

Sugar and Spice

Fuel for anger by Bill Smiley

The P.S.S. study... a case of overkill?

The study to be conducted by the Simcoe County Board of Education with regard to the problem of francophone students at Penetanguishene Secondary School certainly looks as though it will leave no stone unturned.

But one is left with the nagging question of just why such an elaborate study is necessary.

Certainly the situation in Essex County must have left school board and Ministry of Education people across the province a little paranoid about the possible problems inherent in running a bilingual education system, but surely the study proposed for this area represents a certain amount of overkill.

Not only residents, teachers, students, school board officials and just everybody else in this area will take part in the study. Officials of the Ministry in Queen's Park, and possibly officials from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education will get their say in the resolution of the situation.

One is left with the impression that if the board were able to commandeer the services of Pierre Trudeau, Rene Levesque and Henry

Kissinger, they might well have done so.

While they are not exactly simple, the problems which seem to be existent at P.S.S. are not earth-shattering, nor are they insoluble. Surely the French Language Advisory Committee could have come up with recommendations which would have done an adequate job of assuring that French speaking students and teachers at P.S.S. would be able to participate in an educational experience which would enhance their identities and the bilingual and bicultural nature of this area and of this country.

Oh well, the giant year-long study won't hurt anything. It looks like it will do the job and do it right. But in this time of economic restraint, one must wonder if perhaps the means of finding the solution isn't somewhat out of proportion to the problem.

It seems a shame to have to bring in help from all over the province to resolve a problem which is basically a local one. If we can't live, work and learn here in some sort of harmony without the help of over-seeing bodies in Toronto, there is something desperately wrong.

I was so mad when I began writing this column yesterday that there was smoke starting to come out of the typewriter keys, so I stopped and let them cool off overnight. They're still warm, but just touchable.

Reason for my rage was that I had been royally shafted three times in a row by three different service stations owned by three different oil companies, to tune of about \$200 and a great deal of personal inconvenience.

In each case the ineptness of the so-called "service" was equalled only by the capacity of the operators.

My first impulse was to name names and lay the sordid facts on the line. But I was boiling so buoyantly that there was no way I could have written an honest, objective account of the piracy I was subjected to, so I'm glad I slept on it.

I didn't want to label all Sunoco, Fina and Gulf service station operators as highwaymen, because that would have maligned a couple of local operators who have not, to my knowledge, while I was watching, mugged me. They were not involved.

Suffice it to say that the next time you see Wayne and Shuster doing one of those comedy commercials in which you are assured that a big American oil company's only aim in life is to give you the best possible service at the lowest possible cost, switch to a soap ad. At least the soap merchants can you blatantly, and take you to the cleaners literally, rather than figuratively, as the oil

companies do. And I thought plumbers were rough! After tangling with a few "mechanics" in a few days, I could have kissed an honest plumber who chanced along. He'd probably have charged me five bucks for the privilege of kissing him, but he'd have looked good after those various grease-monkeys who seemed more interested in rape than kissing.

Nobody wants to hear my troubles, but I don't care. I have to purge myself of this bile or I'll be sour on servicemen all spring. I don't want to go through my life hating mechanics. Some of my best friends are mechanics. But I wouldn't want my daughter to marry one. On second thought maybe I would. She'd certainly be financially secure for life.

Now, the sad saga. It was March blowing itself out like a polar walrus. Bitter cold, wind gusting to about 50. We were on our way to the city for a couple of days. Stopped for coffee at one of those big, drive-in restaurant-service stations which have nothing going for them except a monopoly. Their coffee is lousy, their food is swill, their staff is surly, slovenly, stupid, or all three. You know the kind I mean. Terrific architecture with nothing inside. You've been stung before, and sworn you'd never do it again, but there's nothing else for another forty miles.

Drank the lukewarm dishwater they call coffee. Turned the key to get going. Nothing. Couldn't be the starter. Had just had a whole new unit put in, two weeks before, at a cost of

\$70. Must be the battery, in that very chill wind.

No problem. Get a boost. Walked around to service centre. Nobody home. Out front three young gas-jockeys pumping fuel like mad. Tried to get some help. Was almost completely ignored. Finally, one of them told me with some delight that the mechanic was on holidays, that the tow-truck was away somewhere, and that he personally was too busy to even lift the hood.

