

No more good intentions

"The road to hell", my father once told me, "is paved with good intentions."



FROM WHERE I LIVE
Bruce Stapley

While it wouldn't hurt any of us to take some time after the Easter weekend to reflect upon matters pertaining to our own individual eternity, I personally am waging what seems to be a losing battle against the endless distractions which are forever sabotaging my best intentions.

hucksters, or people knocking on doors to push political or religious causes.

It's not hard for me to kill an hour on a Tuesday morning when I'm supposed to be busy pounding out stories, pine furniture, or both.

It's very easy to justify such extended coffee breaks, at the time, by reminding yourself that as a self-employed individual, you simply keep working until the work is done.

In many cases, interviews for newspaper articles must be done at night, when the 9 to fivers are comfortably watching the Leafs on Eleven, or whatever other comedies they prefer.

Many are the evenings I find myself worrying that the clack-clack of my electric typewriter might be serving as a less than soothing accompaniment to sleep for the others in the house. But deadlines are deadlines, and blank space just doesn't excite editors all that much.

Consequently, my week consists of a 168-hour package, out of which I must somehow manage to steal 45-55 hours a week for the purposes of my gainful employment.

So while I greet each morning with the most sincere intention to apply nose to grindstone with unswerving zeal, there will inevitably appear an irresistible distraction by way of a meaningful encounter with a person or people I just can't turn away.

Now, if, like the late Paul Rimstead, I could use each and every social encounter for a column idea, then it would become a fruitful way of passing a good part of each day.

But, by now, my friends have

warned me of the dangers of exposing their well concealed wrinkles and quirks via the print medium.

When I protest that they are too sensitive, paranoid or whatever, they just mention how unfortunate it is when lawyers are required to come between friendships.

It would appear, then, that, having run out of suitable excuses, the time has come for a more disciplined approach to the daily routine.

This may require the installation of a time clock beside my desk, with the same rigid requirements that are imposed upon salaried employees.

It wouldn't hurt for me to have a sign made for the front door stating that I'll no longer be allowing callers to come in without an appointment between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. A timer could be installed on my phone limiting non-essential calls to 5 minutes, after which time the line will go dead.



Properly placed Bluebird nesting boxes have saved the birds from extinction in many parts of Ontario.

—Art Briggs Jude

Blue birds return in early spring

BY ART BRIGGS-JUDE

Though icy winds and blustery snows persist through much of March, it is the month when the bluebirds return to our part of Ontario.

Traditionally one of our earliest spring migrants, their arrival can be expected any time after the third week in this unsettled month.

Actually, while it's nice to see them arrive on St. Patrick's Day, it is to the bird's own benefit if they linger a little further south till the weather adjusts to a more spring-like trend.

Ironically it was this impatience to head north that, over the years, has caused some noticeable periodic declines in bluebird numbers.

Before the introduction of the

cavity-nesting house sparrow and starling, and the widespread use of toxic sprays, the bluebirds were always able to recover in numbers from these intermittent spring disasters.

These factors, however, when coupled with the loss of habitat due to an escalating urban spread, caused the permanent disappearance of the bird the settlers called the blue robin.

The so-called 'clean farming' practices that removed any dead limbs and standing stubs and the replacing of wooden posts with those of steel also effectively eliminated many potential bluebird nesting sites.

Fortunately there is a way to help bring this symbol of happiness back to many of its former haunts.

Taking the cue from a Quincy, Illinois doctor who, in 1923, built the first known bluebird nest-box and started the bluebird trail concept, many people across Canada and the United States have done the same.

Roy Ivor, the dean of Ontario naturalists, placed 22 of these nesting units on rural property north of Port Credit in 1949 and a few years later this writer began a similar project in the Niagara Peninsula. Over 30 years and thousands of boxes later, bluebirds can still be found nesting in the fruit belt.

By 1961 Brandon's John Lane had organized the Manitoba Junior Birders, a teenage group that eventually extended over 11 townships near the Hockley Valley. Hazel Bird, 1986 F.O.N. award winner for her bluebird trail work begun in 1968 near Rice Lake, still maintains her 200 plus bluebird trail today.

Dennis Barry got going in 1973 with 600 units north and east of Oshawa, while Fred Watts began a 400 box trail north of Markham in 1975. Coral Young of Harrington, Quebec also hit the bluebird trail in 1978.

In later years many other have started helping bluebirds in this area, namely Carson Thompson of the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority and Bob Braley from Perth with his Pike Lake Trail.

