



Children's programs end

Saturday was the last week of children's programs sponsored by Sainte-Marie among the Hurons and the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. The free programs, in operation for the last four weeks, centred on various themes dealing with the area's cultural and natural history. The last program was "awards day" for the

above children. Awards were given for various categories in gathering litter. In the centre is Doug Cameron of Midland who supervised the course for Sainte-Marie.

Photo by McConnell, Sainte-Marie among the Hurons.

by Ray Baker

"The Ungodly" — not for the squeamish reader

One hundred and thirty years ago George Donner had a dream to get from Oregon to California. He advertised in the 'Sangamo Journal', Springfield, Illinois, in March and April 1846. He needed about eight men of good character to drive ox teams.

His wife, Tamsen, was going with mixed feelings, from a safe secure world to an unknown one.

But with the blind faith that wives everywhere in the world have always shown — she went, along with her family — laws, husbands, wives and kids.

This was born the 'Donner Party'. I have read accounts of it before, Geo. R. Stewart's 'Ordeal by Hunger' and Bernard De Voto's 'The Year of Decision 1846'.

What makes this expedition different from the thousands of others going west is that in addition to outlaws, Indians, the worst winter in the Sierra Nevada for 30 years and misguided guides — they survived by cannibalism.

The latest book on the Donner Party is published by Charter House, New York, it is by Richard Rhodes, a writer who travelled the length of the ill-fated expedition and called his book 'The Ungodly'.

It is not for the squeamish, or the faint at heart.

It follows the Donner Party from the first advert in the newspaper in Illinois right through to the survivors in California and is divided into three basic parts.

One: the trail
All the heart breaks of selling up home and having wagons built, leaving friends and neighbours behind. All the accumulated roots of childhood and adulthood pulled up and a new way of life started.

Meeting strangers who were to be travelling companions into the promised land. It is hard in our day and age to visualize ox teams and wagons that might average 16 miles a day. The children then, as now regarded the

whole thing as an adventure. Early days were pleasant enough with Buffalo so plentiful that the plains 'seemed alive with them', pure water, sunny days, plentiful supplies. It had been a good choice.

They stood in awe at nature's wonders, hot pools and springs, verdant grazing for the animals, long summer days, and then salt deserts in Utah. Lines of abandoned wagons and bleached bones, lack of direction and an alleged guide who not only didn't show up, but sent them on the wrong track, which led to the inhospitable bleakness of the high Sierras.

Two: the camp
Realizing that the mountain pass was too deep in snow to cross, that there was nowhere to turn back to, and supplies were low, they dug in as best they could for the winter.

The worst winter in 30 years. No salt, no flour, little meat, no hope of rescue or relief. This is a fascinating account of man's adaptability to practically

certain death by starvation.

Three: the relief
Against insurmountable odds, fighting nature at its worst, and themselves, the remnants, and ultimately one man, reached 'civilization'. The city of Yerba Buena (soon to be renamed San Francisco) organized help.

This meant facing the mountain crossing in winter, with supplies for people who may or may not be alive. But alive they were.

The sick, the old, the children, had perished one by one with a few exceptions. The remainder survived by eating their dead.

One cannot pass judgement even having read this book. A gripping drama set amidst the most picturesque country on earth. 370 pages of pioneer history. 'The Ungodly'.

Ray Baker is a Manager at Midland's RCA plant and a freelance writer for Markle Community Newspapers. He and his family live in Penetanguishene.

Cars are for going places, bikes for free adventuring



by Priscilla Galloway

I have gone adventuring, and returned with a pint of thimbleberries, dead ripe, a dozen windfall apples, three copies of the Times, tired legs, and a contented mind — not bad for an investment of 90 minutes' time.

My speed is the perfect pace for an August harvest of memories; today, fresh in the aftermath of the morning's storm, the perfect day for a ride.

Some people prefer to go adventuring on foot. I love to hike with somebody who knows all the flowers, hears and identifies all the birds, and sees most of them too, but my own vision is not scaled quite so minute.

