



A gull's-eye view of Midland harbour — centre of summertime recreational activity

Omnium Gatherum: Notes from bottom of bag

Shirley Whittington

Once a year, S.W. dredges a tattered notebook from the depths of her vinyl Super-Organizer handbag and considers the contents.

These are the potato chips of a journalistic life — too small to make a feast — but fun to snack upon between meals.

For instance — here's the soon-to-be-patented S.W. method of coping with telephone solicitors.

Let us say you are into something messy like peanut butter cookies or do-it-yourself hair frosting. The phone rings and somebody asks for you by name. The questions that follow are obviously leading up to a sales pitch.

You know how they go. "Good afternoon Mrs. Whittington. Are you a lover of fine music? Do you agree that music soothes the savage breast, keeps the family together and

prevents unsightly scales and itching? Do you presently have a musical instrument in your home?

Have you ever wished your little ones could play a musical instrument instead of hanging around the shopping plaza?"

Anyway — as soon as we determine that it's that kind of phone call, we say absolutely nothing. We simply put the telephone receiver down, and go back to our cookie making or our hair streaking or whatever we were doing.

That way there is no time or temper wasted at either end of the conversation. Five minutes later when we are fairly sure that the little quiz is over, we go back and hang the phone up.

The current Global conference on the future tells us that the family is shrinking. In 1850

the size of an average family was five to seven members. By 1950, family size had shrunk to somewhere between three and five members. Today an average family consists of two or three people.

Last week we were shopping for a glass and toothbrush holder for our family bathroom. We saw lots we liked, but the most attractive ones had spaces for only three toothbrushes. Are the manufacturers of toothbrush holders consulting with the futurists?

That conference on the future predicts that by 2150 the family may have shrunk out of existence, which means the end of the multi-holed toothbrush holder, I guess. Does that mean we will then have to hang up our toothbrushes on hooks screwed into the wall, the way Grandpa used to?

Sometimes we tie up the old suitcase with a stout piece of cord, and venture down to the city for a few days of cultural enlightenment.

The last time we did, we saw the following: a young woman with a hot pink brushcut, people playing chess at midnight at one of the

city's busiest corners, and a white robed woman striding down the grass at the edge of the expressway, with her hand raised in a Papal-style blessing.

We drove by and she gave us a beautiful smile and a two-fingered salute — not the kind we usually get on expressways.

I keep wondering about the pale and weary looking chap we noted coming out of the local beer store a couple of weeks ago, with a case of 12 tucked under his arm. He looked tired and thin and decidedly peaked, and on his T-shirt were the words, "So many women...so little time."

A couple of days later, we saw the same fellow, wearing the same shirt coming out of the same store with another case of twelve. If possible, he looked more wan and exhausted than he had the first time.

Somewhere, the women must be waiting in line for this guy. Why doesn't he make one of them go out and get the beer? Do them good.

Finally, I keep smiling at the memory of the restaurant with "Veal Gordon Blue" on its menu. Or is that the chef's name?

Oh, Canada

Bill Smiley

While the rest of you were winging around the country, smashing up and down the highways, belting about in a boat, or whining because you hadn't got the Monday off instead of the Tuesday, I, like a good citizen, stayed home and had sober thoughts on Dominion Day, Canada Day, or the First July, as we called it when I was a kid. I even put them down on paper.

It's difficult to write something succinct, sincere, and sentimental when you have a lump in your eyes and tears in your throat. But I tried.

Like most moribund Canadians, I didn't run into the backyard and run the whatever-it-is up the flagpole. We don't have a flagpole. The nearest we come is a cedar post that holds one end of the clothesline, the other end of which is attached to a cedar tree.

Nor did I set off any fireworks. We have those practically every day around our house, and they don't cost a penny.

What I did was slump before the slob machine and listen to a flood of flatulence from a posse of politicians who doggedly dragged out every old chestnut that had already been opened and exposed as wormy.

Not only hope but anticipation of the future. My anticipations are a huge heating bill, higher taxes and worse arthritis. Our immense size. The Incredible Hulk? Our vast

riches. Mostly owned by foreign companies. Our confidence in the future. Of the Canadian dollar? Our unity in diversity. Albertans letting us freeze and Quebecois letting us do it in the dark? And so on and on and on.

It was so moving that I had to go to the bathroom. Especially when the CBC types involved in reporting the whole dump job kept telling us that it was just peachy-dandy that we now had an official national anthem, O Canada.

When I heard this, I felt a real surge of something. I can't describe it in a family journal. What do they think the organ has been playing at hockey games for years, while the players slouched around at the blue line, scratched their jocks, chewed gum, and looked bored.

What do they think the kids in my classroom have done every morning for the past few years, just before the principal's announcements that we beat Hayfork Centre yesterday in basketball, and that the Christian-Moslem Fellowship Group is meeting at 4:05 beneath any cars left in the parking lot, and then says, "Please rise for our national anthem."?

I'll tell you what happens. A doleful dirge which even the kids know is O Canada comes over the P.A. system. We all respond.

I stand like a guardsman, chin in, chest out,

'ollow back, thumbs aligned with the seams of my trousers. Encouraged by my stance, the kids also eagerly respond to the stirring tune and inspired lyrics that fill them with pride, hope, confidence and such.

One knocks her entire math set to the floor, stoops to pick it up, and is aided by classmates who kick calculator, set squares and compass in all directions.

Another, lost in a world of his own, sits silently until the 4th bar, then leaps to his feet and begins to disco.

A third rises with the speed of an anaconda emerging from a deep freeze, leans on the window-sill and watches the dog across the street doing his business.

A fourth is back down at her desk and scratching obscenities on it before we hit the second, "We stand on guard..."

For at least a decade, our Olympic athletes have stood, hand on heart, listening to what they thought was our national anthem. Tears have flowed freely over that repetitive song, written about a hundred years ago by a couple of guys nobody ever heard of, but who weren't Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Now, by an act of parliament, to which all parties agreed, because it didn't involve the building of a new post office, the paving of some highways, the funding of some losing industry, or the cutting down of some trees to make a new national parking lot, we have an Official National Anthem.

It figures. We don't move too fast in Canada, but we move. It took us only 100 years to beget a national flag. It is a maple

leaf, a piece of foliage remarkable by its absence in about 95 per cent of the country.

Our national emblem is the beaver, a large rat which specializes in cutting down trees, building dams which flood farmers' fields, and doing nothing whatever for anybody except other beavers.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not being cynical. I think the beaver is a fine animal, if you like fat rats. Some of my best friends are beavers.

I love our flag, too. Every time I see a Canadian flag that has been out in the weather for a week, something sweeps through me — like a desire to mop up the kitchen counter.

And I love that song. I must admit I had a certain leaning toward the other old one — the Maypull Lee, that we all learned in public school. The second line goes: "Four-rem-blumdeer." But it's long gone, and I doubt if there are many Canadians who would remember or dare, to sing, "Wolfe, the dauntless hero came..."

What the heck. We can always depend on our money. I just checked my wallet. Sure enough, there was the Queen, looking not a day over twenty. But what's this? Horrors? On a ten dollar bill was John A., looking as though he'd never had anything but a Canada Dry in his life. Even worse on a five was Sir Wilfrid Laurier, looking like Pierre Trudeau without having been through Margaret.

And the whole wallet would have bought me a box of strawberries, a quart of rye, and a gallon of maple syrup.

Oh, Canada!