

Markham author's book may become major film

MARKHAM — Roderick Stewart's biography of Norman Bethune soon may become a major motion picture.

Mr. Stewart, of Walkerton Drive, Markham, told the Tribune that movie impresario Otto Preminger has picked up the option on his 1973 book "Bethune", and that Ring Lardner Jr. has been tapped to adapt the book to the screen.

The story of Bethune, a hero to 900,000,000 Chinese for his medical role in 1938-39 during China's war with Japan, would cost on the order of \$5-\$6 million, according to Mr. Stewart.

Screenwriter Lardner is best known for his work on the movie "M.A.S.H." Mr. Stewart said he was told he would serve as an "advisor" in the writing of the screenplay.

Preminger had Bethune in mind as a film subject for five years, but had been unable to raise money for the project, partly due to the fact that Bethune was a communist the last three years of his life, Mr. Stewart said.

He added that the deal is not yet "100 per cent", and that he has an agent negotiating the final arrangements.

Mr. Stewart said he is actually more pleased with a deal recently reached with a "first class" Tokyo publisher to have the book translated into Japanese.

The biography was written by Mr. Stewart after four years of research on the life of the controversial Canadian physician.

Mr. Stewart, now a teacher at Birchmount Collegiate in Scarborough, had first decided on the project after screening the National Film Board treatment of Bethune's life for a history class in 1969. He toured England, France, Spain, and China "on the trail of an objective evaluation of the man", as he described it.

The result was a heavily-documented, concisely-written story of Bethune, who Mr. Stewart says "will emerge as the world's best-known Canadian."

Speaking about the reaction to the biography, Mr. Stewart said that "both the right and the left are suspicious. The left, because they know I'm not a Marxist, and the right because any tribute to a leftist is irritating."

Mr. Stewart himself is no stranger to political conflict, having served as a Markham councillor from 1966-68. His 38-day tour of China, in 1972, he said, did not affect his political views, "but my understanding of China has changed."

"I have seen a remarkable society in

China when compared with the sloth and laziness in our school system, and the society that's crumbling," said Mr. Stewart.

The book "Bethune", he said has been a "fair" seller, with 10,000 copies of the book sold across Canada. Almost more important is a shorter biographical sketch of Bethune he wrote that is being distributed to Canadian schools.

Recognition of Bethune increased when in 1972 the Canadian government declared him a person of "national historic significance." Mr. Stewart worked full-time for the federal government last year gathering further information that would be used for remaking Bethune's childhood home in Gravenhurst into a museum.

He returned to all of Bethune's old haunts around the world, and even revisited China last year. "Every place (in China) Bethune trod on became a historic site," Mr. Stewart said.

He and his wife travelled for five hours over rugged terrain to reach a remote village of 1,000 and there found "a huge museum" to Bethune, he said.

Mr. Stewart's office in the basement of his Markham home is itself a tribute to Bethune. Framed on the walls are famous photographs of the man and of the book jacket of Mr. Stewart's biography.

