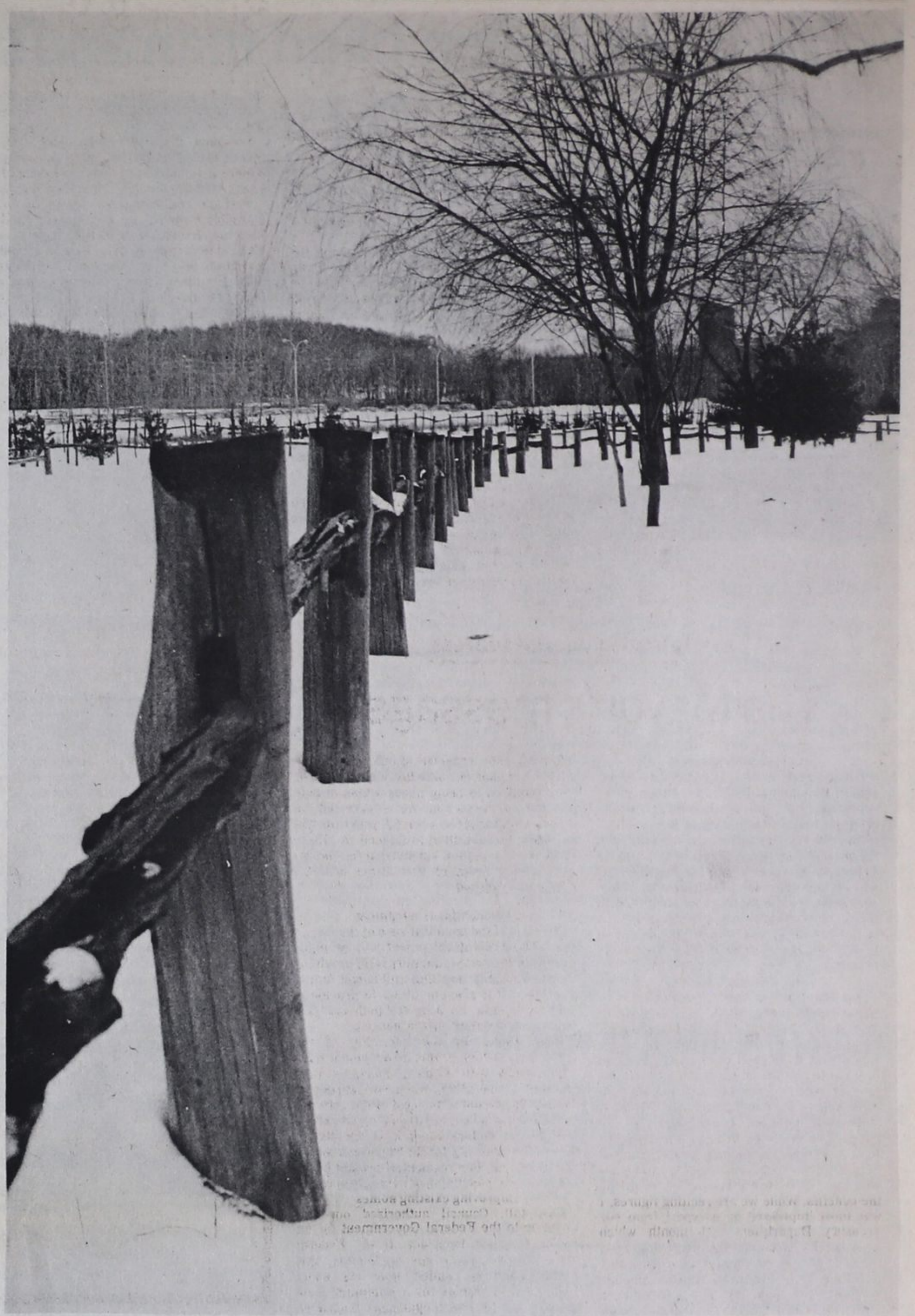
On the other side of the stove was a grandma, diligently scraping off years of accumulated drippings and other assorted grunge.

The rest of the family was just kind of standing around overseeing the whole messy operation. The kids looked at me with a strange mixture of triumph and contempt.

I had been found out. They were looking at the real me - the homemaker who neglects her appliances and wonders why they break down; the hypocritical mother who insists that everyone else in the family live sanitary lives; the feckless daughter who devotes more time to frivolity than to housework.

The next time I'm alone with that fink stove, I'm going to give it more than a lick and a promise. I'm going to give it a kick and a malediction.

Shirley Whittington is a staff writer with Markle Community Newspapers.



