

# Onward and upward and even more upward

This summer of 1984 is fraught with incident and around here everybody is busier than a snake on a rake.

The Pope's visit in September has brought our fall fair forward into mid-summer. Half the town is doing up jam for the Home Economics section of the fair, and the other half is enumerating for the fall election.

As if that weren't enough last week an international hot air balloon championship took place practically in our back yard. It is hard not to go pop-eyed at the sight of a glowing balloon taller than a house, floating against a bright blue sky. There were dozens of near-accidents on the highway south of here as motorists gaped at airborne flotillas of multi-coloured balloons, slipping across the sky like giant inverted Christmas tree ornaments.

On the fourth day of the championships, a muscular Japanese named Teruo Kubota bounced into our office to request permission to launch his red and white hot air balloon from our parking lot.

Why us? Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, said Mr. Kubota was level, protected and in the right direction for prevailing winds. Besides he said, with indisputable logic, he was out to make hot air history by breaking the world altitude record. Such a feat would begin most appropriately in the parking lot of an historic site.

At Sainte-Marie we're used to questions. We've been queried on washrooms, motels,

## Shirley Whittington



restaurants, martyrs, beer stores, hiking trails, canoe races, and dentists, in several languages. But this was the first time in history that anybody had longed to lift off from our parking lot in a hot air balloon.

Many brows were furrowed; many heads were scratched. Eventually, permission was granted.

And this is why at 2:30 a.m. last Thursday, four of us stood alone in the very dark parking lot surrounded by intimidating squeaks and rustles from the Wildlife Centre next door.

Illogically, we kept scanning the skies and saying things like "I don't see him yet. Do you see him? What time did he say he'd be here?"

We had almost decided that we were victims of an elaborate practical joke when Mr. Kubota's motorcade arrived. It consisted of two American automobiles, a pick-up truck and a van containing television cameramen.

Mr. Kubota immediately began spreading his gear on the ground - life jacket, parachute, oxygen, propane tanks, electronic stuff,

wires, sleeping bag, and a bulging Canadian Tire shopping bag.

Meanwhile his crew spread the limp balloon across the pavement. A wicker basket with about sixteen square feet of floor space was moved into position and the team secured Mr. Kubota's gear to its inside. We looked in and noted a dashboard with several dials, many straps and pockets and very little room for Mr. Kubota.

Someone wheeled in a gasoline powered fan and pulled the starting cord. Air rushed into the envelope which began to swell in the eerie glow of the car headlights.

A propane heater was activated and sudden roaring bursts of flame began to heat the air within the envelope.

Mr. Kubota tested his walkie-talkie, and attached a new thermometer - the kind you probably have hanging outside your kitchen window - to a padded strut on the basket. Then he vanished to suit up for the flight. He re-appeared in a many-zippered flight

suit and posed for TV cameramen with and without his padded helmet. Then he slipped into his parachute harness and hopped into the basket which was held down by crew members. The balloon was lugging overhead, anxious to be airborne. A long cable attached to the bottom of the basket ended in a blinding strobe light.

It was now 4:30 a.m. The stars had disappeared and there were amber glimmerings in the eastern sky.

Mr. Kubota tested his radio again, and then said quietly, "Okay, please". The men who had been holding his basket down stepped back and Mr. Kubota lifted away from us, but not silently. We could hear the thunderous roar of the propane heater during its periodic belches into the balloon. It was an impressive exit.

The follow-up team was in the truck in an instant and off, trailing their airborne quarry. The TV crew headed back to their studio.

We drove home through the pearly dawn, craning our necks to keep sight of the balloon with its winking strobe tail. With each puff of the on-board heater, the inflated envelope glowed with colour. It looked like a huge ascending light bulb.

Later Mr. Kubota told us he had risen to 20,500 feet in his balloon. The previous Canadian record was 19,000 feet.

We felt good about witnessing hot air history in Canada.

Bring on the election.

