

CITIZEN COMMENT

Taking responsibility for one's own survival is part of being human

Well, they finally did it! Monday night, council voted to outlaw skateboarding on public streets and sidewalks.

As it happens, there is a place nearby where skateboarders can practise their sport. The stretch of Highway 27 which runs downhill from the town limits is in the process of being repaved, and right now, cars are only using half of it. According to the Ontario Provincial Police, there is no regulation against riding a skateboard on a provincial highway, so skateboarders can rest assured that they won't be arrested for doing it. Mind you, once the cars start using the whole road, it won't be very safe. In fact, many of the hills in town would be much safer than Highway 27.

The point is that the connection between what is legal and what makes sense is often a tenuous one, and the two don't necessarily go hand in hand.

Skateboarding can be practised safely in places where it is illegal, and it can just as easily be practised in a dangerous fashion in places where it seems to be legal. If a thinking person is contemplating an action which could prove dangerous to himself, it should be his own common sense which discourages him, not a law.

There is only one justification for laws. Laws are, or should be written and enforced, in order to allow individuals to pursue their goals without having their rights infringed upon by others.

One has a right to enjoy the fruits of one's own labour, hence a law against theft. One has a right to one's own life, hence a law against murder. One has a right to expect order on the roads in order to be able to use them without constantly being exposed to danger, hence traffic regulations. Traffic regulations exist not to protect a driver from himself, although they sometimes serve that purpose, but rather to protect a driver from other drivers on the road.

There is something essentially wrong with a law which attempts to protect an individual

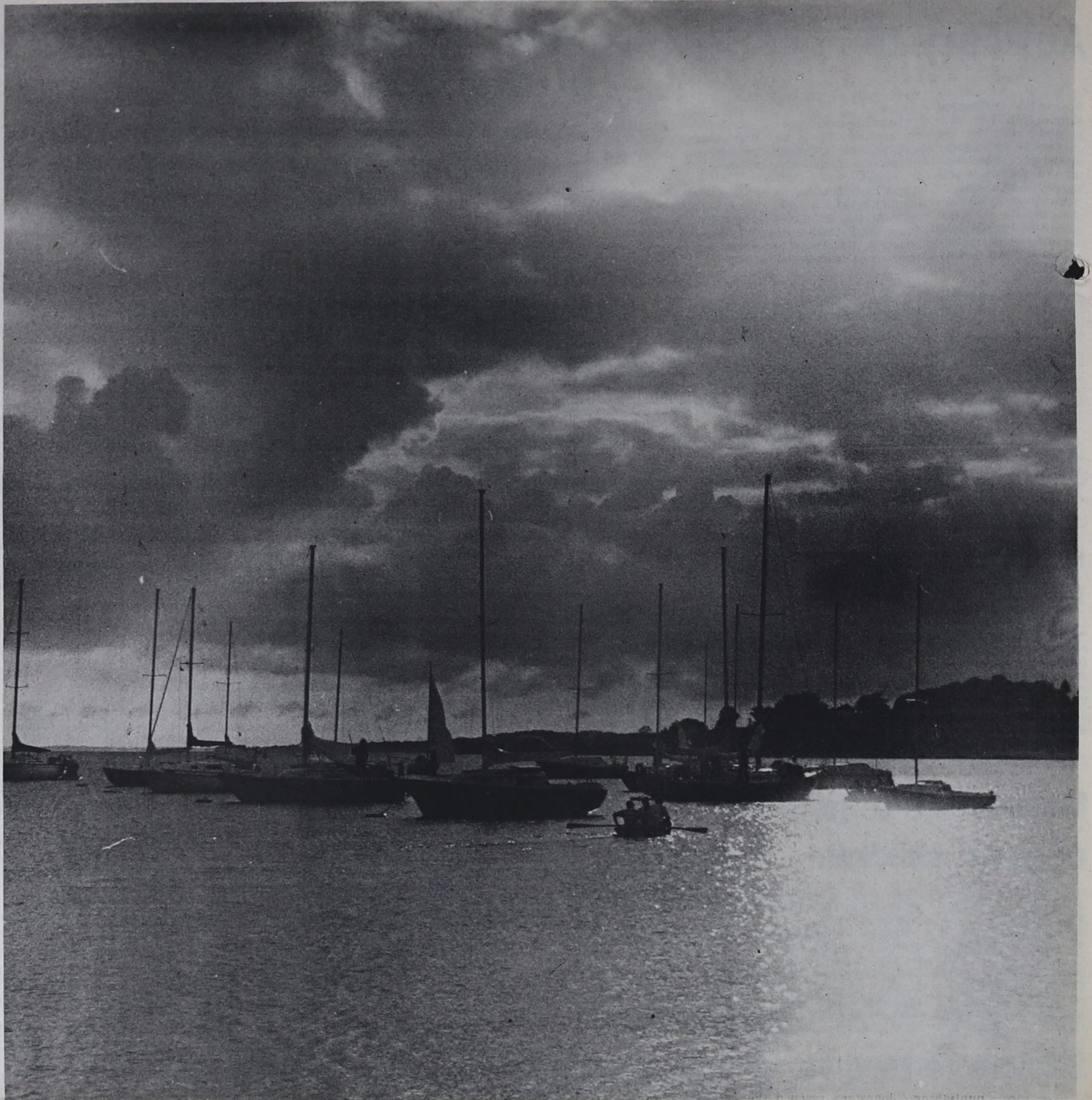
from himself. It absolves him of responsibility for his own survival. And part of being an adult is realizing that one must assume ultimate responsibility for one's own behaviour, and for one's own survival.