Winter stillness at Ste. Marie



by Ron Jones

## Whelan needs friends

The embattled Agriculture Minister then must be wondering how to make friends within his own caucus - given the petulant bleatings of former Minister of Consumer Affairs, Herb Gray and the outright alienation of rural support by Justice Minister Otto Lang and Energy Minister Don MacDonald. Lang, who is also the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, had just prior to Christmas doled out over \$1-billion to western grain growers - dollars taken in by the Wheat Board mainly from foreign sales of Canadian grain, not subsidies.

But did the minister express appreciation for the farmers' contribution to the Canadian economy in producing an exportable product and generating thousands of jobs in transporting, milling, and manufacturing etc? No, sir! In the paternal spirit of the late C.D. Howe, he warned them not to spend their money foolishly.

While Otto Lang's comments are insulting and demeaning, the actions of Energy Minister Don MacDonald have an odour of despotism.

About a year ago, when Western Canada was thought to be full of oil and the Arabs wanted an arm and a leg for theirs, plans were conceived for a new trans-Ontario pipeline to carry crude oil from the west to the Montreal market. Subsequently, Inter-provincial Pipeline Co. applied to the National Energy Board for permission to construct such a line from Sarnia to Montreal, much to the dismay of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and farmers in the area of the probable pipeline route.

The farm people made representation to

MacDonald but were told it was out of his hands, that the NEB would decide when, if, and where the line would be constructed.

The OFA, at great expense of time and money, sat through the NEB hearings in Ottawa, and made their representations. The hearings were then adjourned at the request of Inter Provincial Pipeline, which decided they wanted guarantees from the federal government before they would construct the pipeline. To this date, no decision has been handed down or at least made public by the NEB.

However, since the adjournment of hearings, MacDonald has insisted publicly and to the press that the pipeline would be built. A line that farmers don't want, Quebec doesn't need and as some informed observers claim was never intended to carry Western Canadian oil (that may not be there) but was a scheme to reduce the oil-based bargaining power of Alberta's Premier Lougheed - by making off-shore oil available to the Ontario industrial empire.

The culmination of MacDonald's arrogance in his dealings with Ontario farmers led to the unprecedented call for his resignation as Energy Minister in a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau from the OFA board of directors in mid-December. The Trudeau administration's credibility has suffered a serious wound with the normally nonpartisan farm organization that will only be healed after some internal surgery in his cabinet.

And probably the straightforward Whelan will view the large rural support he singlehandedly won for the Liberals and be thinking - with friends like this in the Cabinet who needs an opposition?



by Vianney Carriere

## Content in the warm quiet of a Lake Simcoe cottage

fireplace until it became too dim and the sun was setting and then I moved away from the flames which warmed my back and my side to sit here with one lamp turned very low. My friend, mentor, ear, occasional companion and occasional Mother Confessor lies sleeping on the couch curled up in a sleeping bag because there is no heat in this place except for that from the brick fireplace and a space heater which was only turned on when we arrived at Melba Lodge several hours ago, and furniture warms much more slowly than the room.

We were right to come here, close to Lake Simcoe, about 60 miles north of Toronto, isolated without being remote, totally quiet, totally silent except for me turning the pages, and her, sleeping there, breathing regularly and at times moving slightly to straighten an arm or pull the sleeping bag a bit higher.

In between chapters, I think that tomorrow, I have to start thinking about going back to work, and all of the previous three weeks which I took off as holidays have

amounted to this day of total aloneness and peace and the flames in the fireplace which breathe serenity and warmth into the room like a third presence that caresses and engulfs us both.

This is a nice room. I've been here before and it has pleasant and funny memories for me, and the cottage belongs to the sleeping figure's parents so her memories must be much greater than mine even as she sleeps.

The fireplace gets another log, and the bark ignites into emerald green that lights the room again and crackles so loudly that I fear she will wake up. So I sit beside her for a moment ready to resume the stroking of her hair and forehead which is what I was doing when she fell asleep in the first place, but she doesn't so much as stir and I return to my reading looking up now and then to make sure the log caught. It did.

You see a lot of things in a fireplace. It has a magic of its own, which combined with total relaxation and comfort turns into a time machine that can whisk you through days

and weeks and even years, forward or backward at a whim, at a thought, at an idea. The flames are like flowers and you can walk around them and pick out the ones you want to build a bouquet of emotions, feelings and thoughts that feed when you close your eyes, never quite shutting off the fire because there's a faint glow of red that dances on the inside of your eyelids, waving veils of thoughts something like a gentle bullfighter who teases and cajoles the senses.

I'm smiling at the lady next door who saw us drive up and promptly brought a tray of food including turkey, apple pie, rye bread and salt because she said she thought "The kids must be famished." My sleeping friend and I were grateful for the unexpected kindness, but shared the same fundamental thought: apple pie? And no cheese?? I'm smiling at the lady's dog that's ten years old but can still jump three feet in the air, at the quaintness of having to walk fifty yards to a well for water, or lighting the fire and then shedding sweater after sweater after

sweater, progressively as the room warms up.