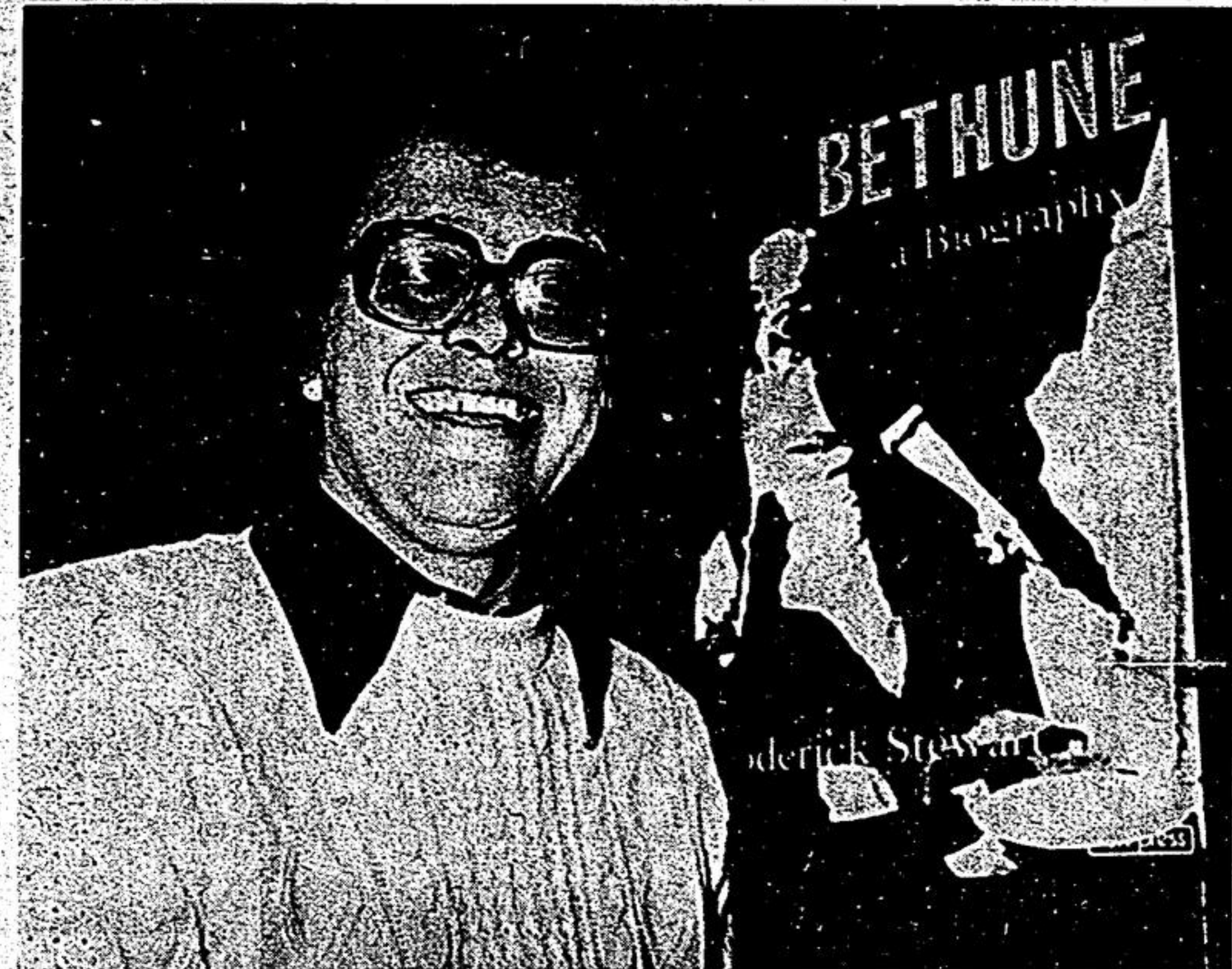
Bethune, Mr. Stewart summarizes, "had an incredible desire to do good, and was a man very hard to live with."

Two previous biographies of the man written by communists, portray Bethune "virtually as a saint." But the Bethune that he discovered, said Mr. Stewart, was "contradictory and many-faceted."

His biography makes it clear that Bethune was a communist, "but he was a medical man, involved in saving lives, not in throwing bombs," said Mr. Stewart.

Perhaps the major lesson to be learned from Bethune's life was "being yourself". Bethune would have made a very poor politician because he insisted on being true to himself, he said.

In today's society, on the other hand, "I see deceit creeping in as we become twisted in our search for values," Mr. Stewart concluded.



Roderick Stewart of Markham stands beside a poster for his biography of Dr. Norman Bethune a Canadian who is a folk hero in Communist China. He is presently negotiating with film-maker Otto Preminger for the movie rights to the book. —Ted Wilcox

Stirring book of renegade doctor

By TED WILCOX

"Bethune was a fascinating, obnoxious, attractive man, with highly erratic ambitions and personal oddities that offended many people." So says a summary on the dust jacket to the book "Bethune", first published by New Press in 1973.

"He also meant, for millions of people whom he had never known, inspiration, healing, education, amusement, and finally, a heroic example."

Subject of the biography by Markham's Roderick Stewart is Norman Bethune, a maverick Canadian medical man who ended up behind the lines aiding the Chinese communists in the war against the Japanese in 1938-39.

Bethune was the sort of person it was hard to be neutral about. He tended to be either admired or disliked by those who knew him.

His paradoxical character — an egotistical man driven to help the disadvantaged — is carefully described and documented in Mr. Stewart's book, which last November was issued in paperback by the Paperjacks division of General Publishing, Toronto.

When it came to his practice of medicine, Bethune was something of a renegade, running ahead of his time and using techniques that some branded irresponsible and reckless.

In his personal life as well, Bethune somehow didn't fit in. He mixed more easily with artists and writers than with his professional colleagues, and even in his manner of dress was often outlandish.

Raised the son of a Presbyterian minister, Bethune soon went his own way as a young adult. He perused "Fame, Fortune and Wealth," in the medical field, as he put it, until he was halted in the headlong endeavor by a bout with tuberculosis.

After spending a period of years being treated for the disease, Bethune, whose two marriages (to the same woman) ended in divorce, changed his perspective on life.

He searched for some ideal or cause that would give meaning to his restless existence. Finally, he labored to have socialized medicine tested in the province of Quebec, only to discover other medical practitioners to be completely opposed to the plan.

Angered, Bethune decided to turn his energies to the Spanish Civil War, where he organized a system for transporting blood transfusions to wounded soldiers.