There are certain circumstances under which laws regarding skateboards would be justifiable. Motorists do have a right to be able to travel the roads without constantly having to fear that someone will dart out into their path. Although skateboarders are unlikely to damage a car which hits them, hitting a child is no pleasure for the driver of the car, even if he is absolved of all blame. There also exists the possibility that in trying to avoid a skateboarder, a driver might strike another vehicle, or be involved in a solo accident causing extensive damage.

But that doesn't call for a blanket condemnation of skateboarders; pedestrians and cyclists also cause accidents and get hit by cars.

The smart thing to do would be to label skateboarders as vehicles. Make skateboarders responsible for obeying the same traffic regulations as cyclists are. Warn children that if they cause a car to slow down or swerve to miss them, they can be charged with obstructing traffic, or perhaps even careless driving.

Skateboarding can be practised safely on back streets in town by someone who exercises a little care. All skateboarders should not be penalized because some are careless. The careless should be penalized, while the others are allowed to practise their sport. It would be a little more difficult to apply the law that way, but ease of enforcement is hardly an excuse for withdrawing rights. The police could probably do their jobs with greater ease if they were allowed, say, to tap anyone's phone at any time with no notice. But we don't let them do that. And we shouldn't take all skateboarders off the street in order to eliminate the necessity of determining who is a safe skateboarder and who isn't.



The day begins

New, streamlined system for UIC offers nothing for area's unemployed

This newspaper received a press release from this week, and we thought that it could mean good news for unemployed people in North Simcoe.

The release begins, "Starting September 11, unemployment insurance benefits are based on how difficult it is for people to find and keep work in the region where they live."

On first reading we thought the release would certainly mean good news for county citizens who have been searching for employment for some time now. At last, we sighed, some assistance from the federal government for people who need it most.

We read on, "Unemployment Insurance officials believe the new system is the fairest yet. The new benefit structure better matches the ease or difficulty of getting and keeping work in the claimant's area," commented one UI official.

Sweet reason, we thought. This is one occasion to rejoice in the clear thinking of our federal officials.

We certainly don't approve of our area's high unemployment rate, but facing the reality of the situation, we believe that some form of understanding is definitely warranted.

The release continued, "The IU program is placing renewed emphasis on communicating with the public. The new structure and other aspects of the new streamlined UI system will be explained in the fall UI officials are telling the public to watch for news coming from Unemployment Insurance. They say it will show how much the system has improved."

On calling the local Unemployment Insurance offices, we were referred to

another number in Barrie. In Barrie we contacted a public liaison officer who informed us, that according to the system of regions worked out by the Unemployment Insurance Commission — area unemployed will not benefit from the "new benefit structure." According to the Unemployment Insurance Commission, it is not a difficult task to acquire employment opportunities in the Midland region.

It matters little, we were told, that unemployment in the Midland area peaked at 18 per cent last winter, and that the situation could even get worse this year. We are in a broad region — one that extends from Bradford to north of Timmins, Ontario. And while the unemployment rate may climb to 20 per cent this year, the healthy work climates of Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and points north "balance" our region's rating.