And nobody can go country-side adventuring by car. What can you see? Mostly dust, right? Cars are for getting places. For that, they're great.

For me, the bike is right. But when I set out, I usually like to go somewhere, and to know I'm going.

The little village of Lafontaine is my ideal distance from the cottage.

Down our dirt track, avoiding the rocks, being careful not to get bogged down in wet sand and pitched into the poison ivy, I stop for the thimbleberries, big, juicy, black. There aren't many, but if I save for a few days, there'll be enough for another lot of freezer jam. Superb.

Low gear
Up the dirt road through the woods, in low. Thin trees, woods dimpled with sunlight, pools of shade. Last fall, a red fox trotted across in front of our car at the foot of the hill. But no living creatures today, at least not wild ones, not even a chipmunk.

A Buildall truck comes toward me and quickly passes, almost empty at the end of the day. (Visions of fathers on holiday, putting a new porch on the cottage, or a roof, or maybe just fixing up the patio or ordering a bit of paint.)

Ma could ride up the hill near the bottom of the twentieth concession, but I've nothing to prove. It's easier to walk, hard enough on the legs at that! Better at the top, but still slow going, still in low.

On my right are a herd of cows, more group than herd, companionable, heads together, one beige-brown among the black-and-whites.

Loaded with berries
The chokecherry trees are loaded, the berries purple-black, and my mind goes back to the war years when my family in Ottawa picked endless chokecherries, and my mother used our precious sugar ration to make jelly. I never was wild about it, mouth-puckering even with all that sugar, but we used to say that it was good with meat. Obviously nobody makes chokecherry jelly any more.

On my left, boughs dangling over the road allowance, is an apple tree standing just inside the decrepit fence line of an untended, weedchoked field. It looks as if nobody is using the apples; maybe I'll take a closer look on the way back.

Milkweeds all over. I've missed the stage when the pods are tiny and tender, good to chew, stripped of the outer case. Have you ever cooked those pods? I meant to try it this year, but missed my chance, and now they're too big, the seeds will be brown.

Delicious florets
But I did gather bags of florets early in July before the flowers had opened, when each sphere was a mass of tiny tight, curled green miniature spheres. Cooked like spinach, served with butter, they were delicious, and I let guests and husband eat and guess until they were satisfied and stumped before I told them about the new vegetable.

That's my 'ideal discovery' of this summer. Free, unlimited quantity in season, and eating them is a service to mankind as well as your own stomach, cutting down the future weeds of the world.

Up to paved road at last, with a left turn, the air heavy, heady with clover, ditches full of goldenrod and Queen Anne's lace, the occasional blue of cornflowers, deep purple of vetch. As I get closer to the co-op, the road is bordered, both sides, with new houses in various stages of building.

Oasis in wildness
Most haven't got far yet with the landscaping, though some fine vegetable gardens can be seen. One little oasis of loving care stands out in the general wildness, driftwood tastefully chosen, artfully arranged, flanked by two circular flowerbeds, circumnavigated by cut-off poles, foot-high palings, brilliant with petunias.

A boy rides toward me. Two others lounge in the grass, bikes behind them, grinning as I pass. I grin myself, more broadly as the one rider, aged about ten, rides briskly, effortlessly past me, both of us pleased at how well he does it, how easily. I'm chicken, turning down the unspoken challenge. It's too obviously his game.

That's the difference between ten-year-old and forty-five-year-old legs. And my bicycle tires

are soft, no doubt about that.

The wind is against me, down to the corner. Turn right for Lafontaine. I saw the church spire from my back, before I reached the paved road, even.

I'd never noticed, really noticed, the fire hall here, on my left as I ride. At the moment, I'm still very conscious of fire departments, would like to stop, but know it's there.

Ringin' bells
Gas station, not fancy, but they've got air. In the garage, three teenagers are earnestly bent over an elderly blue Volkswagen, tail up, motor open, and don't even look up as I set pressure, spurt air, ring bells.

What a difference it makes to have my tires hard, really, really firm. High gear is easy now, no effort at all on the good paved road.

