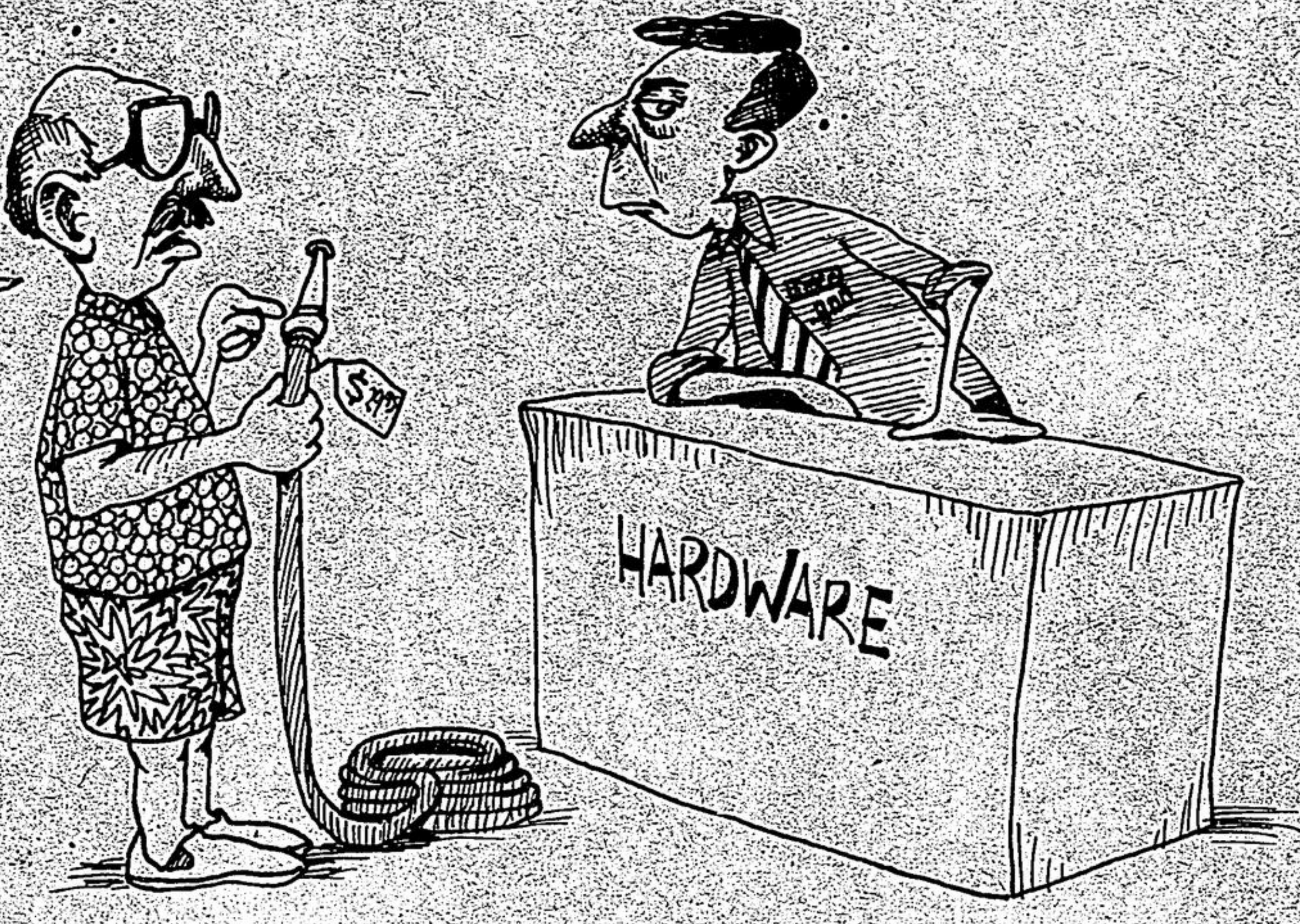


Comment Page

SINCE I CAN ONLY USE THIS HALF THE TIME, WOULD YOU CONSIDER GIVING IT TO ME FOR HALF PRICE?



Do you know where your children are?

If there is a bright side to the tragedy of the death of the seven-month-old infant in Windsor last week, it should be that now, perhaps, parents will take heed and watch over their children with an increased awareness.

The infant wound up in the Detroit river, and now the child's parents are the subject of heavy scrutiny by the public and police.

And yet despite the media exposure this case has received, Tribune staff witnessed a woman leave her infant unattended in the back seat of her car while she ran into a neighborhood store to do some fast shopping.

This is no longer a town where we can leave our doors unlocked when we go out.

And it is sheer irresponsibility and laziness to leave children unattended - regardless of their age.

Few of us would leave our cars unlocked and running for any length of time, and yet some would leave their car attended by a baby.

