

Keeping friendships in 'constant repair'

"A man" said Samuel Johnson, "Should keep his friendships in constant repair."

Well, it had been occurring to me that I was allowing several of my friendships to fall into a state of unbalanced give and take as of late, with me doing all the taking.

A onceover of my rented house revealed that it was my friends who were responsible for so many of the comforts I have come to take for granted. Borrowed television set, couch and chair, not to mention the very cutlery with which I consume my daily bread.

Bedspreeds, table cloths, stereo—even my barbecue tongs. All borrowed, begged or—well lets just say they've been lent in good faith. Even the electric typewriter I use to hack out these two-bit columns was scrounged from



FROM WHERE I LIVE
Bruce Stapley

the basement of a friend's business office.

So what better way to show my appreciation to the friends who have contributed so heavily to my very sustenance than to have them over and entertain them. I thought about having a party.

But then I got to thinking that parties just don't provide the opportunity for intimate one on one exchanges, and besides, I have found parties to be a dud when it comes to generating good column ideas.

So, taking heed of a line from George Bernard Shaw that states, "There is no love sincerer than the love of food." I decided to set aside several consecutive nights for dinner parties.

But what to serve them? Cooking for me has become, for the most part, a tactic for basic survival. My standard fare of grilled cheese sandwiches, frying pan french fries and fish sticks would surely be greeted with little more than a forced smile.

So I went about tapping the recipe files of some of the accomplished chefs of Stouffville. I figured if everything else I had was borrowed, why break with tradition when it comes to something as important as feeding my friends.

I ended up with Loretta's famous rib recipe, Jim's rather impressive lamb curry dish,

Lana's chicken delight, and I even threw in Cathy's can't-fail Yorkshire pudding. I even got so adventuresome as to attempt a semi-exotic dessert!

Well, the net result is that I now have renewed respect for those housewives (and house husbands) who must address themselves daily to the task of preparing dinner for a small group.

I mean the work never ends! Cutting, peeling, thawing, chopping, boiling, saute-ing, draining, mixing. And the mess! I must have gone through five gallons of liquid detergent.

By the end of the week, I was exhausted. So was my freezer. All my reserves were wiped out—the 79 cents a pound of chicken legs, the bargain spare ribs, the 99 cents mushrooms—everything.

But it was well worth it. I feel as though the weight of the world has

been removed from my shoulders. No more will I have to endure the icy tones of friends suggesting that seven months is a rather long "moving in" period, and that they are starting to wonder if they'll ever be invited over to my "new place."

And I have succeeded in adding to my life skills. I can now make gravy, mix up a bernaise sauce (out of a package), and I think I've even mastered the art of table setting (knives on the right, I think).

I'm no longer afraid to attempt an international appetizer (guacamole dip), and I discovered that candied carrots aren't something you buy in a sweets shop.

But most important, a good time was had by all. For in the words of Charles Dickens, it is always important that we "Fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship: and pass the rosy wine."