In the general store, a happy chat with the storekeeper and a teenaged customer, three women together, talking about tenting in a storm, tenting in this storm, this morning. The girl hadn't wanted to get up.

And the habits of pets, fearful of thunder, the storekeeper's cat who got behind the drapes, my little dog who covered in the dark bathroom behind the toilet.

And the joys of swimming in the rain, the remembered water soft and warm, raindrops soft and gentle, or sharp and stinging on the face. Swims of other days and years, not this morning, with the lightning.

Outside the store, starting back, noticing all the names, wondering if here in Lafontaine, Blondin keeps its French pronunciation, or if it's been completely Anglicized, remembering our neighbour in Midland. The first time I looked his name up in the phone book, I went through all the C's looking for Cannell, or Cunnell, tried the K's too, before light dawned, and I found it under 'Q' for Quesnelle.

Going down the fifteenth, the wind is in my face again. No fair, it shouldn't change direction like that!

MHC director awarded grant

The Ontario Mental Health Foundation has awarded \$1,237,700, for research in the mental health field during 1975-76 in the province of Ontario. The program includes support for research projects as well as awards for the support of individuals who are interested in pursuing a research career.

The cows have moved apart, are grazing contentedly. Now I can see only the holsters, the jersey's gone somewhere else.

Showers of gravel
There's fresh gravel on the road, and more of it on the right than the left. I ride in the clearest part, at the left, keep an ear open for cars, but miss the one coming up behind me until it passes with a blare of horn, showering the gravel as it speeds along, vanishes in a flurry of dust.

But there's my apple tree. I try one of the windfalls. It's good, a little scabby on one side, but I don't have to eat that. Some are rotten, but the storm last night brought down lots of fresh ones. A dozen will add a little tang to the chili sauce; the tomatoes are picked and ready. Into my rucksack they go, along with the thimbleberries, safe in their cottage cheese container, and the papers from the store.

Three young women cycle slowly past. We smile at each other, but no one speaks. Cycling on that road is hard work for all of us.

The new gravel runs out well before the top of the hill, though, and the going gets much easier on the firm-packed dirt.

It's years since I've biked down a steep gravel road with a sharp turn at the bottom. Once, as a child, I took a hill like that quite fast on a country lane, made my turn, and found the way blocked by a farm gate. Got a legful of gravel that time. So I brake down the hill, cautious, conservative forty-five, let go and speed up into the turn, and off for home through the woods, the shadows deeper now, supper time and all's well.

I'm used to putting things in the oven, letting dinner cook (it's chicken tonight) while I'm busy with more important things.

