

# Of twigs and trees and ironies

A teacher once inscribed the following on a blackboard of my youth: As the twig is bent, so the tree's inclined. This dense little aphorism was as baffling as all the others mouthed by the supervisory adults who infested my childhood. Least said; soonest mended. A stitch in time. Beauty is as beauty does. What did they mean? Who knew, for Heaven's sake? I didn't.

I wish I could report that now, in the fullness of my adult years, those tiresome platitudes have assumed dimensions of truth and beauty. They haven't. And as the mother of four grown-up twigs, I can say the one about the inclination of the tree is a bunch of banana oil.

For although those four were bent from their earliest ages on lives of total disorder and personal chaos, they have grown into adults with the most appalling sense of neatness and organization. I have spent a weekend in their company and they live like nursing matrons in charge of a floor full of drooling incontinent. They are neat. They are fussy. They are clean. They are, perhaps, not even my kids. I keep wondering if they got mixed up with somebody else's kids on the way down to the city in the bus.

Their lives are paradigms of good sense and laudable caution. They keep their 10-speed bikes in their apartment hallways. The shelves of their closets are lined with plastic containers marked Buttons and Safety Pins.

## Shirley Whittington



Their kitchen cupboards shimmer with row upon row of matching glasses, some for milk, some for tomato juice, some for wine. They even have matching brandy snifters (which I'm sure they use for arranging flowers).

I had only been with Twig No. 2 for a few hours when I noticed him scanning his kitchen cupboards and rearranging a couple of glasses I had carelessly returned to the wrong rank. He reminded me of a nervous museum curator.

And their closets! They are miracles of order. Shirts here; pants here; jackets over here. And in the cupboard by the front door, outer wear and sporting equipment only, if you please.

These are kids who, when they lived at home, stored their clothes on the floor or on top of the piano. Where are the young ruffians of yesteryear who thought coathangers were invented to open locked cars?

The twigs, now that they have sprouted and live on their own, have replaced their nagging parents with lists which remind them to buy milk, vacuum the living room, return library books and pay the phone bill.

As I stood in Twig Two's tastefully decorated pad, dripping all over the carpet and admiring the peace and order, my son tactfully suggested that my wet boots would be better off, and stowed at the front door. He wondered if I'd brought slippers.

Later another child served us coffee in matching mugs and asked us to keep our voices down. This is the person who almost stereotyped us to death back in the days of family togetherness.

These kids eat what's good for them and talk knowingly of food groups and evil additives. Peek in their kitchens and you'll see oatmeal, Vitamin C, fresh fruit and whole-wheat bread. They use dental floss; they

exercise; they amaze me.

They are street-wise too, which is notable when one considers that they grew up in a small community where nobody's been mugged for a decade and most people still leave their back doors unlocked all the time. Now, in the big city, they can point out all the colourful panhandlers and bag ladies; they know where to eat cheaply and where to find free entertainment.

In short, these twigs who seemed inclined in childhood to sloth, filth and utter confusion are now taking us out for healthy breakfasts at unGodly hours, holding down jobs and decorating their digs with No Smoking signs.

Where did we go right?

I hope this will encourage young parents everywhere. Take heart, those of you who seem mired in a morass of broken toys, topless toothpaste tubes and peanut butter smeared door knobs. There is life after parenthood.

In no time, your little twigs will be in apartments of their own. They will ask you to leave your boots at the door and not to play the stereo too loudly. They are going to be fine, those little barbarians. You are the ones who will wind up feeling decadent. ("Would you mind filling up the ice cube trays after you use them, Mum?")

Twigs grow and tree's company--and very good company at that.

## Letters

### Surely something is wrong

Dear Editor,

I am writing regarding the Jan. 4, 1985, front page article in the Midland Free Press on Vera Tugwell and her recent staging of her own murder.

Surely there is something very terribly wrong with this whole scenario from the beginning to where it appears to stand now.

I am referring to her supposedly having given the sole rights to M and M films of Toronto to produce what she is quoted in the Midland Free Press article as being a light and easy story.

One considers the terrible anguish her family and friends and many others were put through by her actions, also the untold hours involving the law enforcement and other agencies of the two countries at a tremendous cost.

Surely society cannot condone in any way what has taken place nor what appears to be going to take place.

Sincerely,  
Bruce Tinney  
RR 1, Penetanguishene

### Fewer cases of impaired driving

Dear Editor:

Communities around Ontario, including Penetanguishene, report a significant decrease of drivers charged with impaired driving over this festive season.

A police crackdown on drinking drivers, with random spotchecks, combined with the threat of stiffer penalties, has certainly helped deter the drunk from getting behind the wheel of a motor vehicle.

With local media coverage on the issue of drinking and driving, it has had a profound effect this festive season to deter that individual from getting behind the wheel and trying to make it to

his destination. To those charged with impaired driving, there will be no empathy for you.

With the assistance of local taxi companies, along with buses, to chauffeur you back and forth to your parties, this has been well received and I would encourage more of this participation with local clubs in the future.

To the citizens of Penetanguishene, thank you for your co-operation and support in making this campaign a success.

Yours truly,  
R.W. Cummings,  
Chief of Police,  
Penetanguishene.