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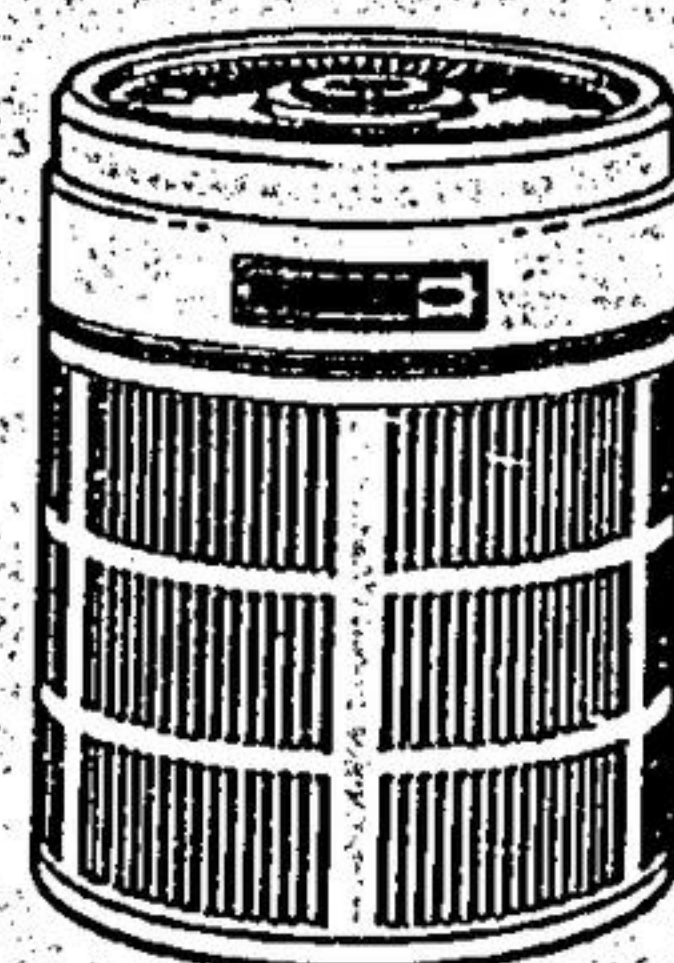
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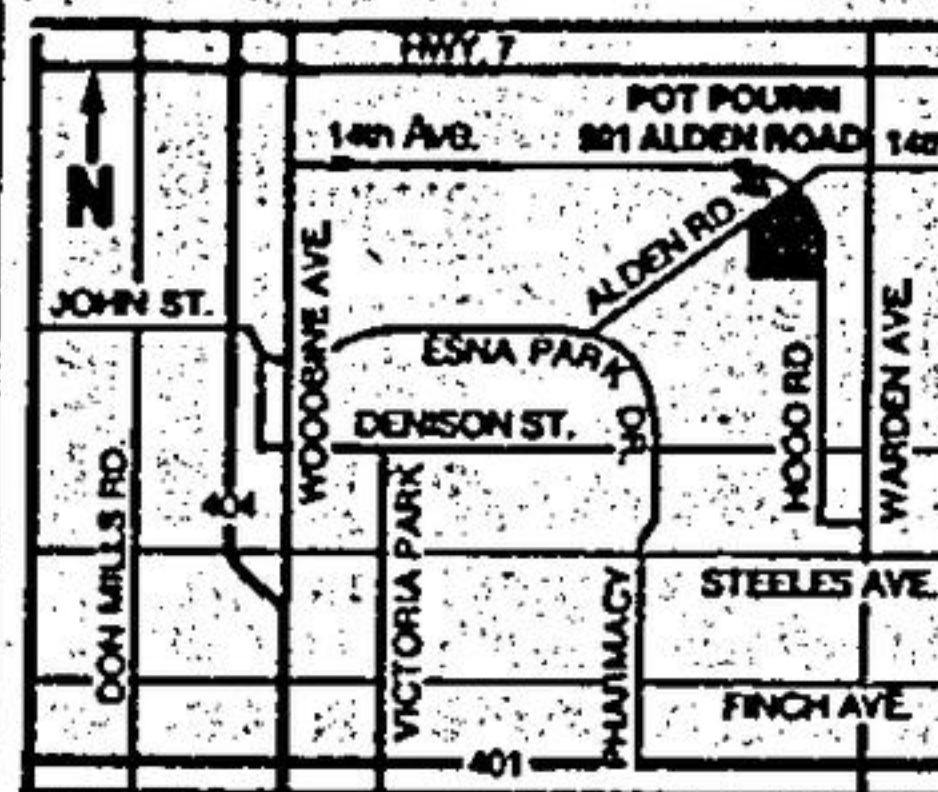
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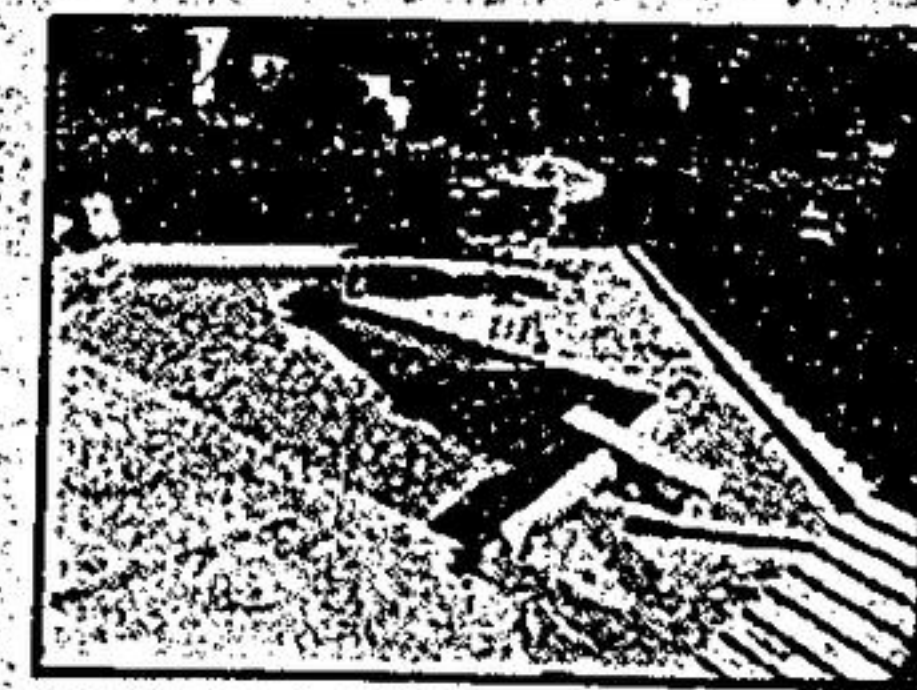
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