



## Famed gate in Sunnyside

Behind this gate in Sunnyside stands the now-gutted Georgian Lodge mansion. Built around 1913 the famed Midland landmark at the northeast corner of town was recently hit by

fire. The blaze, still under investigation, was, according to an Ontario Fire Marshal official "incendiary in nature." As for the landmark

and its famed gates, some \$100,000 was wrecked on the place during the blaze. A real historic site, the Georgian Manor was to have

been turned into a high class eating establishment next year. At present it isn't known what plans are in store for the structure.

# ...now a story (or two) about strawberry extract

## Shirley Whittington

This time of the year, the local population is divided between those who take their strawberries seriously and those who do not. How do you spot a serious strawberry person?

For one thing, he or she will pick by the flat, not the basket. The head of a serious picker is protected from the July sunshine with a large straw hat or a kerchief.

The serious picker works his way methodically down the rows. He does not eat while picking.

Serious berry pickers transform their booty into jams and preserves and ammunition for pie making — enough to last a whole winter. They work hard at putting up (or putting down) their berries. "Bill and I did our berries last night," they will say. Or, "We put down 23 pints last weekend," and you know they're talking about berries, not booze.

My parents were serious about strawberries.

Once, my mother used a strawberry to demonstrate to a pair of visiting grandsons a fundamental fact of life. She put the berry on the kitchen counter and crushed it with a spoon, right before the eyes of the fascinated youngsters.

"That" she said firmly, "is what will happen to you if you go out on the road in front of Granma's house and get hit with a car. You will get smushed, just like that berry."

Both our older boys have always been careful in traffic. They do however, have recurring nightmares about giant spoons, and one of them still eats his soup with a fork.

Every year I decide I want to be considered a serious berry picker.

I would like to be able to tell someone I can't attend her Tupperware party because I have to do down my berries. My mouth waters when I think of the joy of a fresh baked strawberry pie, in February. Or pots of sinfully sweet strawberry freezer jam.

But every year, by the time I make the

resolve, the season is over and the farmers have hung burlap bags over the signs that say "Strawberries — pick your own."

This year it was the Squire who decided that we would approach strawberries seriously. We went to a place he knew about, and the farmer assigned us to the eastern end of row 7. Right away we felt like serious berry pickers.

Other serious pickers — phalanxes and families of them — had swooped down upon rows 8 to 24. They bent themselves into U-shapes and went at it.

Inspired by their example, we set to work. The alleys between the rows were paved with sun warmed straw, and were as soft as pillows. We knelt — one on each side of our assigned row — and began to fill our baskets.

I went much more quickly than the Squire, a fact I attributed to the natural dexterity of the female. Then I noticed that every berry he picked had been neatly separated from its stem. My berries were still connected to their little umbilical cords.

The Squire pointed out — gratuitously I thought — that his method of harvesting would save time when we got home. Next thing you know, he'll be telling us about a

place where you can catch fish that are already cleaned.

We picked and gently bickered, and many philosophical questions arose between us.

Who knows how to make the best use of a berry? The English with their strawberries and clotted cream? The country women of the world, with their strawberry festivals? The French, with their strawberry flans? Or the daughter of a friend of mine who turns strawberries into exquisite pink wine?

Why are these speckled little fruits called strawberries? Because we kneel on straw to harvest them? Because of the little straw like bits that dot their complexions? Because they are ex-straw-dinarily delicious?

Finally, our baskets filled, we paid the farmer and left for home. (Fortunately the dear man did not weigh me before and after I entered his strawberry patch. He will never know about the pints of strawberries I smuggled out in my stomach.)

After we got home, we did our berries. We kept hoping somebody would phone us and ask us out for the evening, so we could say "Not tonight thanks. We have to do our berries."

Yes sir, yes sir. Three Baggies full.

## A 'lit crit' speaks out, at last

### Bill Smiley

"If you're so smart, why don't you write something intelligent and literary?"

That's what a lady said to me, after reading in that dumb article that I was a graduate in honor English.

My immediate response was, "If you're so smart, sister, why are you reading that trashy weekend magazine?"

Fortunately, as they say, cooler heads prevailed, and my wife and I were once more prided apart before we could injure each other.

O.K. You want literary criticism? You shall get it. I've just finished reading "Needles", the novel that won for its author, William Deverell, \$50,000 in a new gimmick established by, I think, Seal paperback books and the old and — it says here — reputable Canadian publishing firm of McClelland and Stewart.

It was, according to the cover blurb, the unanimous choice of the judges. I wonder who the judges were. Gordie Howe? George Chuvale? Lassie?

"Needles" cannot be written by a fine young Canadian. It is straight out of Sax Rohmer by Mickey Spillane with James Bond

doing the accouchement.

It is pure garbage. But the sort of garbage that makes you dig right to the bottom of the garbage can. (Note the repetition of the word garbage there, you literary crits?)

But it is wonderful garbage, and that's why the judges chose it. It will sell. It's so rotten that I finished it at three a.m. It's so bad you can't put the dang thing down.

It has everything that the modern reader wants, and can't quite get, even though TV and the movies are busting their corsets to probe our every aberration.

It has kinky sex, drugs, genital mutilation, booze, a cop who likes kicking people in the guts, a courtroom scene with a lawyer who is shooting into his vein, and a re-incarnation of Dr. Fu Manchu, the great Chinese villain of the aforementioned Sax Rohmer's books.

It also contains every dirty word you ever thought you might like to say, and every violent deed you might like to commit. It's bound to be a best-seller. And that is why Gordie, George and Lassie chose it. Not for literary merit.

To be fair, it has a few great descriptive passages from the Vancouver Chamber of Commerce tourist booklet, and some switches right out of John LeCarre.

Actually, I thoroughly enjoyed the novel, and I'm sure you will, too, if you can't get enough sex and violence at home.

Might as well get all this lit crit out of my system at once. That brings up — no pun intended — Mordecai Richler's new novel. I haven't read it, because the library has not yet stocked it, and may never do so.

When his novel "Cocksure" won the Governor General's Award, I chaffed our local librarian because it wasn't on the shelves.

Her reply, and she was right, was that it was too dirty for our town. We must have had a dirty old man as Governor General at the time.

At any rate, as they say when they don't know how to begin the next paragraph, grumpy old Mordecai has once again gone through his gestation, and produced.

And once again, he is into the Jewish thing. In short, he has once more re-written the same novel that he has been honing for years. He wrote one about a young Jew, then about a slightly older Jew, then about a youngish middle-aged Jew, and this one is about a

really middle-aged Jew. I'm looking forward to his novel about an old Jew.

Simply, Mordecai Richler, after a couple of good attempts, went back to the fecund well of his own background, drew from it, and drank deeply. The results are first-rate.

He has not yet produced a "masterpiece," as Maclean's, that pale copy of something or other, called his latest work.

What's a masterpiece? A piece done by a master, which is recognized a hundred, or three hundred, years later by the current expert on masterpieces.

Shakespeare was a journeyman playwright. Dickens sold his stuff to magazines, and padded it unscrupulously, because he was paid by the word. Nobody would touch Conrad with a ten-foot pole until he was aging.

We have some excellent writers in Canada. If you want to see into the mind of a woman, read Margaret Laurence. If you want to see into the mind of a Catholic moralist, read Morley Callaghan. If you want to see into the mind of a WASP, read Richard Rohmer. And so on.

But if you want to read the works of a hard-nosed satirist, who lays it right on the line about this country of ours, read Richler.

Too bad his novels are too dirty to teach in high school. But I have snuck in Duddy Kravitz.