## Province-wide highlights of government

Next week, hundreds of municipalities across Ontario will join in celebrating Local Government Week, a week of activity focussing on the people, organizations and services that make up local government.

From the City of Pembroke to the Town of Kenora, municipalities of all sizes will be marking the week of Jan. 14-19 with special events.

Those events will range from an Appreciation Night planned in Stratford, to honour former mayors, through to a town logo contest organized in Red Rock.

Municipal councils will be working with school boards as well as hydro-electric and public utilities commissions, in an effort to increase public awareness of the important role played by local government in the province.

"Opportunity for involvement is the keynote of Local Government Week", notes Claude Bennett, Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "It will be a good chance for local

organizations to open their doors to residents, and thereby increase awareness and understanding of local government and also encourage participation in the many functions of local government."

This province-wide program is a direct response to numerous requests from individual municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

The most important message of Local Government Week is that an overwhelming number of municipalities across the province recognize the need for this program, and their enthusiastic response provides concrete evidence of this", Bennett said.

Involvement in Local Government Week is not limited to municipalities. Community service clubs, Chambers of Commerce and other groups and associations have all expressed support.

Many cable television stations have plans underway for special programming. Some are planning to air a

film about local government, produced by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Others are scheduling special guest appearances by members of municipal council, local government employees, trustees and commissioners.

Local Government Week will draw attention to the work done locally on behalf of citizens. It will highlight the contributions made by elected representatives and focus on many thousands of people who work in our communities -- police officers and firefighters; public health workers; people who work to ensure our water is clean and our streets remain safe and in good repair; teachers and library workers; as well as many others.

Local Government Week will also be a celebration that will give citizens and officials a chance to get to know each other better. Open houses, breakfast with the mayor, and tours are examples of this kind of activity.



## Midland Library News

Last week in this space we stated in error that library service in Midland was a bargain at 40 percent of municipal tax funds. Naturally, at 40 per cent, it is no bargain. However, at just over four per cent, which is the true figure, it is a bargain indeed.

The following is a list of new books available in the Midland Public Library as of Jan. 11.

Fiction - Children Of Lucifer by Pamela Hill, Nightcap by J.C.S. Smith, The Dearest And The Best by Leslie Thomas, Rules Of Engagement by Brian Freemantle, Still Blooms The Rose by Pamela Hill, Hit Them Where It Hurts by James Hadley Chase.

Non-fiction - The Great Castle Hotels Of Europe by Phil Philcox, Great Medical Mysteries by Richard Gordon, The Meryl Streep Story by Nick Smurthwaite, Mr. T., The Man With The Gold: An Autobiography by Mr. T., Tug Of War: The Canadian Victory That Opened Antwerp by W. Denis Whitaker, Foul Balls: Five Years In The American League by Alison Gordon.

## Seatbelt use has increased in Ontario since 1981

Driver seat belt usage in Ontario has increased 10 percent since 1981 and more than half the infants and toddlers are buckled into an approved car safety seat.

"While the improvement in restraint use by both adults and children is encouraging, I am still very concerned that a large number of vehicle occupants are subjecting themselves to unnecessary risks," Ontario Minister of Transportation and Communications James Snow said. "We have volumes of research to indicate that seat belts save lives and reduce the severity of injuries, yet some people still choose to ignore the facts."

"What is particularly baffling to me is that parents are willing to put their children in danger when child restraints have been estimated to reduce fatalities by as much as 90 percent when properly used."

The most recent restraint usage figures come from a survey conducted across the

province last summer by MTC crews. For comparison purposes, the same locations and mid-day time periods were used as in previous surveys dating back to 1975.

The researchers found driver lap and shoulder belt use ranged from 64 percent to 76 percent in different regions of the province, compared to a 45 to 68 percent range in 1981. Usage was highest among females and older drivers, but no difference was observed between rural and urban areas.

Child restraint use in general was up from 33 percent in the pre-legislation days of 1981 to 55 percent in 1984, with safety seats in use by two-thirds of the children travelling in their parents' cars.

"However, further observation revealed that a high proportion of those seats were not secured properly," Snow said. "Obviously, under those circumstances, they aren't doing

the job they're supposed to."

About half the harness straps were either not fastened at all or fastened too loosely to secure the child properly in the event of a collision. Approximately two-thirds of the toddler seats requiring tether straps were not bolted to the vehicle or were bolted inadequately to protect the child. Furthermore, almost 25 percent of the seats had been installed with the vehicle's lap belt not used or not placed according to the manufacturer's instructions.

"We will be using the information we have collected to study ways of encouraging adults to use child safety seats in a manner that will provide optimum safety for their children," Snow said. "We believe, if parents better understand the importance of properly restraining their children, they will be more than willing to make the extra effort."

The survey also indicated that eight percent of children under five are travelling on adults' laps--an important statistic considering one-third of the children in that age category killed in accidents between 1979 and 1983 were sitting on someone's lap before the impact. Studies have shown it is impossible for an adult to hold onto a child during a collision even at low speeds.

Since child restraint legislation was introduced in two stages during 1982 and 1983, the number of young children killed and injured in traffic accidents has dropped. In 1983, the last year for which complete data is available, 10 children under five died, and 1,269 were hurt, compared to 19 fatalities and 1,608 injuries in 1981.

A full report of the 1984 child restraint and seat belt survey will be available in February.