STOUFFVILLE

Opinion

Road safety warnings heeded

Our View

It has become like clockwork.

Every year, and on every long weekend, the police issue statements about road and water safety.

This past weekend, it seems the message on highway safety may have finally gotten through.

Or perhaps the advance publicity on the police's get-tough approach with aggressive drivers made people more cautious. Or maybe we just got lucky.

Unfortunately, despite the good news on the highways there was tragedy on the water.

More people dead and injured. More needless suffering for the families of the victims.

The July long weekend took a terrbile toll on the highways.

Many expected the same result after this long weekend on the roads, but it was not anywhere near as bad.

Ironically, this was the first long weekend since the photo radar program was scrapped.

Police are now making a greater effort to stop the destructive behaviour which causes such havoc on our roads.

Here are some of the areas that must be concentrated on:

• Drinking and driving. Despite our best efforts, people still, especially in in the hazy glow of having an extra day off work on a long weekend, feel it is a licence to drink to excess and then get behind the steering wheel.

• Aggressive driving. We still take unnecessary chances by tailgating, passing too close and speeding. It is our assertion that people in a hurry to get back from the cottage are among the most deadly creatures on the planet.

• Unsafe loads. campers piled high with luggage, boats, bikes and spare tires weaving along the highway are the terror of many drivers. Getting behind such a load can cause accidents as people attempt to pass in high risk situations.

• Government cuts to road upgrades are certainly not helping the situation as this province has numerous dangerous roads, many of them unfortunately in the north.

For the Labour Day Weekend, let's hope the warnings on water safety are heeded.

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Don't chute! I'm a coward!

OFF THE RECORD
joan ransberry

I'm a coward. I scare easily. I always have.

My first fraidy cat memory goes back 40 years.

While most old people can easily tell how they raised their fist to the heavens when Hurricane Hazel struck, I can't.

Courage couldn't find me on that fateful night—I was hiding under the bed. While the rest of the family kept the farm from blowing away, I didn't come out until Hazel was long gone. I knew what I was doing.

Two weeks ago, when I heard the order, "Assume whitewater position," I asked, "What are you doing?"

I didn't get an answer. There was no time. I was being introduced to McCoy's Chute, the first of six major rapids on the Ottawa River.

I'm within spitting distance of my 50th birthday. While the worst fear in life is to outlive your money, living with regret rates a close second.

I may be a chicken, but I refuse to wake up on the other side of 50 and say, "I wish I'd done...."

I've had whitewater rafting on my agenda for 25 years. I just never got around to it. And, the years slipped by.

When reporter Bruce Stapley told me about a local business that organizes whitewater rafting trips, I knew it was Now or Never time.

Since my man and I were getting ready for a two-week, 5,000-kilometre trip on a Gold Wing motorcycle, I suggested we kick off the vacation with a rafting weekend. The man agreed. The man's about to salute 55 and there are a few undone things to do. Whitewater rafting being one.

Rick Vendrig and his wife Janet own First Descent, a business offering summer splash adventures. Rick's a 38-year old teacher with a background in alpine skiing, kayaking, canoeing and rafting. When storms hit, Rick doesn't hide under the bed.

Although Rick would eat the bark from the trees, he's got plenty of charm. He took wonderful care of us. All Joan and Gerry had to do to was show up.

Rick booked us into River Run Paddling, a farm-resort nestled on the banks of the Ottawa River in the middle of whitewater country. Marg, the owner, loves what she does and does what she loves. 'Tis a smart way to live.

Rick arranged a sleeping cabin and excellent meals. Before we embarked on the five-hour river run, we were given a safety briefing.

Before boarding the six-man Sotar, we put on life-jackets and helmets. We were then introduced to our guide, Lee. He's British, quick witted and cute as a button. If the truth was known, Lee eats nails.

Rick would ride shotgun along side our raft. He's a hardboader. That's a kayaker who descends the rapids first and watches for the safety of the raft.

Yes, siree...we'd muster the strength and the courage to fight the rapids, including one named Butcher Knife.

Rick didn't know I have little strength and no courage. To boot, I'm not fond of knives.

The first rapid, McCoy's Chute is billed as the thrill of a lifetime. That's an understatement. Moments after we were told to assume "whitewater position," we hit McCoy. McCoy hit back. All six of us, including Lee, were flung out of the raft.