After the period in Spain, Bethune set his sail for an adventure that few others, even of his own political persuasion, could appreciate. He went to China, and with Mao's army, finally found a niche where he was appreciated in a whole-hearted way.

The lack of medical supplies necessitated the kind of innovation that Bethune excelled in, but, just as important, in that situation, Bethune's communistic political views were shared rather than opposed.

It was Bethune's political beliefs which kept him, and still keep him, from being admired by very many Canadians. It is inconceivable to most of his countrymen how anyone could give up prominent and lucrative positions in medicine to serve international Marxism.

Mr. Stewart's book at least makes it possible to understand how a man like Bethune could do such a thing. The Canada of the 1930's, and the Canada of today to a lesser

extent, tends to "reject people who climb above and stand out," Mr. Stewart remarked.

To "stand out in a crowd," you have to make waves, be controversial, take stands" and that, said Mr. Stewart, "is not altogether the Canadian way."

There was a sameness, a conformity, a blase acceptance of the status quo, that Bethune simply couldn't stand in this country.

However, as to whether Bethune chose a worthy cause in which to vent his frustrations is another question. While through his natural talents and temperament Bethune made an impact on history, some may question if that makes him a "great man." He labored strenuously for the welfare of the sick, but still retained a self-conceit and arrogance that many found disgusting.

In short, does greatness mean only "making waves," or should it have to do with inward qualities as well?

Those same kinds of questions probably should be applied to most of the men we consider worthy of esteem, whatever their political persuasion.

Great race challenge in only a 16-foot canoe

By DON BERNARD

STOUFFVILLE — Gary T. Smith, R. R. 2, Stouffville, enjoys a challenge.

But the challenge of paddling a 16-foot canoe from Toronto to Montreal in time for the opening of the Olympic Games is the greatest one he's ever faced.

Mr. Smith and his partner Barry McMahon will attempt to paddle the 450 miles in eight days as part of the "Great Canadian Race."

Local firefighters are involved in the project. The duo is accepting pledges with money to go to the Muscular Dystrophy foundation. The "Stouffville" Fire Department will have pledge cards available for those people wishing to pledge money.

According to Mr. Smith, no money will be accepted unless they finish the trip.

The idea for the race came from Damian Lee a former professional skier, and will include all sorts of unusual modes to travel from Toronto to Montreal. Air, sea and

land modes are all included.

Mr. McMahon, who is the chairman of the MD committee for the North York Fire Department, was attending a meeting for Muscular Dystrophy. A representative of the "Great Canadian Race" was there.

It was there that the idea of paddling a canoe in the race first was formulated.

The two men have been paddling together for the past 10 years, but the 450 miles in the treacherous conditions of Lake Ontario is by far their largest undertaking.

The canoe is a standard 16-foot fiberglass one with a keel being added to help combat the high winds to be encountered on the lake. They will start out June 19 from Ontario Place and hope to arrive in Montreal in time for the opening of the games.

He said that the men will paddle about 12-14 hours per day and under ideal conditions can cover about 70 miles in that time.

Gary Smith said that

they have been training for some time now and the two men will try out their canoe in Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario, before the big race.

They presently have about \$3,000 in pledges, most of it raised through the North York Fire Department. He said that no money will be accepted, "unless we finish."

He vowed that they would finish the race if they must carry it in two pieces along the beach to Montreal.

"It was just sort of a lark, until we realized what we were up against," Mr. Smith told The Tribune in an interview. "We've been planning it for two months."

He said that 70 per cent of the time, they will be in sight of shore, but there will be some long stretches of open water as they will have to cross the mouths of a number of large bays.

Swells of 12 feet are not uncommon on Lake Ontario and sudden changes in the weather are another threat.

Although the canoe is

standard, the two men are experimenting with different kinds of paddles. Ones with wider blades are being tested to provide more speed.

If the water temperatures does not rise above 45 degrees Fahrenheit, the two men will wear wet suits. Handball gloves will also provide good grip on the paddles, despite the wet conditions.

The two men have

"There is quite an element of danger," Mr. Smith said. "They say it can't be done."

Most people feel they will either lose the canoe or be unable to withstand the fatigue. The two men, who enjoy challenging each other vow that they will finish the course.