Children are increasingly neglected in our society, but to leave a child unattended, for any reason, and for any length of time, is an abomination, and is utterly inexcusable.

Hark back to summer camps

Every morning on my drive into our Stouffville office, I invariably am stalled behind a string of school buses.

And just as the sun is sure to rise each day, some snotty-nosed kid in the back of the bus directly in front of me leans over the seat and proceeds to make lewd gestures and cross-eyed faces at me.

These children, in my view, are of the worst sort.

They know full well that I can't get out of my car, board the bus and pummel them to within an inch of their life. And they know they are getting a big old laugh from their fellow snotty-nosed passengers at my expense.

For these are 'campers', trundling off each summer morning to area retreats where they will make life a living Hades for counsellors until



a minute with mair
andrew mair

they are relinquished into the care of their weary parents that evening.

I dislike summer campers, and not just because they mock me from behind the confines of their bus windows.

I dislike them because at one time, I too was a summer camper. But only once.

I hated the camping scene. From bonfires to late-night Desenex fights, summer camp was to my 10-year-old mind, the equivalent of a Nazi work farm, where brutal guards kept you on a demanding

and rigorous schedule, and where each day you were forced into cramped and damp barracks with an assortment of sickly and insane inmates.

I did not do the daily summer camp routine, where at least you can go home each evening. I was shipped off to a two-week camp, and on an island, to boot.

From the moment I arrived, I knew it was not going to be the "rollicking good fun" the brochure had promised my parents.

For the most part, I spent my camping days planning my escape. I wrote a letter to my mother telling her to pick me up on the mainland at an allotted time on an allotted day.

As the day drew near, I formulated my escape plan. When all the campers went to bed, I would sneak out, swipe one of the rickety old sailboats and drift silently across the channel to safety.

The plan worked, all but for one small detail. I managed to smuggle aboard the small dinghy that would lead me to salvation all right, but I failed to take into account that there is no wind on most lakes at 9:30 p.m. on a moonlit summer's eve.

I got maybe 10 feet from the dock, and was promptly becalmed.

The counsellors heard the splashing as I tried to paddle the mile or so across the channel, and came out and got me.

It's probably a good thing, since my mother hadn't even received my letter at that point, and it would have been a long walk home

After that episode, the counsellors kept a pretty close watch over me. They figured I'd make a break at any time.

But they underestimated a young enterprising mind bent on liberation.

One day on a nature hike, the counsellor advised us to beware a large patch of fauna he called "poison ivy". Thinking that if I couldn't walk, swim, boat or fly out of that pine-clustered hell, I just might be able to get carried out.

So I fell to the back of the pack, and upon our return, I made sure the other campers were out of sight. I promptly sat in the field of poison ivy and began picking the red-stemmed plants.

By the time I got back to the cabin, I had started to itch. Picking an entire grove of poisonous plants would certainly get me airlifted to the comforts of a luxurious hospital, I thought.

But to my dismay, I had underestimated the healing powers of calamine lotion.

Lathered up like Marilyn Bell before a lake swim, I was relegated back to my cabin to lie motionless on my bunk for two days.

It was during my rehabilitation that I founded my dislike for campers.

A burly, freckled-face kid named Bucky Buchanan was the terror of our cabin, and the other kids revered him for his antics.

He was the one who would steal the board out from under your mattress on the top bunk. He was the one who would put earthworms in your pillow case. He was the one who pushed you off the dock. And he would be the one who physically dragged you from your bed at 6 a.m. for a "polar bear dip".

He was a moron, and likely went on to a life of crime or politics, if you can detect a distinction.

And during my bout with poison ivy, he would sneak up to my bunk and tickle me wherever I was visibly rashed.

One day after my recovery, he came up behind me on the archery range.

While I prepared to let fly an arrow from my bow, he hiked down my drawers.

The arrow flew, all right, landing beside a centre fielder on the neighboring ball diamond.

That evening, at my wit's end, I leapt from my bunk, and confronted Bucky as he prepared for another round of bullying.

In a mad flurry, I bopped him squarely in the nose, sending a torrent of blood down his ruddy face.

A fight ensued, and the counsellor soon broke it up.

To my horror, Bucky was sent home for his actions. I begged to share in his punishment, but the counsellors were on to me by then.

The last two days of my camping experience, it rained as though it would never stop.

The time dragged, but finally, the big ferry pulled up to the dock to take us all to the mainland.

In my excitement at finally being paroled, I dropped my brother's brand new fishing rod in the water. I had borrowed it in naive expectation of a good time.

I watched as the rod spiralled to the bottom of the lake and thought that it was a fitting end to what were perhaps the worst two weeks of my life, discounting the year I spent in Sudbury one weekend.

And now as I see the smirking, goofy faces of the children heading off to camp each day, I think of Bucky.

I think of his bleeding nose smeared all over his face, and his eyes big as pie plates in shock and pain.

And I smirk right back.

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