We're not the only ones to be overlooked we were told. Parry Sound depends on two particular industries to maintain their standard of living; one of their industries will be laying off 100 employees in October — permanently. They will not benefit from any pay period extension either.

Orillia has its problems with employment as well.

The federal government's "new...streamlined UI system" doesn't mean anything for Simcoe's unemployed — except that unemployment payment lines may become shorter. As payment periods end, unemployed area citizens will be cut off from what may very well be their only source of income.

Is this an example of how the federal government is anxious to renew "emphasis on communicating with the public?"

Is marriage quickly becoming a union affair?

by Shirley Whittington

The marriage proposal, like so many other relics of our dying culture, is in trouble — maybe in more trouble than marriage itself.

Proposals used to be a pretty big deal. Victoria swains fell upon one knee to press their suits, although one might expect that such action would have the opposite effect — at least on the crease in the trousers.

Sentimental lithographs of the time show the moustached beau semi-recumbent at the feet of his beloved, who sat blushing above him, trussed up like a turkey in high-collared lace and whalebone stays.

She had first to listen to a prologue, in which her young man outlined his ardent admiration for her silken hair and, her pearly teeth. Further than this he could not go. The apple of his eye could have had a wooden leg, or the misery of psoriasis, but all was hidden beneath the stays and the petticoats. In a sense he was buying a pig in a poke.

But then, so was she. What hint had she, as she gazed into his brimming eyes, that he had

ragged toenails, or picked his nose when he thought nobody was looking? She put her trust in his protestations of undying devotion, and in his promising prospects as a junior bank clerk.

The question, when it was finally popped was embroidered with countless verbal curlicues. "My dear Miss Gumworthy," he might have said, "may I, dare I hope that you, in your infinite kindness, might lighten my misery by consenting to share your life with me..." and so on for several highly ornamented paragraphs.

If his prospects at the bank were really good, the young lady in question would look down demurely from her perch on the edge of the sofa and reply that she would be honoured to do so, providing Papa approved.

According to the Victorian novels, the interview between ambitious suitor and potential father-in-law was fraught with a good deal of harrumphing on the part of Papa and some nervous throat-clearings on the part of Lover Boy.

Papa would wonder if the young man would

be able to support Arabella in the manner to which she was accustomed. He would reply that he would climb mountains, ford raging torrents and dig drainage ditches with his bare hands if necessary in order to keep Arabella in smelling salts and sassafras.

In my day, proposals were less formal but still hung about with tender feelings. I was propelled into matrimony by the Squire's suggestion that I be the mother of his children, and in no time our two families were locked into genteel negotiations about whether the lines for the wedding guest list would be drawn at first or second cousins.

Now the Ontario Status of Women Council suggests that housewifery is a job, not an identity, and that a proposal of marriage is a job offer and should be considered in exactly that way.

Some of my best friends are personnel directors, but I sure wouldn't want my daughter to marry one. Assuming that my children (and yours) may arrive some day at that loony, glassy-eyed state which precedes matrimony, will the proposal be an intimate

sharing of trust and hope, or will it have degenerated into a job interview?

Will he demand details of previous marriages and related experience, and will he insist on references?

Will she hold out for a contract, stipulating hours of work, time and a half for overtime, and pension arrangements?

Together will they opt for an annually renewable contract? Will they set up a grievance committee?

Will the couple take automation into account? Could either one of them be replaced by a machine? If so, what then?

If she chews gum during the interview, and appears nervous and insecure, will he tell his secretary to send in the next applicant?

If he seems picky about coffee breaks and extended lunch hours, will she decline his offer and seek someone who offers better working conditions and more opportunity for advancement?

Marriage is supposed to be a union, but I'd sure hate to see it turned into a union-management struggle.

Columnist perplexed by 'heavy' questions

by Bill Smiley

This week, I am perplexed by several questions, and I turn for possible answers to the only people in the world I can trust for honest answers: my faithful readers, all four of them.

For example, By what editorial inanity does the Globe and Mail, which grandly calls itself Canada's National Newspaper, run on its front page a five-column by eight inches photo of Pierre Trudeau getting his hair cut? What is the symbolism, the hidden meaning, the secret code, the deep, interpretive analysis, behind this picture? Can anyone help?

