

Musician trades stage for classroom

By BLAINE KANEKO
 Stan Szymkow, an accomplished professional musician is playing a different tune these days, as teacher at St. Mark's Catholic School.

The days of sporadic concert bookings and infrequent pay are over, but it hasn't kept the former Welland resident from performing, and if indeed all the world is a stage, Mr. Szymkow has found a captivated audience of 28 Grade-eight students. It's a challenge and a pleasure for the first-year teacher.

"I'm responsible for these student's development. As a teacher, I am their mentor, friend, and psychologist for a good part of the year," says Mr. Szymkow. "A teacher spends more time with the students than their parents do. This is my family, the biggest family I have ever had."

And as one big family, Mr. Szymkow isn't hesitant to discuss any topic with his students, anything from career choices, to life's biological changes, to the death of a close relative. And despite his 19-years of performing professionally, Mr. Szymkow admits it is difficult to hide anything from his students.

"If you're having a bad day the students know about it. They can tell. But if you can show them enthusiasm for a subject and tell the students you are not perfect and

don't pretend to be perfect, you can gain their respect."

The 32-year-old Szymkow, hadn't really thought of teaching until two-years ago. As a professional saxophone player, performing everything from jazz to the polka, he toured with a band all through southern Ontario. To supplement his modest income, Mr. Szymkow taught music on the side. It may have been that impetus in teaching which led him to enroll in the graduate teachers' program at Western University.

And while he has only been a

teacher with the York Region Roman Catholic Separate School Board for less than one year, it has not been without incident Mr. Szymkow said, the most memorable incident occurred after teaching a math lesson then to his dismay, having one of his students tell him he made a mistake and having to teach the lesson over.

And although Stan Szymkow no longer performs for the applause of the crowd, he says his biggest reward after a lesson these days is to hear the words, "Sir, I understand now."

From stage to classroom

Stan Szymkow, a Grade 8 teacher at St. Mark's Catholic School shows his performing style on the saxophone. The Welland native used to perform professionally, but gave up the life of a musician to teach full time.

-Blaine Kaneko

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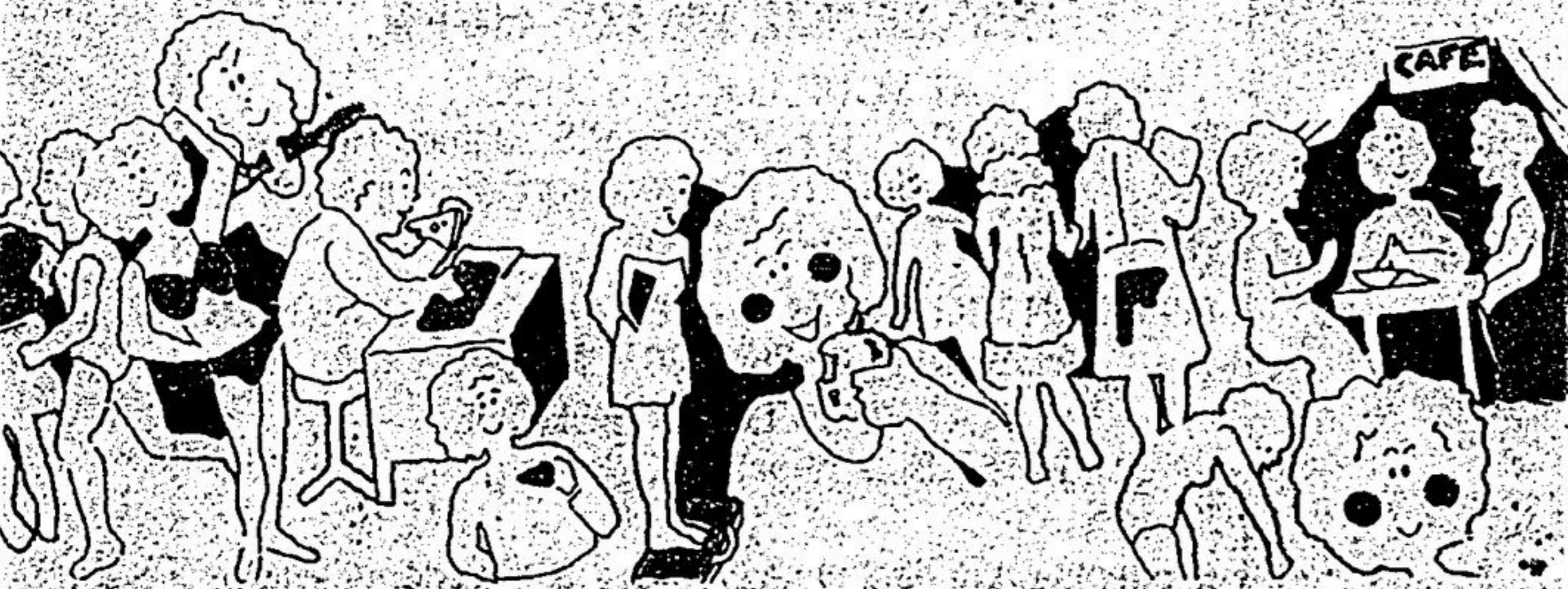
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put your figure to the test

- 1. Physically I feel**
 - a like a feather in the breeze
 - b like a flea in a fat
 - c like a slug in a rug
- 2. In a bikini I look like**
 - a one of Charlie's Angels
 - b Mama Bravo
 - c two of Charlie's Angels
- 3. At lunch hour I usually**
 - a jog around the desk to avoid Big Mac, the office heavy
 - b spill pizza on my movie magazine
 - c sample new restaurants with the girls
- 4. After work I usually**
 - a go for coffee
 - b go for dinner
 - c go for broke
- 5. Since leaving school I have**
 - a lost a pound or two
 - b lost my willpower
 - c lost all hope



your score: Allow 18 for each "a", 12 for each "b", 15 for each "c". With 90 you need a little smoothing; 75-90 you need a lot. 60-75? Drop that milkshake and come right down.

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