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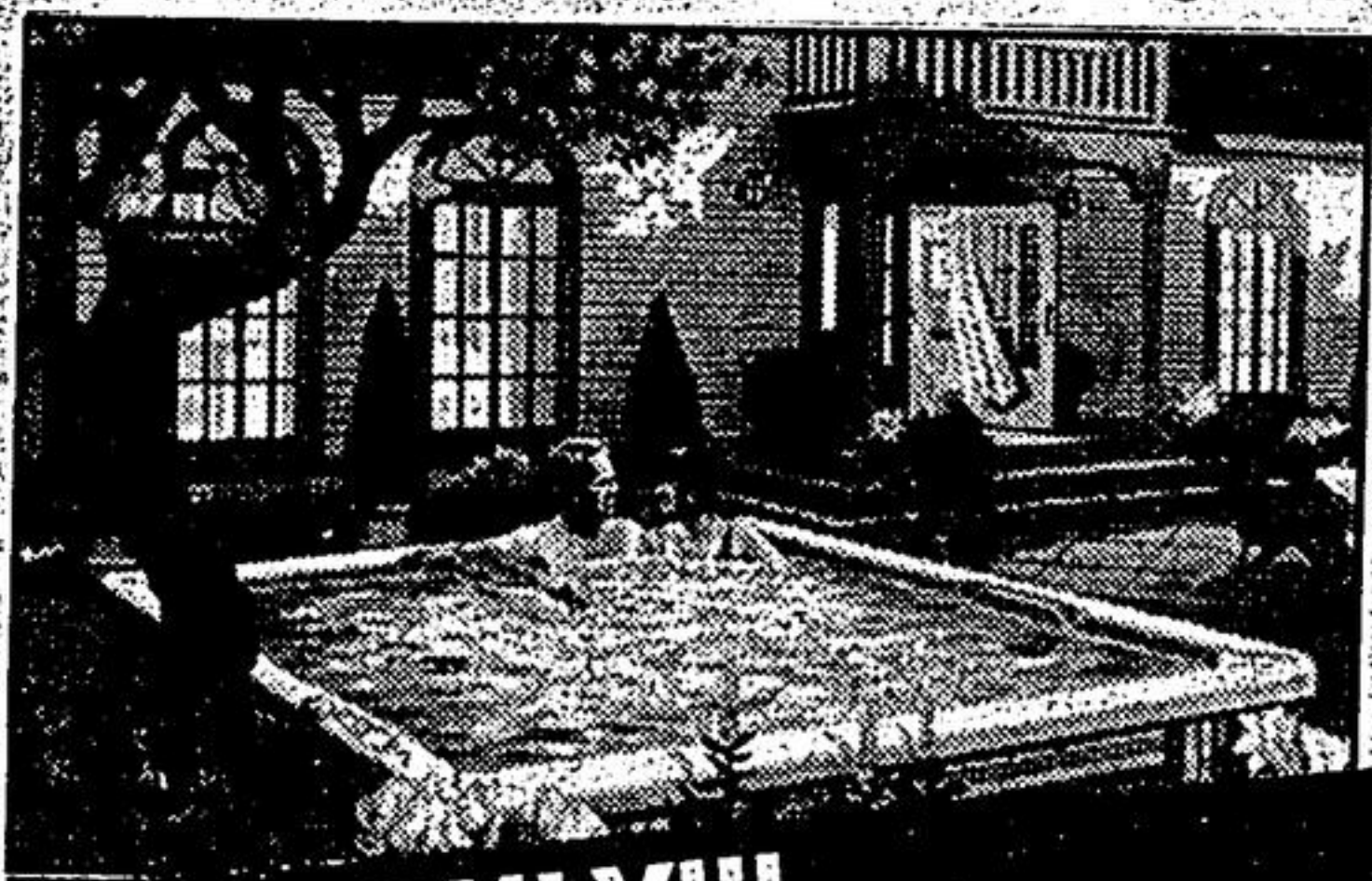
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American humor missing



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

Mention the word "Americans" at a dull gathering and the conversational flood-gates will suddenly spring open. Love 'em or hate 'em, there's no getting around the fact the people who populate the land of Lincoln, smart bombs and privatized medicine have a persona all their own.

So it was with amusement that I watched the squabble emerge surrounding a recent *Tribune* editorial on Prime Minister Chretien's unabridged Bill Clinton-bashing gossip spree at an economic summit. It seems an American expatriate living in these parts took exception to her countrymen being labeled rude, arrogant blowhards who are insulated from the rest of the world. As I see it, the essential ingredient that was conspicuously absent from both the editorial and the terse response to it was humor.

We're all flawed, so we should learn to laugh at our own blemishes, as well as those of our neighbors.

As with many generalizations of countries, races and creeds, there is sometimes a kernel of evidence to back them up. Canadians are often cautious, we Scots can be dour skinflints, and many Baptists wouldn't be caught dead on the dance floor with a drink in their hands!

But when it comes to the Americans, there is an army of Canadian comics whose living is derived solely on the foibles of these folks.

Let's face it. Being an enormous, self-sufficient nation, there is a tendency to sit back and let the world come to you.

Who could forget the magazine cartoon after last summer's Olympic Games in Atlanta where the American commentator offers his audience a news flash confirming there are countries other than the USA competing at the games after all. Or the inanity of the response of one of the American runners after his relay team was left in the dust of Donovan Bailey and the Canadian foursome in the 4x100 event. "Nobody beat us," bellowed this dunder-head. "We came second?"

This Hour Has 22 Minutes, the hilarious

CBC political satire, regularly tweaks the nose of the giant below us. In one episode, real Washington D.C. residents were asked about a supposed upcoming summit involving their president and the Canadian prime minister. With each person questioned, the name of our PM was switched with that of a Canadian from a different field of endeavor. "Do you think it should be called the Clinton-Gzowski summit, or the Gzowski-Clinton summit," the bogus reporter would ask. Respondent after respondent failed to pick up on the ruse.

On another occasion, the show's shameless Mary Walsh spewed forth a wicked diatribe aimed at Jesse Helms, while a camera zeroed in on the somewhat corpulent congressman through a donut hole. Walsh suggested the Canada-bashing Helms' "arse should be as narrow as your mind!"

Then there was the pitcher from the southern U.S. who was traded to the Blue Jays back in the late 1970s. "Do they speak American up there?" he inquired during his first interview. Of course, this is not to suggest that to be American is to be a chauvinistic, self-absorbed cad.

Anyone who has travelled throughout the USA has no doubt experienced the type of hospitality and attentive service the country is known for. The nation abounds with people who are sensitive to the needs of others and open-minded to the reality that is the rest of the world.

It's just that there's more fun to be had picking on them than in acknowledging their more admirable traits.

As for Chretien and the debacle involving the live microphone, Clinton himself assured the two of them will sort it out the same way issues are settled all over Canada and the U.S. — over a game of golf.

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