



A picture from Midland's past

This picture was taken on Sept. 30, 1914 at the old Central School in Midland. It shows Miss Woodhouse and her class of Senior Third

pupils. Have you a photo flashback you'd like us to publish? All photographs will be returned once they are printed in this

newspaper. For more details please contact the editor. At the same time we would like to thank our readers for making this feature the

wonderful success it has been during these past few months.

Do treasure your boy soprano

Shirley Whittington

Like you, we've had our Christmas records out for several weeks. The living room carpet is strewn with album covers, and it's a nice change to see pictures of stained glass and snowflakes instead of Devo and Cheap Trick.

Somewhere there are undoubtedly families who gather around the piano each night and sing the old favourites, but for most of us the music of the season is more likely to come from the family stereo. That's not all bad. How else could you get the whole Mormon Tabernacle Choir into your living room?

Of all the records we have — by Perry Como, and Percy Faith and choirs ancient and modern, the family favourite is a recording by the St. Michael's Choir School.

On that record an anonymous boy soprano

annually brings tears to our eyes.

There is no voice like that of a boy soprano. One church organist calls it "the pure sexless sound". All I know is that this child — whoever he is — sings with a voice of liquid silver.

And every year, for all of us, his is the voice of Christmas.

We don't know his name and we never will. It is the custom of the St. Michael's Choir School not to reveal the names of their soloists.

Whoever he is, he is a young man now, and the soaring miracle of his voice will have vanished, to be replaced with something deeper and less ethereal.

This is the chief miracle of the boy soprano.

After a few years of seemingly effortless soaring into the musical stratosphere, the boy soprano is suddenly grounded by biology. And from then on, excursions into the falsetto are usually only comic ones.

The other lovely thing about the boy soprano is that he knows not what he has. You can tell a boy soprano how beautifully he sang, and he will say "Thanks," and tear off to play football with somebody.

Even while they are touching hearts with their superb singing, boy sopranos are capable of harbouring inelegant things in the pockets under their choir robes, and it is not impossible that the owners of those angelic voices may have dirty fingernails and knots in their shoelaces.

It makes one uneasy to realize that the voice that in the morning lifts the listener to celestial heights may in the afternoon be hollering "Kill'em!" at a hockey game.

We once had three of our very own boy sopranos. Now two of them weekly raise their

formerly glorious voices in rock band performances. The third one sings pleasantly, rarely, and never about angels and starry heavens.

Still — all three of our former boy sopranos love music, and they have been known to express their own special form of admiration for that anonymous angel on our St. Michael's Choir School recording.

Sometimes if the mood is right, they will even turn off the stereo, and gather round the piano and rumble through a few of the old favourite carols.

If you have a boy soprano in your house this Christmas, treasure him. Give him all the turkey and cranberry sauce he wants, and when he goes outdoors to try out his new skates, be sure he bundles up well, especially around the throat.

Boy sopranos, like so many of the good and joyous things of Christmas do not last forever. So cherish — oh cherish — while you may. Merry Christmas.

He's gonna get ya sooner or later

Bill Smiley

EVER HAVE the feeling that someone is out to get you? Society, or God, or Somebody?

When I was an airman, an intrepid fighter pilot. I was quite superstitious. I knew that bad things came in three's. And they did.

Two times I came back to my squadron badly shot up. The third time I was shot down.

There were three guys in my tent in Normandy, July of 1944. The three of us were shot down (two killed) in three weeks.

But I'm beginning to think that three is not the only bad number. Seven and nine are no hell either.

Right now I'm about the seven stage. When I hit nine, I'll be writing you from that Great Typewriter in the Sky.

It all began last summer. On a fine, sunny day in August, someone lifted my wallet while I was on a visit of mercy: seeing my kid brother and trying to assure him that he still had a few years, despite a spine fusion, several yards of intestine removed, and a head condition that was driving him blind.

Not long after, the Infernal Revenue people told me I owed them eight hundred bucks. We're still battling back and forth, but since

the four weeks to get a letter from me to them, and them to me, we have a Mexican standoff.

But I know who's going to win. And it ain't me. They have the computer. All I have is honesty, decency, integrity and good citizenship.

Up goes the price of oil and gas. This is not a personal tragedy, but it doesn't help that Trudeau presents his unbelievable arrogance, and Alberta cuts back oil production by 15 per cent, and begins talking seriously about separation.

Then the Liberal government, smug in its majority, starts railroading its own version of the Constitution through parliament. I was perfectly happy, like most Canadians, to leave that yellowed document in Westminster. Who needs a constitution, when we have no political ties with Britain?

But petit Pierre wants a monument. Not a bronze one, or a stone one, but one in the history books, which will show that he, almost single-handedly, established a constitution for Canada, liberally (pardon the expression) sprinkled with things the Liberal Party deems important to its continued existence. Everybody is mad. Me too.

Then I head off to make a speech for an old

friend. A bit late because of highway construction, I went over the speed limit, just a little.

A cop nailed me, gave me the old siren, and when he came up to me, hit me with \$28, not for speeding, but for sitting there like a big dummy without my seat-belt fastened. I didn't have enough brains to step out of the car and lie like a trooper that I'd had it fastened.

My wife went slightly out of her mind and ordered aluminum storm windows for the whole house. The money we spent will never be recovered by the oil we save.

And I have 10 huge, wooden storm windows sitting in my tool shed, which I'll probably have to pay somebody to cart away.

Then she left me, my wife. Not for good, just for two weeks to visit my daughter in Moosonee.

Thanks again to the postal service, the column I wrote about her being away appeared three weeks after she'd got back, confabulating a lot of people who kept saying, "I hear you're going to Moosonee."

Next, an old veteran of my English staff had another attack of angina and decided to pack it in. This meant an entire re-arranging of English classes, about as simple as sticking your finger in a chain saw.

My English department has been decimated by the 'flu. Nobody knows who is teaching what, when or why.

Then I get the greatest mother of a head-

and-chest cold that anybody has suffered since the Middle Ages. Anti-biotics don't touch it.

We go on another mission of mercy: to granddad, who is 88 and a little frail, but full of beans. My wife gets a horrible cold, the kind that makes her ugly as a Gila monster, emotionally, and I get a seized-up knee.

I don't know whether or not you know what a seized-up knee is.

Imagine your throat seizing up so that you can't speak. Imagine your bowels seizing up so that you can't.

Well, that's what my knee was like. It occurs every few years, but this was the worst. I couldn't get out of it. I couldn't climb stairs. I couldn't descend them.

In bed, I had to put one foot under the bad knee and shift it, so that I could turn over. It ached like a tooth.

Oh, I got a lot of sympathy. An old colleague, an old friend, a veteran, said, "I see you're practising up for Remembrance Day parade."

Oh well. The knee is some better. I'm still coughing up stuff that would make you seasick. My wife is actually asking me how I feel, instead of telling me how she feels.

The new storm windows are on. The Infernal Revenue department is silent. The English department is functioning, sporadically.

Maybe there is a God, and he's in Heaven, and all's right. Maybe.