



Hardly a traffic jam

Here's a photo flashback that dates back decades. It shows Midland's main street,

King Street. As you can see there wasn't a traffic jam as only one Model T is shown

heading south on King Street. Do you have a photo flashback you'd like us to publish?

Please contact the editor if you do. All prints will be returned upon publication.

And now the story of the coat of many cholers

Shirley Whittington

The most dismaying circumstances often represent good learning experiences.

The trick is not to let rage or dismay blind you to the inherent teaching.

What was I supposed to learn from the following experience? Let's figure it out.

One day early in March, I went to the city for a two-day holiday. One item on the agenda was the purchase of a winter coat at — one hoped — a spring sale price.

For reasons which only my closest and most devoted friends will understand, I decided to pay for my hotel room in cash, in advance.

I checked in and started peeling off the bills and pushing them across to the desk clerk. He reacted as if I'd shoved a snake at him.

"Do you have a major credit card?" he asked in an elevated tone.

"Sure. But I want to pay cash for my room."

He distanced his fragrant self from my dirty money. "I cannot accept your cash without positive identification from a major credit card," he said stiffly.

Now — this made me really mad. "Does that look like Monopoly money?" I asked. "Smell it. Feel it. It's real."

"Madam," he said. "I need identification in case, during your stay with us, you should steal a television set or throw a lamp out one of the windows. We need to know that you are who you say you are."

I flashed my Master Charge; he deigned to take my money. I went upstairs to my room, where my reputation had apparently preceded me. The television set and the lamps were firmly bolted to the table tops.

Early the next morning I travelled up town to some favorite shops. Winter coats were as scarce as martinis in McDonalds. "We're into the spring line now," said the salesgirl.

Disappointed, I trundled down to the city's two major department stores. The first had acres of winter coats. Half of them were size six. The other half were big enough to set up housekeeping in.

Tiring, and faintly daunted, I set out for the other big store. There, after hours of searching I found my coat. Red. Cosy. Size 12. Affordable. Unique. Mine.

I passed my Master Charge to the sales clerk. Her kind grandmotherly face fell. "Oh dearie," she said in a soft Scots burr. "I canna take that. It has to be an Eaton's card."

I felt my face redden as I gave a fair imitation of a madwoman about to run amok in the Eaton's downtown Coat Salon.

"But we'll take a cheque," chirped Annie Laurie.

I brightened. "Good. It's an out-of-town bank, but I have lots of identification."

She waved her hand. "Don't need a thing dearie," she said. "Just your cheque." And she bundled up the coat.

I returned to the hotel, footsore, but pleased with my prize. Later in the evening, the new coat still in its Eatons box was placed in the car in the hotel's underground parking garage.

The next morning, the coat was gone — stolen in the night by someone who pried open the locked car door.

I arrived home, footsore, weary, angry, broke and coatless. Lessons? They abound.

If you want to use cash to buy something, take your credit card.

If you want to use credit to buy something, take your cash along.

If you need a new coat, buy it at home where there are no underground parking garages.

Finally, if you are a middle aged mother of four who looks like the kind of person who would throw a lamp out of a hotel window, or steal a television set, get professional help.

The hazards of writing a pre-election column

Bill Smiley

THIS IS being written on the eve of the provincial election in Ontario, but it could be the eve of any election in any province in this far-flung dominion.

Going up against the incumbent government resembles very much a promising heavyweight fighter going up against the world champion.

He has to knock the champ out, or make him look so foolish that even the judges have to award the challenger the title.

If it's anywhere near close, the champ wins. How does this apply to provincial politics?

Well, in the first place, the party in power has its fingers in a stranglehold on the public purse.

This means that it can run an overwhelming advertising campaign, conduct its own slanted polls, and throw grants and patronage in all directions, especially when a seat is in danger.

Every nickel of this vast wastage comes out of your pocket and mine.

A provincial election costs you and me anywhere from ten to a hundred million dollars, most of it disguised in the form of government information, government announcements of ten million here, two million there, eight million elsewhere, and so on.

It means that the government, fighting a

supposedly democratic election, is in with both hands to public money, scattering it wherever it might glean votes, regardless of the provincial debt, regardless of us, who are putting up the bucks.

It means that the government can cynically hire clever people to write speeches, brilliant people to plan glossy ad campaigns, brutal people to twist arms and remind of past favors, and opportunists to denigrate the opposition parties.

The latter, without access to our money, can fight only with what they have, and it's an uphill battle.

They can't afford the opulent advertising, the sycophantic sycophancy of a venal press, the bus or the plane with the free bar, the free buses to pack nomination meetings.

But, lo, all is not lost. People are not sheep; not quite. Every so often, a slick, glossy government campaign goes down the drain, as The People suddenly demand to know what the hell the government stands for, besides motherhood, prosperity, and a turkey in every seat in the legislature.

It happened in B.C., when Dave Barrett knocked out the right-wing government of Wacky Bennett. And in Manitoba, when right-wing Sterling Lyon knocked out the left-wing

NDP

It happened in Quebec, when the PQ knocked off the smooth Liberal organization, riddled with patronage and corruption and fear.

And it happened before that in Quebec when the Liberals, before they became rich and slick, bumped the Duplessis, right-wing Union Nationale, now a mere shadow on the Quebec horizon.

Being of Irish extraction, I always, without fail, vote against the government. By the time this appears in print, the Tories in Ontario, who have a menage a trois with the NDP, the Liberals and the Liberal government in Ottawa (doesn't that boggle the mind?) will likely have formed another minority government.

How could they be defeated, with all that money, and a leader who epitomizes all the small-town, small-minded attitudes of traditional Tory Ontario?

But I'm in a quandary. Out on my front lawn is a sign, urging people to vote NDP. My wife, in a weak moment, allowed a friend to talk her into installing it, with my urging.

I can't vote Tory, because I detest and despise a government that has allowed Ontario to become a second-rate province, despite its enormous resources, and because I resent the manner in which the Tory leader, a fairly mediocre politician who squeaked into the leadership by about the same margin as Joe Clark, and only because the Northern Ontario voters had to get home by bus, rail

and plane, and couldn't vote in the last ballot, and who chooses to scatter my money wherever it will buy a vote.

Why not vote, then, for the NDP man, a good man, a man of intellect and integrity? Because, while he is a good man, and would make an excellent representative, his party can't win.

Thus, I'm going to vote Liberal, even though I don't know a thing about the Liberal candidate, except what I hear.

As a result, I will be drummed out of the teachers' union, which has urged all teachers to vote against the Liberals.

Why? Because the Liberals have chosen education as one of their sacred cows to attack. And not a bad choice.

The public, as well as many teachers, is fed up to the ears with the present educational system. Include me in.

I think the system, which by the way was architected by the present provincial premier when he was Minister of Education, neither knows where it has been or where it is going.

It is full of brilliant young people with new ideas, old fogies who fight the new ideas at every turn, and middle-aged nerts who can't see past salaries and pensions.

Bury me not on the lone prairie. Bury me instead under a heap of frustrated young people who are getting neither an adequate education for a job, nor an adequate education for life with a capital L.