

TERRACE BAY
SCHREIBER

News

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Spelling out the three Rs

Imagine being dropped into a foreign country where the natives speak English, but write in their own language. Try to picture what it would be like getting around the town by reading the street signs; try to understand the difficulty you would have when reading a menu, or directions attached to a new piece of equipment you bought from a store that you were unable to pronounce because you could not understand what the name of it was.

Now come home to Schreiber, Terrace Bay or Pays Plat and realize that there are residents of this area who live those frustrating and anguishing lives on a daily basis, with real problems you could only imagine.

They have been referred to as the "functionally illiterate," and they have been termed "undereducated adults." Some may find either term inappropriate, distasteful or inaccurate, but they are labels which have become the tags for this surprisingly large segment of the Canadian population. And this area is no different than any other in our country.

There are many facets to this problem -- some might call it a tragedy -- and there are no clear answers. There is not even a clear definition of the term "illiteracy".

A few years ago Southam News Service published the results of a commissioned survey examining the issue of illiteracy in Canada entitled *Broken Words, why five million Canadians are illiterate*. The official definition of illiteracy, as mentioned in the study, is "less than eight completed years of schooling."

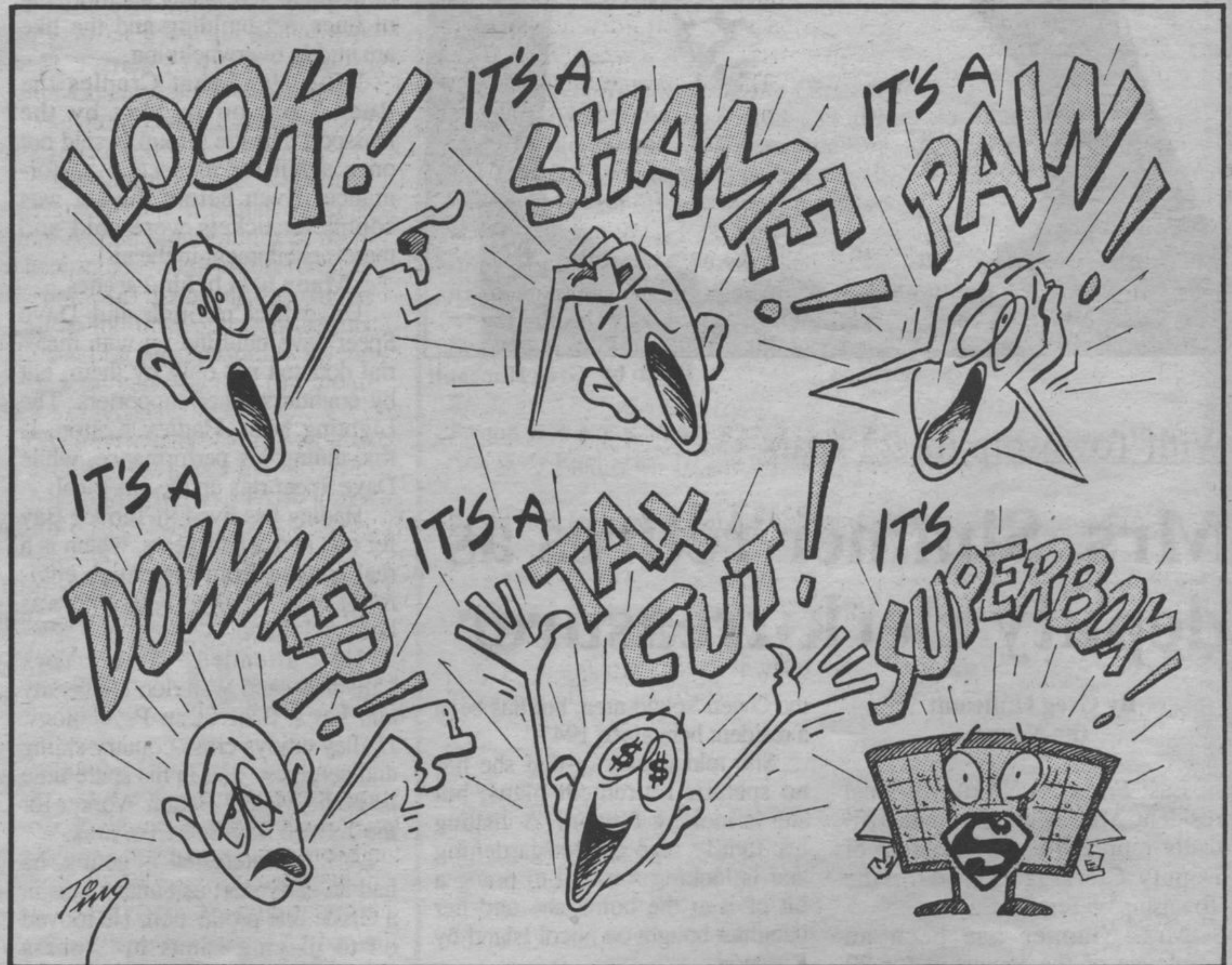
Within the context of that arbitrary definition, there are 3.75 million "official" adults who are functionally illiterate. However, the survey suggests up to 4.5 million residents have failed to reach a minimal level of functional literacy as established by a national panel representing a cross-section of Canadians.

