



Down on the farm

There's a good chance our readers will think we are rushing the seasons a bit since this photo was snapped during the fall of last year.

(You'll note the piles of pumpkins in the foreground.) When one thinks of North Simcoe, cottage country and tourism come to

mind yet there are some of the best run farms in the county right at our back door. Beef, dairy cattle and mixed farming top the list. 4-

H Clubs abound in North Simcoe and our annual fall fairs are next to none when it comes to attracting city and farm folk.

A novel approach---to writing that is!

Shirley Whittington

If you make your living in journalism, people often wonder when you are going to do some serious writing.

I often meet people who say something like, "I really enjoyed your write-up on the Horticultural Society's annual pot luck dinner and plant sale. When are you going to write a book?"

Other people have even more confidence in the abilities of one who can type but perhaps not write. "I loved the column on the planning board and the birth control information centre," they'll say. "Why don't you write a book — before Christmas if possible. I'd love to send a copy to my aunt in Fredericton."

I've been thinking a lot about that book and I have half of it done. I've decided on a title (Catch 23) and a dedication, ("For a discerning reader in Fredericton").

I also have the back of the dust cover figured out. It will carry a picture of me staring thoughtfully at a couple of pieces of blank paper rolled into the top of my

typewriter. (The really observant will notice that the carbon paper is in backwards.)

Under that there will be selected phrases from reviewers. "An absolutely...first novel!" and "...read it!"

Now then — that's the back and front of the book done. It's the fat part in the middle that I keep having trouble with.

Once I read some advice to aspiring novelists which said, "Write down 30 things that could happen in your story, and divide that list into chapters."

I tried that, and you'll never know how hard it is to think of 30 things that could happen to people until you try to write them down. I got as far as No. 8 ("Brother-in-law arrives with pet parrot,") before I got bored with the whole thing, and decided to go out and thin my carrots.

The question is: does this world really need any more books? There are 40,000 books published in the U.S. every year — that more than 100 a day. And only half-a-dozen of those

become runaway best sellers.

Sometimes I stand outside the big city book stores and paw through their sales bins and I wonder about the dreams that are being remaindered along with the books.

One writer who actively attacked this cruel remaindering system is the late Hugh Garner. He went round to his publisher's warehouse and loaded up the back of his car with about-to-be-remaindered copies of his latest work. Off he drove across Canada, and sold every single copy.

The truth is that writing a book seems to me to be such a vast undertaking that I know I'd never be able to accomplish it. I'm not alone in thinking writing is hard work. Even the published pros say it isn't easy.

Mordechai Richler says he is finding writing more and more difficult and that it's no longer a pleasure just to be published. Alice Munroe says she can't write if there's another adult in the house because she still feels embarrassed about the act of writing. Margaret Laurence says she "comes into a book with incredible difficulty." Margaret Atwood says for her, writing a novel is physical labour.

And I say that all these learned opinions

scare me away from authorship.

Still the question: "When are you going to write a book?" seems a legitimate one to ask of one who makes money with a typewriter. I, recognizing that legitimacy, have saved up a few questions of my own.

For a doctor: "I really enjoyed that blood pressure test. When are you going to do a heart transplant?"

For a lawyer: "That mechanic's lien presentation was a real gas. When are you defending a mass murderer before the Supreme Court of Canada?"

For a restaurateur: "What fantastic fries! I hear the French embassy in Ottawa is looking for a new chef. You should apply."

Once I interviewed a charming and tweedy Canadian novelist. When he heard that I'd been working in journalism for a decade he said kindly, "And I'll bet you've got a novel hidden away on the top shelf of your linen closet."

I hated to disappoint him, but I had to tell him the truth. "There's nothing on the top shelf of my linen closet," I told him, "except an old hot water bottle and a copy of *The Joy of Sex* underneath the flannelette blankets."

Sometimes reality is a lot more fun than fiction.

School's out AGAIN for another summer

Bill Smiley

I'd like to be able to say that the end of year for a teacher is fraught with sadness, as the delicate flowers you have nurtured during the year (and most of whom have turned to weeds,) leave you.