Is Mr. Trudeau symbolically trimming his sails for a fall election? Is it to show that the P.M. is mortal, after all, and that his hair grows, like that of us lesser beings? Perhaps it's a secret warning to Margaret that, despite talk of a reconciliation, he's not going to let his hair grow and become a flower child. I dunno, but it sure has me baffled.

Next question. Where do things get lost to? It seems to me that my wife and I have spent more time this past summer looking for things than we have sleeping. Looking for things that were "Right there, right on that counter yesterday."

Looking for things is one of the most frustrating, irritating pastimes in this materialistic society of ours. It has brought many a marriage to the teetering point, and

if the union was already teetering, pushed it over the brink.

A couple of weeks ago, she lost the keys to the car. After a 12-hour non-stop search, no keys. Oh, we had keys for the other car, the battered old Dodge. Only one catch. It was in the garage, and the keyless car was sitting right behind it, immovable.

Twenty-four hours later, I called a lock-picking specialist. He was out of town, but would call me when he got back. Just before he did, and I had to fork out eleven-seven dollars, the old lady found the keys, without looking. They were in the vegetable bin, with a turnip, a butternut squash, and a bag of cooking onions. It was certainly the logical place for them.

Then my new black \$10 belt was missing. It was the first belt I'd bought for 12 years, and I was rather proud of it. I knew it wasn't really lost, because I always hang it up with my ties. It was obvious that my wife, in her eternal tidying, had stuck it away somewhere, as she so often does with things that I then cannot find. But she swore, as she always does, that she hadn't touched it, mentioning in passing that she was sick and tired of looking for things that I had lost. Naturally, words followed, in which the phrase "car keys" inadvertently popped out several times.

But the mystery of the missing belt was readily solved when I decided to wear my new, blue, fit-like-a-glove summer trousers. I couldn't find them. High or low. Then with a

flash of intuition, I knew where my belt was. It was with the pants, because I never unbelt, just hang the whole works on a hook.

It was quite a relief to know where my belt was. It was equally reassuring to know that the pants were with the belt. But it was slightly dampening to admit that both were lost. They still haven't turned up.

There are only two possibilities. One is that a pantsless burglar crept into our bedroom, snatched by treads and crept off into the night, once more modestly attired. The second I don't even like to dwell on.

The last time I had worn those pants, that belt, was to a party. It wasn't a strip poker party, but it was a fairly lively one.

Did I do a strip tease and forget to redress my little peccadillo?

Did I tear them off on the way home from the party and throw them out the car window? Sounds silly, but the other morning I went out to get the morning paper, and there on my back walk was a pair of brand-new blue shoes, with thick white rubber soles, in a shoe-box, with only the lid missing. Only the Lord knows who, for what mad reason, in what temporary mental aberration, flung them there. But they are just my size and finders keepers.

And this whole probe brings up the Case of the Missing Socks. What in the name of all that is unholy becomes of socks when they are put through the washer and dryer? They never go missing in pairs, always singles. I'll

bet I have nine single socks in my drawer, all different colors or knits.

I've gone down with a flashlight and peered, a bit shaken, into the interiors of those machines. No socks.

They can't go down the drain, or it would be plugged. Do they do a reverse Santa Claus and go up the spout of the dryer with the hot air? It's a little frightening, as though someone were trying to tell me something. About my feet? Someone with a feet fetish.

Just one more question. Where were all the editorial writers who are now screaming about the stupidity of changing highway signs to kilometers instead of miles, when I was lambasting the whole metric-C nonsense almost a year ago?

Can you, gentle reader, do a fast bit of arithmetic in your head when you encounter a road sign announcing the speed limit is 45 kilometers per hour? When your speedometer is marked in miles per hour? And will be for years to come?

Will you happily pay your fine when the cop puts the big blue arm on you and claims you were exceeding the speed limit by seven k.p.h.? Must we all start driving with a calculator-computer in one hand?

Now these questions may not be as important as some: How old is God? How hot is it in hell? How long is a straight line? How far does a rolling stone? Whither the Flat Earth Society? Why does everyone pick on me?

But they are, poor things, mine own, and I'd like some answers.

The Penetanguishene Citizen

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