

# Fears can be overdone

As the mother of two elementary school children, my concerns are the same as those of any other parent: Safety, happiness and well-being are high on my list of priorities.

Our children know they shouldn't ride with or accept gifts from strangers. They know it's better to go to school in pairs or groups. And they know they must call home if they go to a friend's house after school.

On the other hand, we don't want them to think that every stranger who smiles and says hello is a closet maniac, or that a hug from their favorite teacher or a friend's mother should be treated with paranoid suspicion. Yet society's well-meaning attempts to protect them may be creating just such attitudes.

I recently attended a seminar on child abuse at Stouffville Dist. Secondary School, presented by the York Region Abuse Prevention program.

The program, aimed at the Grade 9 students, covered both



**KATE'S CORNER**  
Kate Gilderdale

physical and mental child abuse (a child being defined as someone under 16 years of age).

Much of the presentation was informative and useful, covering everything from the trauma of a victim's court appearance to information on self-defence, and ways to avoid abusive situations.

Some elements of it, however, I found unduly alarmist and didactic. Abuse is everywhere, the students were told in York Region, in Stouffville and among those attending the school.

Widely differing figures were quoted for those under 21 who had suffered abuse; ranging from one in 10 overall, to one in two girls and one in three boys.

Presumably, the figures depended on the study and its definition of abuse. Unfortunately, the definitions used in those studies were not outlined at the presentation.

Skits, covering everything from abusive behavior by teachers to date rape, were performed by Grade 12 students. In answer to one student's question, a social worker said that false accusations by young people were rare and were usually the result of other problems in the accuser's life.

Nothing was said about the devastating effects of a false accusation on an innocent adult. Yet in a recent case in England, scores of parents were falsely accused of abuse and had their children removed from their care; the result of over-zealous attempts on the part of local officials to curb abuse.

I left the seminar feeling profoundly depressed. For me, one message predominated: Abuse is everywhere and no one is

immune. Of course we want to stop abuse; but do we want to create a generation of paranoid youth, who recoil in fear every time someone puts a friendly hand on their shoulder?

I feel strongly that as parents, we should be involved in the kind of information our children are obtaining on such sensitive topics. Some studies have defined undressing in the sight of one's children as sexual abuse. Such a definition would naturally make 'abuse' figures high, and would also make a mockery of any serious analysis.

By all means let's educate our children about the real dangers of life, but let's also keep a sense of balance.

If the powers that be in our education system are going to tackle such controversial issues within the school curriculum, they have an obligation to consult parents and invite them to participate.

# Scouting well-remembered

By ART BRIGGS-JUDE

Back before the advent of television, when my generation was growing up, a lot of the kids joined the Boy Scout movement.

We'd start off as Cubs and when about 12 years old 'go up,' as they called it, to become Scouts. We never quite got involved with the senior branch called Rover Scouts because the war came along.

Yet as anyone who has spent time in the scout organization will agree, these years produced some of the happiest times of our lives.

With all the energy of youth to burn, what better place to consume this vigor than in the outdoors. And while the majority of juveniles today have options and opportunities we only dreamed about, I think, by and large, they may be missing out on something too.

It must be extremely difficult for a present day Scout leader,

for example, to keep the majority in a group of boys interested in hiking, camping, and wood lore.

The competition of organized sport, modern science, T.V., and a host of other activities certainly have a much greater appeal.

I'm not knocking these pursuits, just trying to show the involvement in such things often removes much of the opportunity for experiencing the outdoors in a person's growing up years.

Yet the scout movement is not alone in this regard, as a check on the junior membership of any fish and game club or naturalist association will show.

Unless kids have parents or someone else interested in taking them out and doing such things together, they will never taste some of these simple pleasures of life.

These young people will never feel the tranquility and closeness of Nature unless they have camped on a secluded lake.

They won't recognize the night sounds of the woodlands unless bivouaced there. These same future citizens may never get to know the true personalities of their acquaintances unless they share some backwoods time together.

In our modern life's evolution from the treadmill to the escalator, many of today's kids will all too often lose the individual participation in outdoor activities their predecessors had.

Even country children with more noticeable outdoor opportunities than their urban counterparts may be losing some of the basics of Nature to the speed of travel and the shrinking world.

I like to believe that the trials, tribulations, and unexpected events young people are exposed to during such away-from-civilization trips are important parts of their educational curriculum.

Later in life when faced with a similar set of circumstances,

they will have the necessary experience to react favourably.

You won't, for instance, hear any detrimental remarks about so-called 'Boy Sprouts,' when a former Scout leads his lost hunting comrades out of the woods or pulls a drowning child from a swollen creek.

Fortunately, the Scout movement is still active and available in many areas today. They may have modernized the program, added a couple of new groups, and put in a few new wrinkles, but the basics are still there.

Comradeship, help and respect for others, woodlore and a brotherhood in the outdoors. If you are a lad reading these lines, go for it.

And if you're an adult wanting to help the kids in your neighborhood, go for it too. There is no better time and no greater opportunity. I know because someone helped me become a Scout when I was young.

# Bird count on Boxing Day

Dear Jim:

One of the more exciting events for Naturalists is the Annual Christmas Bird Count held each year on a chosen day between Dec. 16 and Jan. 3.

Fifteen hundred counts are taken each year in North America. For many years, Pickering has chosen Boxing Day for its count.

The area covered is from the Uxbridge townline in the north to Lake Ontario in the south, which is divided into 12 sections, each covered by a small group of birders - about 40 people in all. Others help by counting birds

that come to their feeders during that day.

It was well after dark before all those who took part arrived at our home to compile their results, while enjoying hot soup, cheese & crackers, and sharing experiences of the day.

A highlight for one group was seeing a coyote crossing a hay field. They were delighted when the coyote flushed out 150 snow buntings.

"Had it not been for the coyote, the snow buntings, (the only ones seen that day,) would have gone unnoticed," reported the leaders of that group.

Those who helped me in the northeast section were pleased to add house finches to our list at Claremont. To the east, on the south side of the Uxbridge townline, 14 evening grosbeaks were the only flock seen that day.

South of Balsam we searched in vain for a pair of wintering bluebirds. They were seen just before and again since our count day.

No crossbills, redpolls or pinesisks, which were so numerous last year were observed this year. Canada geese were up in numbers, ducks were down. House finches showed a large

increase from none in 1984, 21 in 1986, and 161 this year.

The final tally for the day was 67 species, 14,863 individual birds, which was about average, over a 10-year period in Pickering.

All the results and information received, including names of participants involved in the Christmas Bird Count in North America, will be published in a special issue of the journal, "American Birds."

Sincerely,

Edgerton Pegg,  
Claremont

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