## Education stalemate (another view)

In thirty plus years as an editor, a parent, and a teacher, I have been inundated (though not quite drowned) by several waves of self-styled "reform" of our educational system, especially that of Ontario.

Each wave has washed away some of the basic values in our system and left behind a heap of detritus, from which teachers and students eventually emerge, gasping for a breath of clean air.

Most of the "massive" reforms in our system are borrowed from the U.S., after thirty or forty years of testing there have proven them dubious, if not worthless.

We have borrowed from the pragmatist, John Dewey, and American, who had tried to put them into mass production, an endearing but not necessarily noble trait of our cousins below the border.

We have tried the ridiculous, "See, Jane. See Spot run. Spot, see Jane vomit," sort of thing which completely ignores the child's demand for heroes and witches and shining maidens, and things that go bump in the night.

We have tried "teaching the whole child", a process in which the teacher becomes father mother, uncle aunt, grandfather grandma, psychiatrist, buddy, confidant, and football to kick around, while the kid does what he/she dam-well-pleases. And we wonder about teacher "burn-out".

We have tried a system in which the children choose from a sort of Pandora's box what subjects they would like to take, and giving them a credit for each subject to which they are "exposed", whether or not they have learned anything in it.

That was a bit of a disaster. Kids, like

## Bill Smiley



adults, chose the things that were "fun", that were "easy", that didn't have exams, that allowed them to "express their individuality."

New courses were introduced with the rapidity of rabbits breeding. A kid who was confident that he would be a great brain surgeon took everything from basket-weaving to bird-watching because they were fun.

And suddenly, at about the age of seventeen, he discovered that it was necessary to know some science, mathematics, Latin, history and English to become a brain surgeon (or a novelist, or a playwright, or an engineer, etc.).

There are very few jobs open in basket-weaving and bird-watching or World Religions or another couple of dozen I could name, but won't, for fear of being beaten to death by a tizzy of teachers the day this column appears.

The universities, those sacrosanct institutions, where the truth shall make you free, went along with the Great Deception. They lowered their standards, in a desperate scramble for live bodies. They competed for students with all the grace of merchants in an Armenian bazaar.

Another swing of the pendulum. Parents discovered that their kids know something about a lot of things, but not much about anything. They got mad.

The universities, a little red in the face suddenly and virtuously announced that many high school graduates were illiterate, which was a lot of crap. They were the people who decided that a second language was not necessary. They were the people who accepted students with a mark of 50 in English, which means the kid actually failed, but his teacher gave him a credit.

Nobody, in the new system, really failed. If they mastered just less than half the work, got a 48 percent, they were raised to 50. If they flunked every subject they took, they were transferred to another "level", where they could succeed, and even excel.

The latest of these politically-inspired, slovenly-researched reforms in Ontario is called SERP, and it sounds just like, and is just like NERD.

Reading its contents carefully, one comes to the conclusion that if Serp is accepted, the result will be a great leveller. Out of one side of its mouth it suggests that education be compressed, by abandoning of Grade 13, and out of the other side, that education be ex-

panded by adding a lot of new things to the curriculum. How can you compress something and expand it at the same time? Only a commission on education could even suggest such a thing.

There will be lots of money for "Special Education" in the new plan. There will be less money for excellence. Special Education is educational jargon for teaching stupid kids.

Bright kids are looked down upon as an "elite" group, and they should be put in their place.

The universities would enjoy seeing Grade 13 disappear. That would mean they'd have a warm body for four years, at a cost of about \$4,000 a year, instead of three.

I am not an old fogey. I am not a reactionary. I believe in change. Anything that does not change becomes static, or dies. Ideas that refuse the change become dessicated.

I am not against spending lots of money to teach stupid kids, or emotionally disturbed kids. But I am squarely against any move toward squelching the brightest and best of our youth, and sending off to university people who are in that extremely vulnerable stage of half-adolescent, half-adult, and turving them into classes of 200 or 300, where they are no more than a cypher on the books of a so-called hall of learning.