Mounting frustration and seething anger commencing. But I'm a patient man, a reasonable man. Finally, kid arrives with tow-truck. Gives battery a boost. I turn key, with relief. Horrible screeching sound. No more. Everything dead. The kid reckoned my new starter unit had just stripped its guts out. He was just guessing, of course.

A little background music here. We were on our way to hear our daughter play in a concert. Her mother had brought a complete new corduroy outfit, made by hand, for the girl to wear at the concert.

And there we were stranded at a wind-swept "service" station forty miles from anywhere.

Only by dint of great forbearance and awesome threats of law-suits did I get one of those turkeys to call a garage in the nearest town, and arrange to have the car towed there and repaired.

We hitched a ride down the road with two lovely women from up north, bless their good souls and they took us into the city, getting

themselves thoroughly lost in the process. Taxi to concert site. Daughter doesn't want new outfit. Missed concert. Taxi to hotel. Total taxi bill, \$14.00. OK. No sweat.

Next morning, phone garage to which car towed. Sure he can fix. No problem. "You pick up tomorrow. Before noon. I quit noon."

Next day, taxi 45 miles north (no bus) to garage. Car fixed. Bill \$99.00. Garageman won't accept credit card though sign n window says he will. Borrow enough from cabbie to get car out of hock. Decent cabbie, took cheque, was sympathetic. His cab bill, \$40.

Drive car all way back to city. Something wrong; doesn't steer right. Whole day shot. Arrive hotel, no parking space left at the inn. And I'm skipping over the bad parts. I'm sure this bitter little tale has mechanics everywhere slapping their knees in hilarity. But I'm afraid it left a slightly rotten taste in my mouth.

One service station made a mess of the job in the first place. The second one advertised service and gave none. The third guy hosed me to the hilt because I was comparatively helpless, and was ugly about it into the bargain.

I'm sure there are some good service stations, somewhere. I'd like to come across one. And maybe there is one among the many American oil companies operating in Canada which is more interested in good service than selling gas. Maybe.

Letters to the editor

A mon cher oncle Michel

Dear Editor:

Please permit me to address a few lines to Mr. Michael Asselin regarding his letter printed in the "Citizen" on April 20, 1977. Mon cher oncle Michel.

Your recent letter to the "Citizen" not only surprised me but puzzled me as well. Dr. Gauthier's praises and encouragement for bilingualism (French and English) in our community on the one hand, and the founding of a French senior citizens' club on the other hand are not contradictory.

A large number of Huronia's citizens are aware that for nearly a century you have been the promoter of good will between the two main linguistic and cultural groups of Huronia. You will long continue to be loved and respected for the things that you have stood for during those years. Always respectful of the rights of others, you have been courageous and articulate in defending the rights of Canada's French-speaking citizens.

On various occasions, you and I have discussed the difficulties encountered by French-speaking senior citizens of the area in finding an organization where they could meet and enjoy together the things they have in common—their language and their culture. You will recall our discussions about the frustrations being suffered by French-speaking senior citizens within an existing

senior citizen's group—a constant struggle to obtain permission to have a wee bit of French accepted as a part of the program. As a result of your complaints and the complaints of many others which we felt were legitimate, the problem was a subject of investigation and discussion by the francophone leaders of the area for several years.

Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Germain Gauthier, a French senior citizens' club has been born. Thanks to the tremendous response of the senior citizens the club is a fantastic success and a need has been filled.

The formation of this new club is a very positive step in creating a better climate between these two linguistic groups. The English senior citizens group can do their thing without having to complain that "French is being shoved down their throats", the French senior citizens group can do their thing without complaining that their rights are not being respected, and when they so desire, they can still all get together and learn to enjoy and respect one another's culture and language.

I wish to thank you, oncle Michel, for having given me the opportunity of expressing to you my humble opinion.

Your loving nephew,
Romeo Asselin



by Shirley Whittington

Last week the Squire got a letter which was clearly and correctly addressed. His name was spelled right. The postal code was neatly typed in the right place. But underneath all this correct information, someone (at the Post Office?) had angrily scrawled "Not known at this address."

You can imagine how this made the Squire feel, after a hard day at work, sweating to make the pennies to pay off the mortgage on the house where he had been declared an unknown.