What is here is very important. Candles, and oil lamps, the fireplace of course, and amateurish oil paintings, a Stephen Leacock book, a couple of games, aging editions of the National Geographic, an old heavy burgundy warm bathrobe that I adopted the first time I was up here, the sleeping lady, and an inner composure that I can seldom aspire to.

What isn't here is also important. Noise, televisions, radios, telephones, correctly set clocks and thermostats. Between the fireplace and this chair I feel sandwiched between eternity and love. It's a comfortable feeling. It's very shortly after Christmas, but the cottage, which hasn't had visitors for several weeks is devoid of all ostensibly Christmas things. But I open my eyes again and look into the flames where the new log is burning very very well, and I can somehow feel that even if on December 25, this place was deserted, it wasn't forgotten. Santa was

here, and he left his gifts. They just aren't the type of gifts that come in packages with bows, and that are shaken in a guess at what's inside and then unwrapped, and then fondled and cooed at and touched. They are far better gifts that announce their presence subtly, and make your eyelids heavy with a joy that permeates and stays with you for a while after you've gone, and will still be there when you return.

In between visits here, there is another world, but the place comes back when you return. The place has loyalty and understanding.

She sleeps there like the epitome of quietness, and hours later after she's woken up and we're driving back to the city and the other world, she gratuitously confirms what I already suspected. She had no dreams and she's feeling rested.

Vianney Carriere is a reporter for the Globe and Mail and a freelance writer for Markle Community Newspapers. He lives in Toronto.



by Ray Baker

## Tales of the Big Blue Machine - Part II

we men sat down on his machine and looked at mine.

**Repairs made easy**

The ideal way to overhaul a machine for the winter is to sit in a warm shed on a cold night with a beer. The shed is practically out of bounds to the opposite sex, so the men can sit and look at the machine about to be overhauled without interruption.

Certain logical steps have to be observed when overhauling a machine that can leave you stranded in the middle of nowhere. I cannot overstate the importance of cool, calm, preventative maintenance. Here's how it works.

All doors are closed, the stove stoked up, jackets taken off and sleeves rolled up. The work bench is scrutinized with an efficiency that would do credit to an open heart operating room.

Each man settles in his allotted place, the beer is passed around and discussion begins.

**The great debate**

Relaxing (apart from the right arm) the great debate syncromeshes into top gear. Spark plug, gap, type and make are analyzed. Points, magnetos, H.T. wires, riding positions, most involved is the riding position, and the mixture.

Well, the mixture you could write a book

on. "Lifeblood of the system" said one expert. I forgot to mention that as the evening draws on and the stove warms up it is realized that everyone is a snow machine expert - even me - who has only owned one for a few days.

Drive belts come in for intense discussion, along with clutch adjustment, which is baffling until you realize that clutch adjustment is when the female grabs the male more firmly round the middle with the left arm to free up the right arm to beat him over the head. This clutch adjustment is universally understood to mean 'slow down you expletive deleted madman'.

**The survival factor**

Due to the fact that this sport is enjoyed under conditions that would freeze a brass monkey, survival training is part of the preventative maintenance. Keeping the feet warm and the beer cold are apparently vital factors.

"Turn off the headlights in a snowstorm to see better," was offered. The hairs on my neck bristled. "Always throw the machine away from you as you turn in mid-air," was another. My hair stood on end.

"Keep two spare plugs in your trouser pockets to warm them up." That made sense, until he added "but don't fall forwards". No

comment.

Tow ropes, flashlight, wrenches, and a good screaming voice are mandatory. Also the 'buddy system', so when you get stuck there is always someone to laugh at you.

**The pessimists**

"An excellent machine, yours," said a friend "when they were still in production". My hopes sank. "I've heard of one chap, came in on one cylinder and one broken ski," said another. "Well constructed, in their

day." My fears mounted.

Carburetor tuning came next. Diaphragms, jets, starting sequence, optimum power and acceleration.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening. The stove burned low and we went home satisfied, the Big Blue Machine gleaming against the tools and work bench.

Of course we didn't really overhaul it that much. In fact we just moved the tools around a bit.

But I learned a heck of a lot about the sport and another night we'll get together in the shed and give it an overhaul again.

If you're not careful I'll write part three dealing with the actual overhaul and maiden voyage.

Next Week....

Ray Baker is a manager at the Midland Plant of R.C.A. and a freelance writer for Markle Community Newspapers. He and his family live in Penetanguishene.

## TERRY PENN

by John Beaulieu

