



## King Street in the summer

Here's a reminder that snow doesn't always cover the Town of Midland. This photograph snapped from a Cessna flying out of Huronia Airport some years ago gives you a good idea

of King Street's business section, better known today as the BIA. In lower part of the photo is the dock area which has undergone a

series of changes and more are in the works this year thanks to the efforts of the local harbour committee which recently received

word a couple of new grants will help to make yet more improvements at the foot of King Street.

# And this shall be a sign?

## Shirley Whittington

Last week I went into a fruit store with a friend who kept telling jokes to the bananas.

"Why are you telling jokes to the bananas?" I asked in what I hoped was a reasonable tone of voice.

"I couldn't resist the challenge," she said, and she pointed to the hand-lettered sign above the monkey fruit. "DO NOT BREAK UP THE BUNCHES" it said.

When I left, she was asking them if they'd heard the one about the travelling salesman with the wooden leg.

She — like me — is a member of a nutty underground network of word weirdos — people who delight in guileless inaccuracies and misleading word arrangements.

Another friend who collects and cherishes double entendres pointed out the "Battered

Cod" sign to me in a local supermarket. "Poor defenseless fish," she said.

What could I do? I directed her to the dairy counter where "Whipped Butter" was advertised. Who says cruelty and kinky excesses are the exclusive property of the film industry?

A small Ontario village carries this interesting sign on one of its municipal facilities: "Bath Water Filtration Plant."

Not far away is the community of Welcome. For years the sign over their little graveyard read: "Welcome Cemetery."

We live near a township named for a statesman's daughter's lap dog.

Actually the kid had three dogs who rejoiced in the names of Tay, Flos and Tiny. Our township is called Tiny, and you can

imagine the astonishment of travellers who see signs directing them to Tiny Beaches, or the Tiny Dump. Headline writers never tire of composing show-stoppers like "Tiny firemen quell huge blaze."

I have noticed that garages seem to excel in displaying thought-provoking and off-beat messages.

I passed one the other day which advertised "Ten Percent off Senior Citizen Repairs." Does Canada have a shortage of hospital beds?

Not to worry. We'll just put Granny up on the hoist, and change her oil.

Meanwhile, I hear there's a place in Willowdale which offers "Rabbi and Bug Repairs."

If you are bored by the sheer dailiness of life, you might consider a trip to the garage which carries this banner ad in its window: "Special Today: Shocks." I keep imagining a customer, shuffling and yawning — and a specialist in shocks who shouts, "Your wife is going to have twins!"

Not all signs offer constructive help. My all-time favourite is the huge sandwich board in the lobby of a downtown hotel. "Join us for lunch," it said. "Help cripple children."

This seems the apex of unkindness. Did they push them downstairs or what?

The thought behind Carpe Diem (seize the day) on a rural barn is sensible. Near here there is a farm with this enigmatic and beguiling sign at its gate: "The Sheepish Grin."

Such gems are rare and undeniably collectable.

And can you find such a treasure when you really need one? Of course not.

I just wrote a story about a cat who works as a mouser on a provincial government site. She produced an awesome number of kittens, and was finally given official leave of absence so she could be neutered.

The cat's name is Vanessa. I wish they'd called her Sam.

Sam Spayed. What a headline.

# Now here's an item about the WINTER

## Bill Smiley

AH. WINTER! There's nothing like you to put the iron into the souls of Canadians.

We can tuff you out. But the trouble is that the iron stays in the souls, and our short summer is not enough to make it molten. In other words, everybody over fifty has arthritis.

Mine doesn't bother me much, because I'm always trying a new remedy that is guaranteed, and hope lives eternal in the human beast.

I've tried carrying a potato in my hip pocket. It was a sure thing. I was told.

But from sitting around on that cold mashed potato for a couple of weeks, all I got was arthritis in the hip, where I'd never had it before.

Then I got a kind of wristband, made of some shiny metal, which allegedly had done wonders for arthritis in Japan. Nothing happened except that I got arthritis in my wrist, where I'd never had it before.

My son, who is a great man for herbs and a vegetarian, except when he's home, when he eats three helpings of meat, had a surefire recipe that would cure arthritis in three weeks.

It's an herb from Switzerland, called Devil's Claw. It tastes like a devil's claw that

hasn't been washed since His Evilness was kicked out of heaven.

You have to drink three cups of the junk, brewed in hot water and left standing, per day, before meals. I was faithful for the three weeks, even though it was an ordeal to look at food after swallowing the swill.

Result? I had the worst arthritic knee I've had since a guy kicked my kneecap two inches to the left back in 1944.

A kind lady from Alberta wrote that she could get me a special price on some kind of machine that gives you ultrared (or something) treatments. I declined to answer, on the reasonable grounds that I knew it would turn me into a red arthritic.

I wouldn't mind being a red politically, or a red Indian (something I've never seen), but I didn't want to become a red arthritic, for some reason.

My wife has about eight books about arthritis. She keeps reading me bits from each, and I get so confused I don't know whether to diet strictly, eat like a hog, get into acupuncture, or go out and roll in the snow, naked.

I imagine any or all of them would have the same result.

Anyway, my arthritis doesn't bother me at all. It's just a good excuse for getting out of a lot of unnecessary chores, which my old lady is quite young and fit enough to do herself.

Scrubbing (my knees are bad.) Wall-papering (my shoulders are killing me.) Garbage (doc says don't lift anything over 20 pounds: my back.)

Anyway, I didn't intend to write a column about arthritis. As a topic of either conversation or literature, it's about as exciting as the common cold, another subject which winter provides Canadians some stimulating repartee about.

What I really set out to do was write an Ode to Winter. And here it comes. I tell my students that any dang fool can write modern poetry, but there aren't many of us left who can make it rhyme.

Ode to Winter:  
"Winter, you is a time for  
Slipping and sliding,  
Swooping and gliding,  
Snowmobile riding.

But if you decided to spend the winter in Flor'da  
I'd adore ya."

That's all. No need to spoil a perfect bit of poesy. But imagine what a modern poet, especially a young one, would do with that. Here's a sample, no rhyme, no rhythm:

Hev. Mr. Winter.  
"I dig you.  
Beer and bums after the ski hill.

Downing the drinks after the bonspiel.

Knocking down farmers' fences with my Bombardier Flyer.

You're a white man, Ole Mister.  
I dig you."

Come to think of it, the second ode has more concrete nouns than the first, more action verbs, more appeal to the senses, and sharper imagery.

Not to mention a great and powerful use of repetition in the opening and closing lines. It's a better poem. But how can it be a better poem if it doesn't rhyme?

As R. J. Needham would ask, who once stated publicly that there hadn't been any good poetry written since Tennyson. I told him that was utter nonsense.

He agreed. He was just trying to get somebody to say something.

Nah. Winter's not so bad. But my heart sinks when I think that Wilson, the boy next door, is in Grade 12, and will soon be off to college.

In the mornings, after a blizzard, I sit quietly drinking my tea and reading my paper until I hear his shovel clanging on the back porch.

Then I leave for work, knowing my path and driveway are open. In the summer he cuts my grass.

I'm going to ask all his teachers to fail him this year. The only other solution is to sell the house.