It's enough to give a guy a terminal identity crisis.

This is just another of the mystifying jokes played on us by our national postal service. Laugh-In is dead, but the boys at the P.O. are playing out the most hilarious scenario since Abbott and Costello.

Consider the case of a lively and very busy young lawyer in our town who was understandably baffled when a friend gave him a piece of mail that had been deemed undeliverable by the postal jesters. Right under his name and address (both correct) some wag had written: "Out of business. Deceased."

I guess he had a merry chuckle over that one.

I myself laughed until I cried last week, at this rib-tickling chronology, concerning a rather important piece of correspondence.

April 5—letter placed in the red box on our corner.

April 7—letter removed and strapped on the turtle which regularly carries our mail out of town.

April 13—letter arrives in Toronto—100 miles away.

Since Toronto is south of us, and therefore downhill, this delay seems inexcusable, but perhaps my sense of humour is wearing thin. Yesterday the Post Office played another

little prank—trivial admittedly, but edged with black humour.

First I have to tell you that I am a member of the Tender Tootsies club. It's easy to get on their mailing list. When you buy a pair of Tender Tootsie slippers, you fill out the attached form, and there you are. Mr. Tootsie will send you newsletters, birthday cards and other bits of uplifting literature.

It's not as great as getting a love letter, or a royalty check, but what the heck. It's mail.

Yesterday's communication from the Tender Tootsie people was roughly the size and shape of a birthday card. And it smelled nice.

I opened it over my morning coffee, and all this ground glass dribbled into the cup. Mr. Tootsie had not only sent me a birthday card. He'd enclosed a little vial of perfume to sweeten my twilight years.

"Hand Cancel, Please" was written on the envelope, but apparently the horse that carried the mail from Mr. Tootsie to me had stopped on the envelope, with his not so

tender hoofie.

All this high comedy in the Post Office is cute, but I wish it wasn't costing me so much. As soon as I figured out what six divided into evenly, they upped the price of stamps to eight cents. I mastered that one, and they shoved it up to ten, which was easy. Now I'm grappling with twelve.

In the last ten years, postal rates have gone up more than 60 per cent in this country. By comparison, telephone rates have only been escalated by about 20 per cent. But then, I only get a third of the laughs out of the telephone that I do from the Post Office.

You think the Post Office isn't hilarious? Remember that television commercial that depicted a doctor mailing away blood samples in order to diagnose a little girl's illness? The results came back by return mail, it seemed, and before you could say Bob's your uncle, Mother was running across the fields, radiantly back-lit and shouting "John! John! She's going to be all right!"

That little piece of comedy, along with five other similar filmed pitches, cost you and me

\$436,138. They were shown 1,661 times on TV stations across the country, until they were abruptly cancelled. Why? Because of a national postal strike.

Ultimately the postal joke is on us, because we have no easy alternative to what is laughingly called Canada's postal service.

A letter could be sent by bus, which costs about \$2.65 for a one hundred mile trip. Or it could go by private courier for a tab of \$4.75. Or, if you're a fast talker, you might get a telephoned message to your loved one for a couple of bucks.

I can't afford to do any of those things more than once or twice a week. About the only folk who can spend that kind of money on communication are the Post Office which in 1975, employed 85 people in a public relations department. Their budget was in the two million dollar range.

Back in 1975, post office union leaders told the Canadian public that we could go to Hell.

I wouldn't worry about it. The way the mails move, we'd never get official notification.

The national comedy



A spectacular view

...and another response

Réponse à Monsieur Michael Asselin.
Les membres de notre "Club Cinquante et plus" sont très mécontents de vos remarques désobligeantes, adressées au docteur Germain Gauthier à propos de notre Club.

Vous lui reprochez, dans votre lettre de ne pas favoriser le bilinguisme-ce qui est tout à fait faux-et vous le savez.

Je crois que vous ne connaissez pas notre Club puisque vous n'êtes jamais venu nous encourager. Venez donc le jeudi soir vous réjouir avec nous qui avons toujours parlé français et qui voulons continuer ensemble à le garder... "RESTONS FRANCAIS"

Un membre du Club Cinquante
et plus qui se fait
l'interprète des autres.