Not so. Rather is it a lifting of several stones from a man who is being "pressed" to confess.

The pressing was an old-fashioned method in which ever-heavier stones were placed on a man's chest until he said "uncle", or "Yeah, I said God didn't exist", or, "Yup, I know where the jewels are."

Not so. On the last day of school a teacher walks out of the shoe factory, which most schools resemble, and is beholden to no man.

Except his wife, kids, dog, car, boat, bank manager, garden. But it's better than being beholden to a lot of gobbling young turkeys whose chief aim in life is to destory your emotional equilibrium, and a gaggle of administrators whose chief aims in life are discipline, attendance, dress, drugs and the entire mid-Victorian world that is crumbling around them.

Things have changed quite a bit in the 20 years I've been teaching.

In my first year, my home form gave me a present at Christmas and another at the end

of the year.

This went on for some time. They may have thought I was a dull old tool, but we parted with mutual respect and good wishes for a happy summer.

There was always a gift: one year a bottle of wine and three golf balls, another year a table lighter that didn't work; another year a pen and pencil set with thermometer that still works.

By golly, in those first years, there was a little sadness. Joe had turned from a gorilla into a decent lad, hiding his better instincts behind a mop of hair. Bridget had turned from a four-eyed eager beaver into a bra-less sex symbol. I wished them well, unreservedly.

Nowadays, if my home form gave me a present on the last day, the first thing I would do would be to send it to the local bomb squad. If they cleared it, I would open it with tweezers and a mask, wondering which it contained; dog or cat excrement.

Ah, shoot, that's not true either. They might put an ice-pick in my tires, set a thumb-tack on my chair when I wasn't looking, write the odd obscenity in their textbooks, two words, with my last name the second one, but they wouldn't really do anything obnoxious.

Just because I thumped Barney three times this year with my arthritic right fist doesn't mean that we both believe in corporal punishment. We're buddies, and I'm going to keep an eye on my cat this summer in case it's strangled.

And little Michelle doesn't really hate my guts, even though she deliberately stabbed herself in the wrist with a pen on the last day of school, came up to my desk, looked me straight in the eye, sprinkled blood all over my desk and pants, and asked, "Are you sure I have to write the final exam?"

I'm kidding, of course. Those kids in my home form look on me as a father. Not exactly as a father confessor, mind you, or a kindly old father. More the type of father whom you put the boots to when he comes home drunk and falls at your eager feet.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they give me a present on our last day. Perhaps a cane; possibly a hearing aid. Presented by Robin, an angelic-looking little blonde who kicks Steve, just ahead of her, right behind the kneecaps in the middle of the national anthem, and makes him fall forward, kicking backward.

The more I think of them the more nostalgic I get for the year we've spent together. At least, I am spent. They're not. They haven't invested anything, so there's nothing to spend.

On second thought, I'm not a father figure to them. I'm a grandfather figure. In the last

few weeks of school, before it was decided who would be recommended, and who would have to write the final, I noticed a definite increase in solicitude and kindness.

If I dropped my book from senile hands, they would pick it up, and instead of throwing it out the window, would hand it to me gravely.

And they became nicer to each other, probably out of consideration for my increasing sensibility. Instead of tripping the girls as they went to their seats, the huge boys would pick them up and carry them.

Instead of throwing a pen like a dart when someone wanted to borrow one, they would take off their boot, put the pen in it, and throw the boot, so the pen wouldn't be lost in the scuffle.

And speaking of scuffles, there have been very few of late. Oh, the other day, there was a little one, when Tami, five-feet-minus, grabbed Todd, six-feet-plus, and shoved him out the window, second-storey. No harm done. He was able to grasp the sill, and when she stomped on his fingers, managed to land on his feet, some distance below, in the middle of a spruce tree.

Maybe it's all been worth it. They haven't learned much, but I have, and that's what education is all about.

Three years from now, I'll meet them somewhere, on the street, in a pub, in jail. The boys will have lost their 14-year-old ebullience and the girls will be pregnant, and we'll smile and love each other.