

# (It was just a matter of time) Is that you coffin?

The graveyard of the future may be a lively place indeed with pre-recorded voices making grave announcements about the deceased. Tombstones are now capable of speaking in what one supposes would be sepulchral tones. "Rest in peace" as an incantation for the dead is in danger of serious violation.

I read about this in the newspaper. "A US monument manufacturer", reports the Star, "has advertised a heat sensitive gadget that activates a voice-recording when a warm body walks past a tombstone. The voice introduces the deceased, gives the birth and death dates, adding (perhaps wistfully) 'Have a good day'. The cost is \$30,000."

I was pretty surprised the first time I walked through a cemetery and was confronted with colour photographs of deceased persons, smiling in at me in the manner of a high school year book or a company newsletter.

Still, if we can have pictures, why not sound? This suggests that the Grim Reaper now has a couple of sidekicks, the woofer and the tweeter.

But glitches will surely occur. I have a friend whose house is wired against burglary. The alarm sounds on a big bell that is mounted on an outside wall of her house, like a goitre. The alarm used to go off frequently, sending pyjama-clad neighbours into the

## Shirley Whittington



street armed with walking sticks and rolling pins, looking for the thieves.

They were all false alarms. The continuing eruptions were caused by her cat whose lithe little body kept intercepting the photo-electric cell, thus activating the big bell. Given the number of nocturnal ruminants that cruise the average graveyard-dogs, racoons and so forth-the risk of sudden bursts of posthumous conversation seems high. You wouldn't catch me near one of those wired-up graveyards after dark. Too spooky.

There are advantages to the invasion of the Sony people. Such spontaneous speeches would certainly deter graveyard vandals.

If done retroactively, hidden taped announcements would prevent backache. Like most of you, I've spent a lot of time leaning over, trying to decipher the engraving on ancestral tombstones. Was Aunt Tillie born in Ireland or Iceland? A taped announcement, issuing firmly from behind the

boxwood bushes would make genealogical research easier.

And certainly there is no more fitting place for that worn, silly, useless clatter of a phrase, "Have a nice day" than in the graveyard, so that's another advantage.

Already some graveyards are filled with entertaining printed messages like:

"Poor Martha Snell, she's gone away. She would if she could, but she couldn't stay.

She'd two bad legs and a baddish cough. But it was her legs that carried her off." Or: "Here lies the body of Mary Anne Lowder

She burst while drinking a Seidlitz powder. Called from this world to her heavenly rest. She should have waited till it effervesced."

If such wit was transferred to tape, it would put a walk through the graveyard right up there with a visit to Yuk Yuk's Comedy Cafe.

Dylan Thomas was a famous poet and one

would have expected his last words to have had a certain memorable quality. They were, in fact: "I have had eighteen straight whiskies and I think this is a record." This is certainly not the sort of thing one would wish to have braying out from one's tombstone every time an idle passer-by activated the mechanism.

Art Roch has collected some last words which can be tailored to specific individuals, and maybe you might want to make note of them in case this tape recording thing catches on.

An atheist: "I was only kidding."

A bridge player: "I pass."

A gossip: "I'm dying to tell somebody about this."

A believer in reincarnation: "What? Intermission already?"

A hypochondriac: "I told you I was sick."

None of those quite works for me. After considerable thought, I offer the following for myself and other hacks. They are deadlines, in the truest sense.

Here lies Shirly, a worn out creak, Buried 'neath a writer's block.

Her dying breath embraced this thought. At last - an original plot!

And if that's too long, I'll settle for, "Here lies a writer: they generally do."

# And the gift and kind words keep pouring in...

IT'S been a long, cold winter and spring, and my heart is still sore. But the tulips are bursting and the sun is shining, and the kindness of people keep the spirit alive.

There's a tendency to sleep in, and stay up until the last late movie is over, and to exist on frozen chicken pies.

But I can't do it. The phone keeps ringing. Old friends drop in. People bring me gifts.

Naturally, the phone rings when I'm on the john or in the bath-tub. I think I'll have it removed. Not the bathtub, but the phone.

Gifts? A daffodil in January. A pot of 'mums (I can't spell the whole word.) in February. A chicken pie and butter tarts in March. An Easter lily from dear Julie at Easter. Cooked goodies from Evelyn, my cleaning lady.

Three pounds of California dates from my old roommate at college. (What does one do with three pounds of dates?)

Letters still come from over the continent. Some of them make me weep, as they try to console and comfort. I'll never get around to answering all of them, but thanks, thanks, especially to those who know me only through this column.

Good friends drop in to make sure I'm not going down the drain. Old friends have written: Gene Macdonald, Per Vidsten, Kay Dills, and many others. You'll probably get my answers before Christmas.

## Bill Smiley



Other friends drag me out to dinner and force me to be genial, if not jovial. It's difficult, but not impossible.

The local golf club says I'll be fined if I don't pay up before a certain date. The insurance company has already nailed me for being late in payment. I missed the date for one Visa card payment and been fined. Some guy from Avis in Florida tells me there was body damage to the car I hired, and was I in an accident. No. I don't think I'll even answer him.

That's some of the good news and some of the bad. To the bad, I'm fairly imperturbable. To the good, I'm grateful.

More good news. My neighbours are as staunch as Scottish clansmen. They don't interfere. They don't pry. But when you need help, they're right there. Jim came over and tried to get my lawnmower going. He did, but it would stop. Finally I realized he'd been trying to fix my old lawnmower, which the dopey kid I'd hired last year had put in the

toolshed, instead of leaving it out for the dump, as I'd intended.