Pet owners should clean up

Dear Sir:

There is a bylaw that prevents owners from allowing their dogs to run loose in town. How, then, do their droppings find their way to my lawn, when I have no dog?

If appears that "taking the dog for a walk" is all too often an euphemism for taking him away from home to commit his nuisances. The dog knows no better, but the

owner should. People would be horrified to see the streets and parks fouled by human excreta, yet dog droppings are no less offensive.

If the owners do not voluntarily clean up after their animals, surely the law should be amended to force them to do so.

Yours for a cleaner world
May Seidon

The making of 'Chateau de Baker '76'



by Ray Baker

Whenever I hear the song "Little old wine drinker you" I think of the star Dean Martin. The "Sicilian Sponge" otherwise known as Dino Martini. I've always enjoyed a good glass of wine. Not every day and not by the gallon though. Six months ago my wife and I were visiting friends and they asked us to try some of their home made Sumac wine. Yes that's Sumac, but not the poisonous kind, (I hope). It was delicious. Sumac, like a red

corn-on-the-cob growing wild just about everywhere, had been transformed into a clear reddish amber drink, wow...

Anyway we were sold, my wife and I, on the idea of making our own wine. No sooner said than done. This is the first of two parts dealing with one family's wine making. I should warn you now, any of you going to Georgian College's fall course, or anyone of a squeamish nature...read no more.

First get your fruit

We didn't go the 'Sumac' route. We went round and round the Mulberry bush or I should say the Elderberry bush. Good purple berries (and fingers and clothes and baby) picked on a bright sunny day in September. As a bonus we found wild grape vines growing right in there, so they went into the pot as well, enough wild profusion to make ten gallons of the best.

Being a ripe autumnal fruit we carefully stripped off the berries and grapes and covered them with water and boiled them. This served two purposes, it avoided the dreaded "vinegar fly" which can strike instantaneously killing all your good work. It also felt better when we smelled it boiling and helped us forget the ankle deep clinging mud that we had stood in whilst picking them.

We skimmed off the scum, pressed the whole thing through a piece of muslin cloth, then we boiled and pressed once more, finally

throwing away the anemic looking mess that remained, (and the cloth). Now we had the juice.

Sugar was down that week

Taking advantage of the local friendly neighbourhood Dominion Store we got the sugar, mixing it into a syrup. We were off and running with two Canadian Tire 5 (imp) gal. water containers in genuine plastic. The deed was done.

Well almost done. The all important, all purpose yeast had to be added, and to give it a fighting chance some yeast nutrient. Now the yeast could survive. It could go forth and multiply as it says in the Good Book. It could eat its way through all the goodness provided by the juices. It could nibble its way through all that sugar. Turning it slowly into alcohol (I'll drink to that eventually).

Now came the all-powerful air-lock, which allows the gasses to escape as the mixture ferments, but keeps the dreaded vinegar fly at bay. The air lock fits directly into the hole where the stopper came out, and the beauty of these air locks is you can both see and hear the bubbles coming out. Finally with enough of these lined up in sequence and a finely tuned ear I was able to make them bubble to the opening bars of "O Canada" but that's another story. And something they don't teach you on a wine-making course, but should.

As an added precaution, the water in which

the float floats in the air lock, is fortified with crushed Camden tablets as an added precaution against any amphibious germs trying to swim down into our beloved wine.

And that was that

Oh I forgot to mention. The twenty nine hours of back breaking toil that went into making a 'winery' (in the basement), with all the sterile precautions of an operating theatre on brain transplant day, it's own diffused lighting system and reinforced shelving, for the additional weight. The extra shelves were loaded with sterilized bottles, syphons, tannin in jars, and citric crystals. Camden Tablets (the wine makers best friend) and all the innumerable items stolen quietly from Mums kitchen stock when her back was turned.

The basement began to smell out of this world. A cross between a well-run brewery, and the L.C.B.O. after a case is broken. We could (and did) sit for hours watching the fermentation take place, no doubt as all mankind has done since the first day one of our drunken forefathers stumbled across the secrets of mead made with honey.

In next week's conclusion we will look at the brighter side of wine making. At night-mares, kidney stones, and at blindness. Don't drink anything until then.

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...

The Penetanguishene Citizen

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