Mrs. Pam McKeever, coordinator and supervisor of the area's literacy program Reading and Rising, prefers the term 'undereducated adults' over 'functional illiterates.'

Terminology aside, those who are aware of the situation agree that there is definitely a problem with the number of people living and working in our country who can't read, write or perform basic math necessary to live completely enriching lives. Next week, the *News* will examine the problem of illiteracy in the area, and will speak with those who are trying to do something positive about it. It is a problem which affects all of us, no matter where we are:

"I'd like to be able to read some of the books about asthma. My youngest has asthma and he gets real bad when the pulp mill is heavy. My husband got these books from the doctor but the words are too hard for me. I keep them on the shelf."

Susan, 26, Saint John, New Brunswick
Broken Words



Letters to the editor

Lower ranking officer wants say also

To the editor:

I am responding to the article last week about the sea cadets ("Sea Cadets corps teaching local teenagers many important skills, issue #11, March 16, 1988).

I am disappointed how Cashmore talked about only the officers, the Petty Officers and the Leading Cadets.

They should have explained what really makes the corps -- the able and ordinary cadets. They should have explained about the cadet duties and not only the good, but bad times also.

Many things they talked about had nothing to do with the corps.

The O/C and A/C may not have a very high rank yet, but soon the A/C will be L/C and O/C will be

A/C.

I have nothing against Cashmore or anyone else. It's just that if you asked an A/C or O/C what they thought of the article they would say: "When are the lower ranking cadets going to have a say in what goes on."

They also would like to know when they start being seen as part
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Super Tankers are going the way of the Dinosaur

One of the saddest experiences of childhood for me -- after figuring out the logistical unlikelihood of Santa's annual one-night trek -- was the realization that I would never get to see a live dinosaur.

I don't know exactly when it dawned on me that I would never feel the earth-trembling approach of a brontosaurus or the ungodly squawk of a lovesick tyrannosaurus rex, but somewhere in prepuberty I did a little elementary research and concluded I was born about a hundred and fifty million years too late.

It hurt. I had fantasies of watching those pea-brained behemoths flash their teeth and lash those mighty tails, pulverizing trees and telephone booths and perhaps even Grade Seven teachers brand new Studebaker.

I think it was the hugeness of dinosaurs that held my fascination. I was born in the middle of North America, so I'd never seen even an elephant or a whale, much less something like, well, the brachiosaurus for instance, which weighed in at around 80 tons and routinely carried its head at the height of a four-storey building.

Massiveness always fascinated me. I remember the first time I saw the *SS Federal Monarch*. I was a 16-year old kid, fresh from the southern Ontario heartland. I'd signed on to work as a deck cadet on an oil tanker running from Halifax to Venezuela. I'd made it to Halifax all right and I'd found my way down to the docks. Now all I had to do was find my ship.

I expected nothing special. After all I'd seen some pretty fair-sized vessels in my time. Yachts, sailboats....I'd even seen a few long skinny lakers chugging up the Great Lakes to Thunder Bay.