Since I was the only coward on board, McCoy and his sidekick God picked on me. While the others were thrown clear of harm's way, I landed underneath the upside down raft.

I took stock of the situation: I was in the river, trapped, alone and afraid. Yet, I was alive. I did inventory. I had an air pocket so I could breathe. I was wearing the life jacket and a helmet and I'm a good swimmer.

But the big but is: You can't swim too far with a raft on your head.

It was Do or Die time. I dove down, came out from under the raft, only to learn that McCoy and God hadn't finished with me.

I came up in the middle of the rapid. I was eyeball to eyeball with McCoy. White water is water, with a temper. McCoy was bull stomping mad. I decided to quit. I took one last breath. I'd let McCoy and God win.

I'd forgotten two things: Rick and Lee. They were neither dead nor asleep at the switch. The pair might chow down on bark and nails but they're highly trained professionals. Rick and Lee know about rescue. They rescued me.

The raft was righted. We rafters climbed back in.

One rapid down and five to go.

Rick, Lee and Gerry had a nine-second meeting. They decided to get rid of me. I would transfer to a nearby 12-man raft. The larger rafts don't tip.

I climbed aboard the giant-sized raft and off we went. I wouldn't have missed the next five rapids for all the world. It was a bonafide thrill — I squealed. I giggled. I hooted. I hollered. I was a kid again. As a bonus, I rode the rest of the river fearless.

Within a half hour of shore, I threw caution to the wind and jumped overboard. I body surfed the rest of the way. It was grand.

I don't have to rely on my memory to relive the ride of a lifetime. My rafting, complete with Joan meets McCoy ordeal, was video tapped. If you want to see first-class whitewater rafting by the very best, feel free to borrow the video.

P.S.

My new motto is: If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space.

Perils of pet pill-popping

KATE'S CORNER
kate allen

Displaying his usual impeccable sense of timing, our feline companion, Qmoknl, was struck down with a dread disease just days after Granny Pat arrived from across the pond.

I knew something was seriously amiss on Tuesday, when he failed to tune up for the early morning chorus announcing his hunger. This ritual has no bearing on whether or not there is sustenance in his dish, it's more of a Pavlovian thing: it's dawn, therefore I'm fed.

Eventually, he lumbered half-heartedly up the stairs, wheezing like a grampus (whatever that is*), his fur matted and dull, his eyes running, his demeanor distinctly dismal. Since there was the odd dollar or two still remaining on the Visa card, if not in the bank, I whisked him without further ado to the vet's, clutching the precious plastic in my trembling hand.

Qmoknl, it turned out, was suffering from a particularly unpleasant and virulent respiratory disorder.

Visions of diminishing dollar signs danced in my head.

The good news was, he was not at death's door and therefore didn't have to be admitted.

The bad, nay, the horrendous news was, he needed antibiotics. To be administered, oh horrors! orally. "It is really quite simple," said the vet soothingly, actually believing what he said, "as I will demonstrate."

Our vet, performing the miracle of popping a pill deftly into my pitiful pet, made it look like a piece of cake. And, he added, to try and cheer me up, you can do it with two people; one to hold him, the other to slide the pill to the back of the throat in one nifty move.

Reality bites and so did the cat, Mr. Wallethead clutching his writhing body and your clumsy columnist futilely attempting to put the pill (fig. A) into the clenched jaw (fig. B) without connecting with two pawsful of sharp and painful claws (fig. C).

On the third attempt, I inserted it between his teeth, where it remained for several seconds until I shifted my grip minutely and it hurtled out of his mouth and attached itself damply to my leg.

The next time, I was sure it had been ejected again but, since there was absolutely no sign of it, we could only conclude that Qmoknl had, against his better judgement, swallowed it. Later that day, I was giving him a friendly cuddle when there was a small but distinct sound, as of a pill hitting the floor.

Qmoknl, it seemed, had been wearing the pill somewhere about his long-haired torso. We are now about to embark on round four of this gruelling ritual, with another 16 pills still to go. And the healthier he gets, the less easy he is to con into submission.

Alas, the parting words of the vet will continue to haunt me until the final pill is popped.

"It is extremely important to make sure he takes all the antibiotics, or he could get sick again."

* For those of you with inquiring minds, I can now tell you that the Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines the grampus thus: "1. Any of various blowing, spouting, blunt-nosed cetaceans of the family Delphinidae. 2. A person given to puffing and blowing."