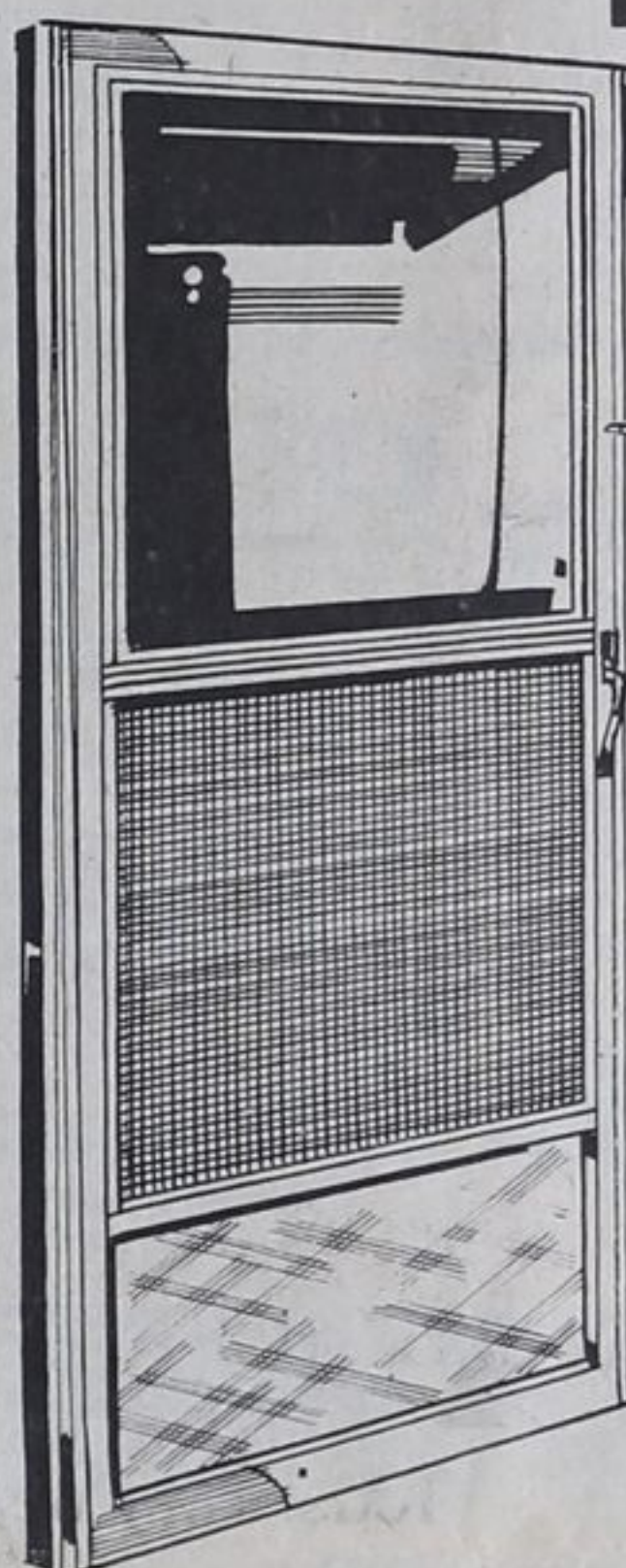
Like a swim, or a book. Or a bike ride through a golden August afternoon.

Priscilla Galloway, a consultant in English to the North York Board of Education, is on vacation at her Nottawasaga Bay cottage.