As Jim started back to his workshop to have another go, I spotted the brand-new lawnmower at the back of the tool-shed. We hauled out a broken bicycle, sundry doors and screens, and pulled out the new one. It started like a jet fighter. He charged me nothing, even though I was the dunce. And his wife invited me to coffee.

More good news. I got a kid to cut my lawn and other dreary duties, and the manor looks half-decent. He was a good lad, worked hard, and was honest, if taciturn. "Good"; that's OK. "Good," was all he said, but he worked.

An old friend died while I was away, and I'm sorry I was not there for her funeral. She had devoted her life to teaching and helping others, and about three generations of students respected and loved her. She was the sort who sent flowers to my kids when they won at a music festival.

Speaking of which, a scholarship in music

was established in my wife's name, and she'd have been delighted to know that one of her favorite students had won it. She had not taught him, but spotted him as a winner several years ago.

I'm trying to brace myself for two weeks of my grandboys early in July. It was tough enough when their Gran was here to bawl them out for all sorts of sundry misbehavior. If this column ceases to appear about mid-July, send my mail to the local Medical Health Centre.

They'll be going to a day camp, where they're supposed to tire themselves out with swimming and running and stuff. But they come home at 4:30, want to play soccer or to go to the beach, and are still going at a 500-watt clip. Then they want to stay up until midnight, watching TV. Oh, well, I'll probably survive, and if I don't, so be it.

My big social event of the next while is the high school commencement, a long, often boring, and usually very hot evening. But I think I'll go. There's something awfully sweet about the girls (who wore jeans all year) in their long dresses, and something pathetic in the graduating boys, strangely pathetic in real suits and choking to death in ties.

Otherwise, my busted shoulder is coming along, and I'm going to try to swing a golf club, do some swimming, and get cracking on a book.

## Letters

### St. John thanks

Dear Editor:

The Midland-Penetang St. John Ambulance Brigade wish to extend a sincere thank you to all those who made our day at McDonalds such an immense success by purchasing a Big Mac.

We would also like to say a special thank you to the following people for donating time and adding to the fun and excitement of the day.

Mr. J. Blackwell and Staff McDonalds, Mr. Doug Lewis M.P., Chief Ernie Bates Midland Police Chief, Chief Robert Cummings Penetang Police Chief, Chief Ted Light Penetang Fire Chief, Mr. Al Roach Town of Midland, Mr. Art Stewart Town of Penetang, Mr. Scot Warnock CKMP Radio, Mr. Fred Hacker Rotary Club, Mr. Rick LeClair YMCA, Mrs. Sandra Saddy Contact, Mr. Fred McConkey Shriners, Mr. Doug Reed Midland Times, Mr. Paul Welch Midland Free Press, Mr. Frank Myers Cable 12 MacLean Hunter T.V.

Thank you one and all.

Yours in First Aid  
- Mrs. Beverley Steele  
Divisional Officer

### Thanks for coverage

Dear Editor:

Thank you for being so supportive of our school drama club.

We really appreciated the newspaper coverage which was given for our production.

Sincerely,  
- The Staff and Students of Bayview P.S.

## Bracebridge Homecoming Weekend

Dear Editor:

We, the Town of Bracebridge, invite former residents to our Homecoming Weekend, June 29 to July 2, 1984. Come see the recent changes in our Town such as the Library Addition. There are guided tours of the Historic Hydraulic Water Pumping Station, and Woodchester Villa, and octagonal home.

Homecoming weekend begins with the official opening of the Wellington Street Bridge. On June 29, at 12 noon a cavalcade of antique cars escorted by the Ontario Provincial Police precision motorcycle team, the Golden Helmets, will take the official party to the ceremonies. The Golden Helmets will present a precision riding display in Jubilee Park.

Saturday, June 30, there will be an antique engine display at Memorial Park (including a

shingle mill).

The Homecoming Picnic begins July 1 at 12:30 p.m. at Annie Williams Park with the Mayor's Challenge canoe race. Entries for the Log Rolling competition must be in by 1:30 p.m. and the competition begins at 2:30 p.m. There will be the traditional ice cream, pop, races and games. A specially prepared Bracebridge Bicentennial button will be distributed to everyone.

For further information contact the Bracebridge Town Office, 645-5264.

Come out and enjoy a look at the past and present in Bracebridge.

Yours truly,

- Pat Malone  
Bicentennial Co-Ordinator

## New provincial legislation

Dear Editor:

I am pleased to enclose a copy of Bill 93, An Act Respecting Public Libraries, which I introduced in the Legislature of Ontario on June 4, 1984.

This new legislation is the culmination of an extensive consultation process with members of the library community, municipalities and the general public.

These amendments provide a framework that ensures a responsiveness to the library needs of all Ontarians while providing support and scope for future development.

The enclosed publication contains explanations (in blue) of certain sections of the Bill, and highlights many program initiatives which my

Libraries and Community Information Branch is undertaking.

The present library system in Ontario emanates from the Free Libraries Act of 1882. The quality of our library services is the result of the dedication, enthusiasm and co-operation of many committed individuals over the years.

I believe that the legislative changes proposed will respect and maintain the proud traditions of a first class library system.

Yours sincerely,  
Susan Fish  
Minister of  
Citizenship and Culture

## Pleased with pact

An agreement covering pensions, remuneration, fringe benefits and general working conditions for employees of the Penetanguishene Public Works Department has been reached between the Town of Penetanguishene and the association representing the employees.

Town council formally approved the negotiated agreement at its monthly meeting Monday night.

The agreement, retroactive to Jan. 1, 1984, is in effect until Dec. 31, 1984.

Under the agreement, wages for Public Works employees range from \$9.66 per hour to \$10.26 per hour for a mechanic.

The chairman of council's administration and finance committee, Frances St. Amant, commented before council's vote on the agreement that she is pleased with it.