While today our personal involvement with this sky-backed thrush is a mere 100 nest boxes on our "Bluebird Acres" farm near Westport, our promotion of this highly beneficial bird through seminars, lectures and workshops has taken us all across Ontario and in fact Canada.

The 'Blue Bells' program, wherein nest-boxes are placed in the ideal habitat of country churchyards has been a resounding success. Over 1,200 information kits have gone out coast to coast and to many places in the U.S.

There's no doubt that the bluebirds are responding well to the hand of man that initially turned against it. Yet as I travel and read about the various projects and the instructions given on nest-box design and erection, I feel many are not learning from the experience of those who have gone before.

Why for example, would anyone still build a top opening nest-box when cleanouts and lethal parasite control are so much easier with a front opening?

Why are many nest-boxes placed at the low five-foot level, where house cats can spring with one leap and pin the hapless birds inside?

Why do people continue to face the boxes into the roadways instead of towards the fields, where few flying fatalities would occur? Think about it.

The bluebirds need help, but let's not kill them with misguided kindness.

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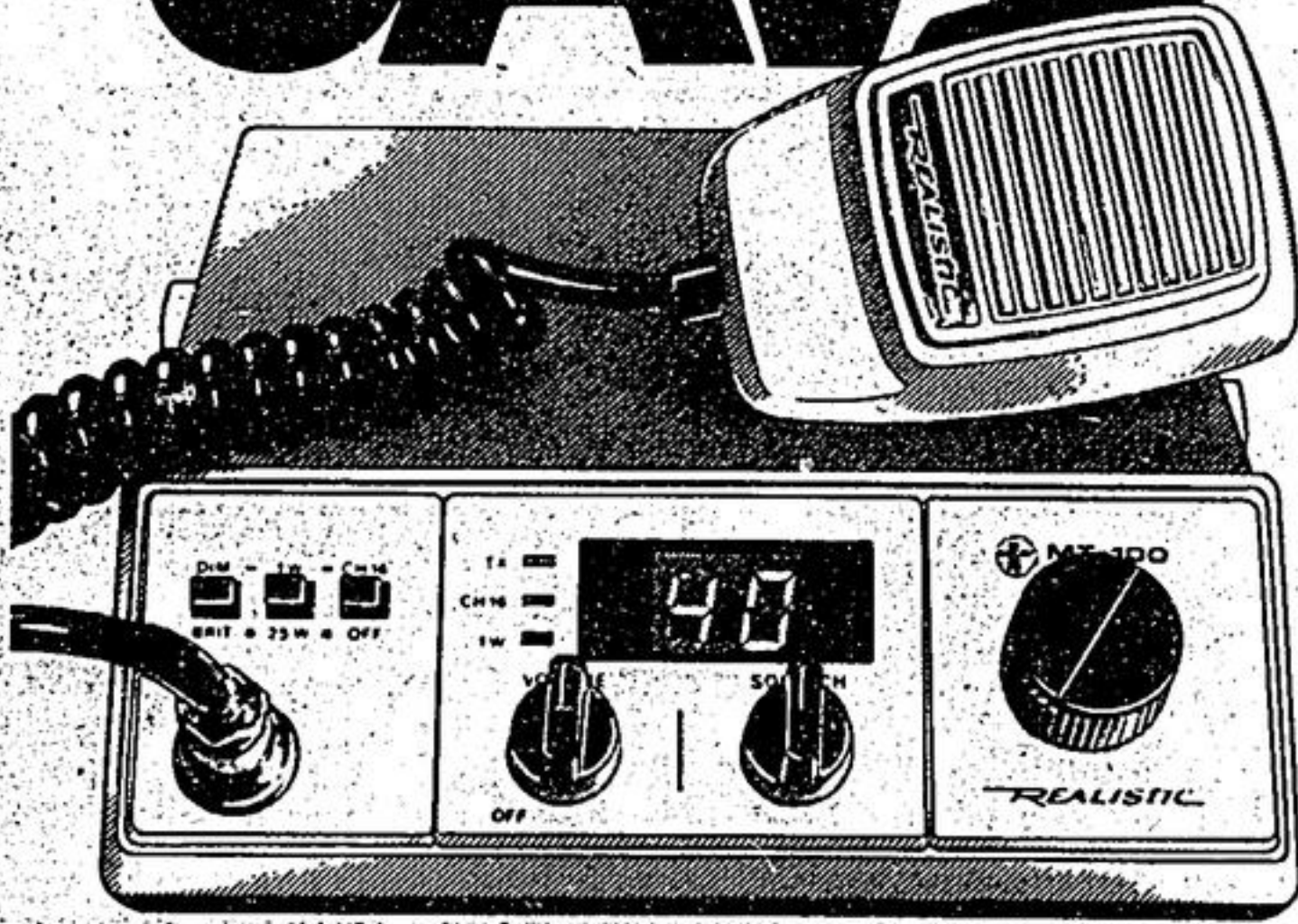
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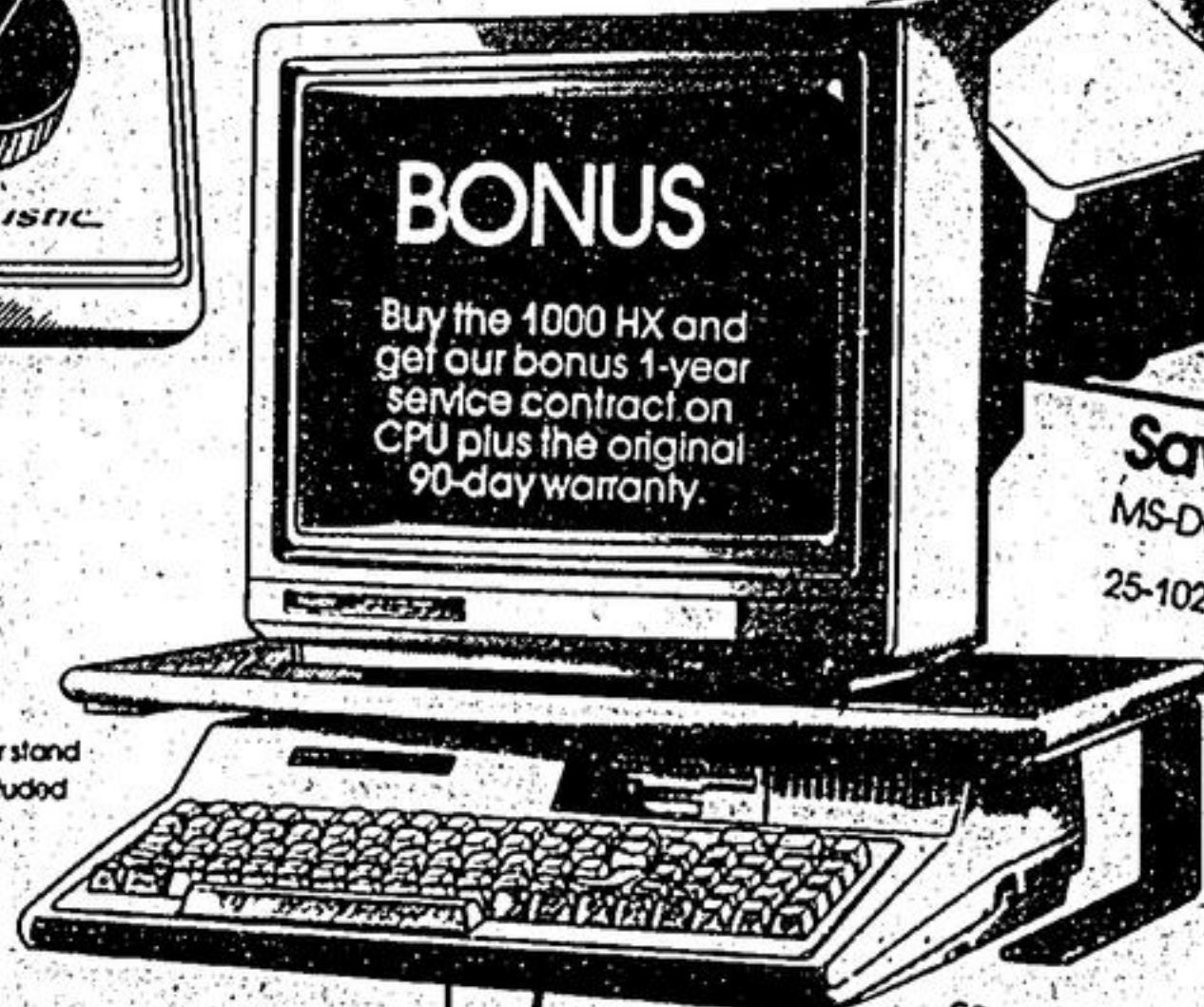
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