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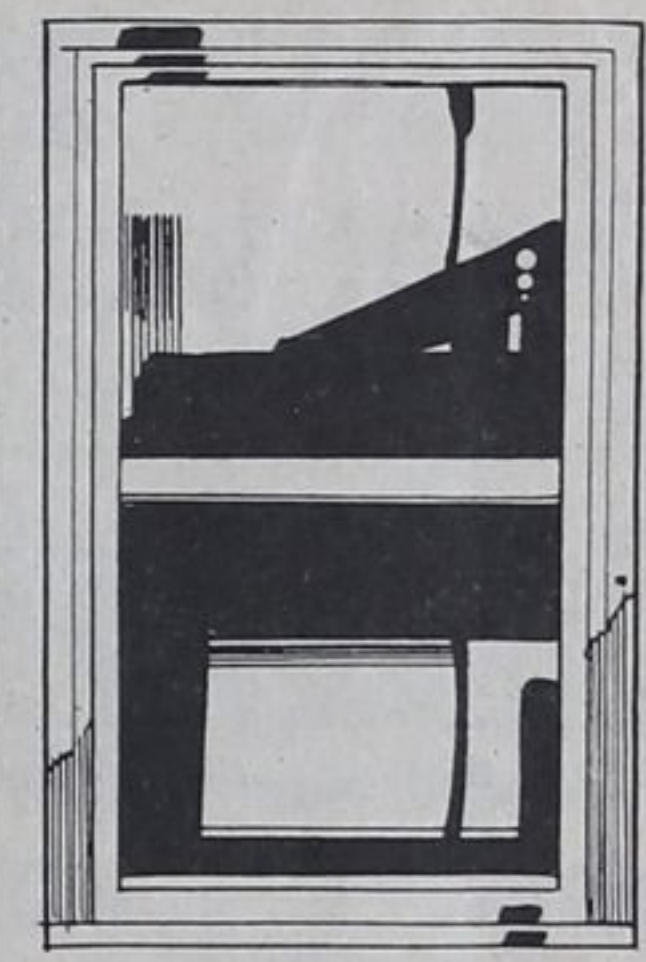
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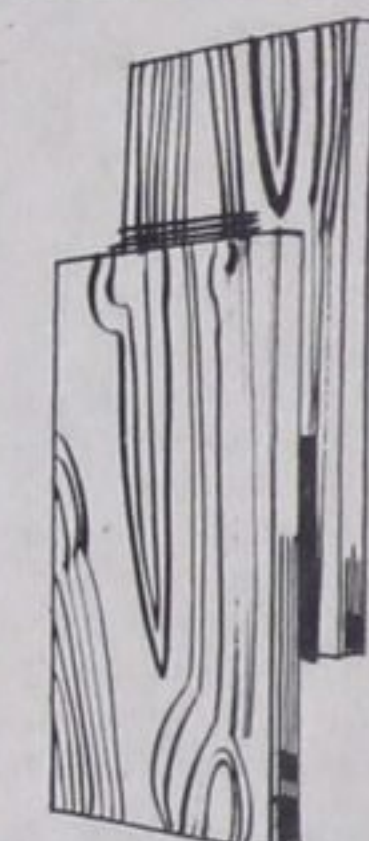
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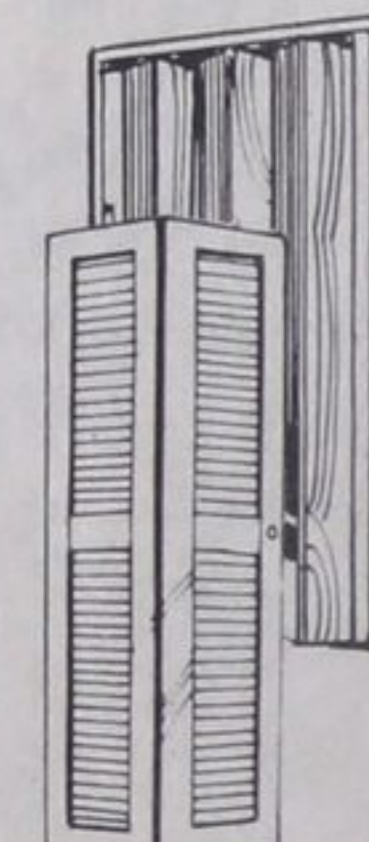
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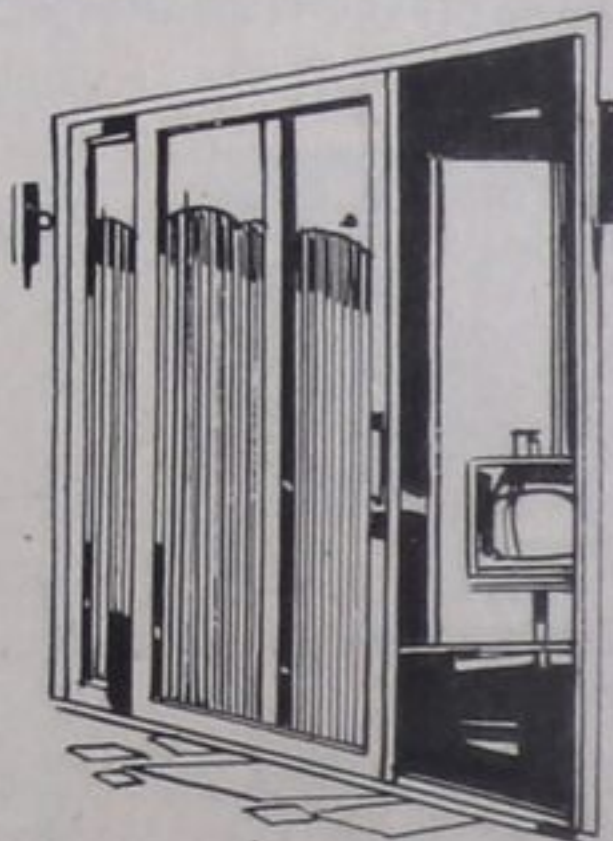
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