And I have the proof right before me, in the form of several brilliant essays by Grade 13 students, better than anything I ever write, who have had a chance to come to terms with themselves and with life, in a small class, with a teacher who knows, likes, and encourages them, rather than a remote figure at a podium.

### Sign to mark welcome to Pontiff and his party

A sign welcoming Pope John Paul II to Huronia is soon to be erected on a field just west of King Street South on Highway 12.

(The property is situated on the Jones Farm.) The field is to be used as a landing site for helicopters which will be carrying the Pontiff and his party to Huronia, reports George MacDonald, assistant co-ordinator of the Papal Visit to Huronia.

Meanwhile, work has begun in preparation to painting the overhead bridge at the Wye River just west of the Martyrs' Shrine.

The fresh coat of paint is to coincide with the Holy Father's historic visit to Huronia.

### Marine safety a must at this time of year

Aug. 3, 4, 5, and 6, Midland OPP and the 1984 Summer Student Youth Employment Program will be conducting a Marine Watch Program at Hindsons Marina on Penetanguishene Bay.

Marine Watch is a program designed to increase security of your boat by marking and identifying marine accessories and equipment through the use of electric engraving and other various forms of marking.

Summer students will be available at Hindsons Marina this weekend to assist in identifying your marine property AT NO COST TO YOU!

Help deter theft and vandalism to your vessel, take advantage of the marine watch program.

### Local law-makers are to meet on Mon. Aug. 13

Midland council meets on Monday, Aug. 13, at town hall.

The 7:30 p.m. meeting is open to the general public.

## North Simcoe Newsbriefs

### Our OPP probe a total of 160 general occurrences

During the week ending July 30th, Midland OPP handled a total of 160 general occurrences.

Included were five break-ins, seven thefts, four assaults and three cases of wilful damage.

### We will be closed on Civic Holiday

This Monday, Aug. 6, our offices in Midland, Penetanguishene and Elmvalle will be closed due to the Civic Holiday.

We will, however, publish newspapers next Wednesday and Friday as usual.

### Special programs offered at parks

Visitor Services programs in Provincial Parks are organized for the enjoyment and education of park users. In Huronia, programs will be offered at Awenda, Earl Rowe, Six Mile Lake and Wasaga Beach Provincial Parks.

An array of experiences are offered, ranging from demonstrations of canoeing, camping and other recreational skills, to nature hikes, guest speakers and film programs.

Campers, day-users and the general public are all welcome to participate. A valid campsite or daily vehicle permit is the only fee applicable.

The \$2.50 per vehicle day use fee provides entry into the park as well as the use of all park facilities for the day.

On Monday, Aug. 6, Civic Holiday, all Provincial Parks will offer free day-use to help celebrate Ontario's Bicentennial.

### Parks offering free day use Aug. 6th

Ontario's 137 provincial parks are offering free day use on Aug. 6, the Civic holiday - as a special Bicentennial gift to park users.

But there's more than free day use in many of the parks. Most are also offering Bicentennial festivities - ranging from blueberry festivals and heritage displays to canoe demonstrations and softball tournaments.

Staff at the provincial parks in your area will be glad to fill you in on what's happening locally.

For more information on what's happening during the Civic Day Weekend or throughout the rest of the summer, call Clare Mahoney in our Outdoor Recreation Inquiries office in Toronto at (416) 965-3081.

### Lots of time left to sign up

Third session for the County of Simcoe Sports and Fitness Camps started Monday at Innisfil Centennial Park and Perkinsfield Park, Township of Tiny.

The camps are for 10-14 year old boys and girls who are interested in learning about sports and fitness. The programme includes daily instruction by a highly competent staff, and topics cover sports theory, fit tips, strategy sports talks, nutrition and a large variety of sports activities.

The camps, of two-weeks duration, run from Monday to Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and the fee is \$20 per person.

A fourth session starts August 13th - 24th at Washago and at Collingwood.