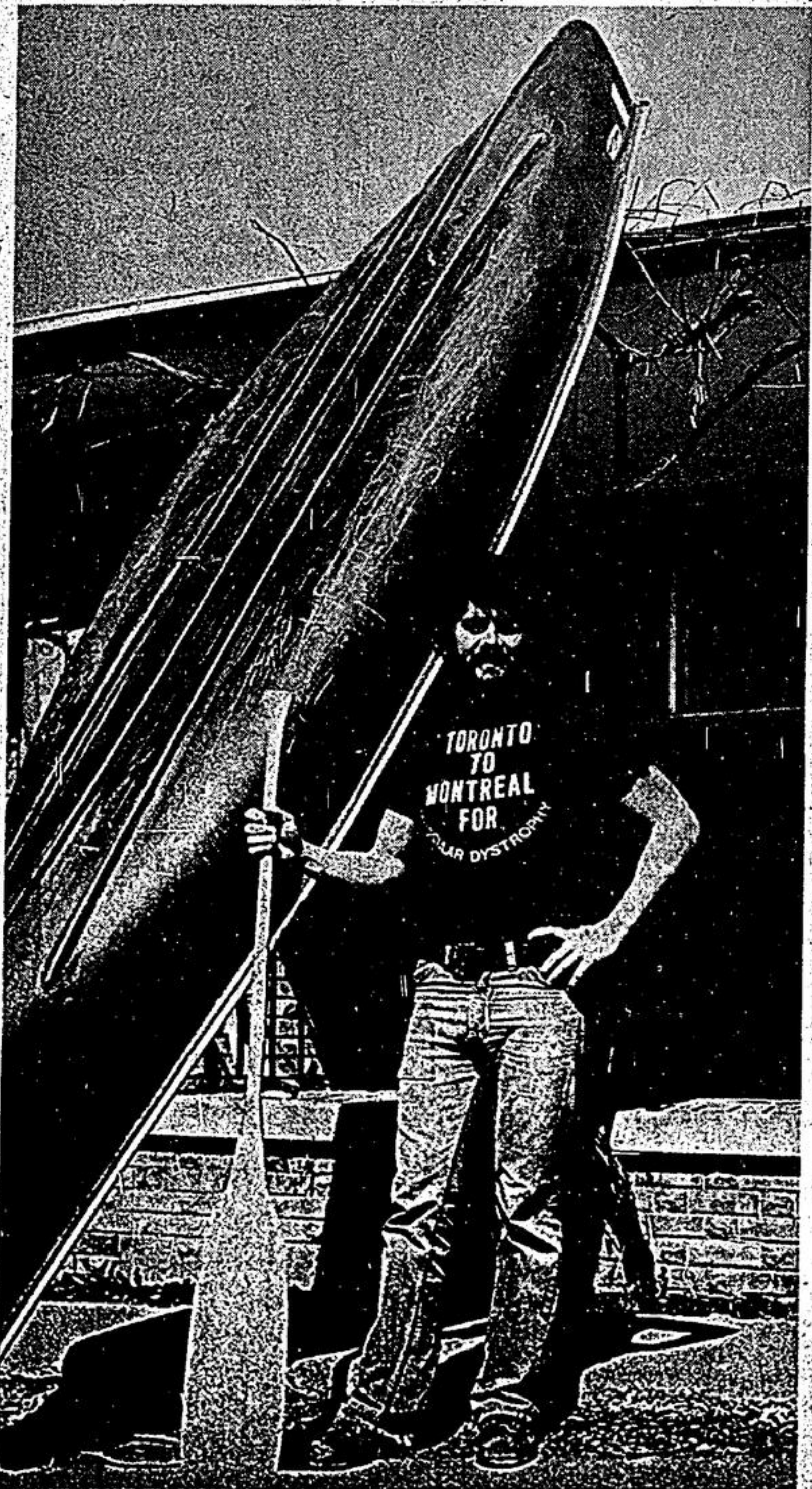
"We're going to get there if it takes two months," he stated.

He presently

operates his own cartage company — Avenue Parcels Delivery Service.

But his primary interest is the upcoming race and physical preparations. He has lost 20 pounds and is training regularly for the race.

Those wishing to pledge money for the duo should contact a member of the "Stouffville" Fire Department for a pledge card.



Gary T. Smith is embarking on a real-life adventure when he sets out with his partner Barry McMahon to paddle a 16-foot canoe from Toronto to Montreal. Money received in pledges will go to Muscular Dystrophy. —Don Bernard

Big move to new quarters for YCBE staff members

YORK COUNTY — Friday's moving day for the 80 employees at the York County Board of Education Church St. headquarters.

The working day ends at 3 p.m. Friday when the movers move in.

The entire operation is expected to last the weekend with the board getting back to normal operation Monday in the new Wellington St. building shared with the Town of Aurora.

But trustees who don't venture to the aging Church St. building in the next few days haven't seen the last of the old board room.

Desks used by trustees are due to be refinished prior to installation in the new facility. Since the project will take two weeks, the April 12 board session will be held in the old building to permit a two-week gap between sessions in the old and new board rooms.



These members of Take off Pounds Sensibly were honored Monday night at the Christ Church Anglican for their successful efforts at keeping their weight down. Left to right in front are: Mildred Barrett, queen for the night Marie Nesbitt, Donna Woolford and Gladys Hutchison. In back: Carol Smythe, Sally Boyd and Pat Appleton. Missing were: Ruby Williams, Irene Conklin and Gayle Dunford.