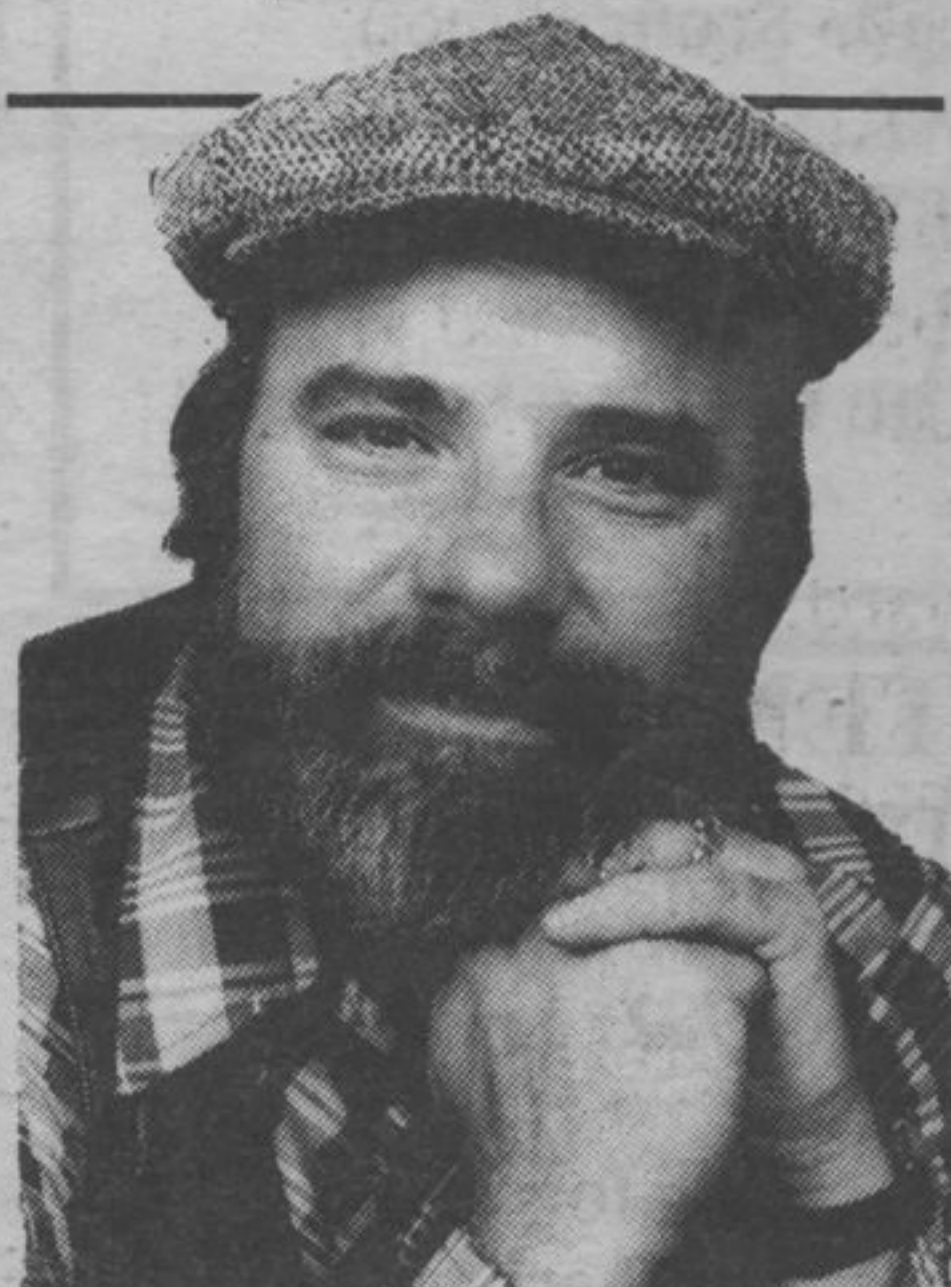
I was no stranger to big boats. I came around the corner of a customs shed and...

There she was.

The *SS Federal Monarch*. Seven hundred and ten feet, one and five-eighths inches long, 80 feet across the beam, 24,000 tons empty and the biggest damned thing I had ever seen in my life.

The *SS Federal Monarch* was

a supertanker in its day -- there was only one ship in the world



Arthur Black

that could carry more cargo.

To a kid who'd never been on anything bigger than the Toronto Island ferry it was mindbending. I remember writing home to my folks, bragging about "my ship". "Too wide to get through the St.

Lawrence Seaway locks" I crowed, "Even the propeller weighs 29 tons."

My first job was painting (and painting and painting) the ships' lifeboats -- which themselves were bigger than most of the boats I'd sailed in.

Well, it's been a long time since I painted a lifeboat, or even set eyes on a supertanker come to that, but a piece in recent *Maclean's Magazine* brought my Monarchical memories flooding back.

"The Sinking Supertanker" was the headline of the piece. It's all about how supertankers, once the wonder of commercial shipping, have become marine white elephants almost overnight.

The tankers got too big -- so bulky and unwieldy that most ports couldn't accommodate them. That, coupled with the a cataclysmic drop in world demand for crude oil, transformed the world's supertankers into useless, dangerous, money-sucking liabilities.

So they are being dismantled. Turned to scrap. Welding torches and wrecking hammers are working around the clock at in Japanese and Taiwanese shipyards. The once glorious super-

tankers are being turned into such inglorious commodities as boiler plate and concrete reinforcing rods.

And these ships heading for extinction are even more awesome than my old ship, the *Federal Monarch*. The *Burma Endeavour* has five and a half acres of decks. The crew on the *Seawise Giant* used motorbikes to travel between the bow and the stern.

But the *Federal Monarch* still qualifies as a supertanker, even if she's only half as long as the biggest ones around today. I don't know if she's still ploughing through the ocean somewhere or if she's gone to the knacker's yard to be reincarnated as boilerplate or pig iron riding some flatcar in the Far East.

What's more I don't want to know. I prefer to remember the *Federal Monarch* as she was when such ships were majestic and vital, not obsolete and useless.

And I can always console myself that, even if I never got to see a dinosaur, I once got to work on one.