

An attack in a town that should know better

If I had been in Steve McMann's loafers that day in 1998, I'm not sure I would have been as restrained.

Five springs ago, Whitchurch-Stouffville was a powder keg under a microscope.

Courtney Trempe, 8, was killed by a large dog while playing with friends in the backyard of an east-end Stouffville home. Everyone, it seemed, knew the happy-go-lucky kid with the perpetual smile. The small town went into shock.

There were more TV cameras in Stouffville than at the Super Bowl. Grief counsellors camped out at Courtney's school. Memorials were planned. People cried in public.

Parents gave their kids an extra hug as they sent them out to school that spring. And everyone suddenly looked at dogs with a cautious eye.

It's hard to fathom, but two days after Courtney's death, on the other side of Whitchurch-Stouffville, another little girl was attacked by a large dog. Word of this attack came out Thursday at a hearing of the town's vicious dog committee. The owner of the German shepherd was unsuccessfully appealing a muzzle order on the dog.

Steve McMann is a doctor at Markham Stouffville Hospital and the father of the attack victim. Fortunately, his daughter was *only* dragged by the hair by the dog.

It was Markham Stouffville where doctors tried to save the life of Courtney. A waiting room for families in the emergency ward is named in her memory.

Given the mood of the community, I doubt if I'd have gone through the legal hoops of police reports and bureaucratic



**JIM MASON
OFF THE TOP**

committee meetings, if one of my kids was attacked by a dog in the wake of Courtney Trempe's death. I'm not sure what my course of action would have been. I don't want to think about it, and I once owned and loved a German shepherd.

A teenager living in the same estate subdivision, east of Vandorf near Aurora Road and Warden Avenue, wasn't as lucky as the McManns' daughter. He tried to rescue his family's poodle from the same large dog and came away with multiple bites.

Almost five years after Courtney's death and the lengthy inquest that followed, are we better off?

This town does have a bylaw and a committee to deal with dogs that attack. That's good.

But people will continue to raise and keep large dogs with a history of anti-social behaviour in residential neighbourhoods. Not so good.

What do we need? A dog prison? The death sentence for dogs that attack?

The owner of the dog that attacked the McMann girl said following Thursday's hearing he would consider having his dog put down.

It's about time, in a town that's too familiar with dogs behaving badly.

BARENAKED AND MISSING: "Where are the barenaked ladies, Mason?" someone asked.

Thinking they were looking for directions to a strip club and knowing that Whitchurch-Stouffville has no such entertainment palaces, I was prepared to tell the inquisitors they were out of luck.

But since we were at the Stouffville Arena and it was a mom and her 10-year-old daughter asking, things didn't add up.

"You know, the band?" the girl said. "They were supposed to play in the charity hockey game."

"Oh, right, right, right, right, right," said I, retrieving my brain from the gutter.

They were correct: Ed Robertson and Tyler Stewart of the Barenaked Ladies pop group were supposed to play in The Game of Our Lives, Keith Acton's charity hockey game Jan. 19.

But as Keith, an assistant coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs, told the standing-room-only crowd that day, there would be no Barenakedness on display. Nothing to do with local bylaws or morals either.

Seems the Ladies were in San Diego for an event the night before the game. They were returning to Toronto on game day, but factor in the long flight over multiple time zones and there was no way they'd make it.

Coincidentally, the band sang the national anthems at a Leafs-Rangers game in New York earlier this month and Ed and Tyler broke the bad news to Keith in person.

On the up side, the game has raised more than \$25,000 for the Canadian Cancer Society and Rose Cherry's Home.

Jim Mason is managing editor of the Stouffville Sun.

STOUFFVILLE SAYS

BY HANNELORE VOLPE

"Have you ever turned to alternative medicines or therapies?"



JANE STEPHENSON

"No, although I have been to a chiropractor. A colleague of mine is using holistic therapies and feels it has helped him. He believes in it very much."



LORNE WALSH

"No. Herbal teas would be about it. Luckily, we have been relatively healthy. We eat lots of fruits and vegetables and work out and exercise regularly."



MARY MARSHALL

"No, I am a fairly healthy person. I would look into it if I needed it. I have read articles on alternative medicine and talked to people about what they are using."



NEIL KING

"I don't have too much stress because I try to steer clear of it. But I am on a low cholesterol, no salt diet. I look at all the food packages to see what is in them."



CELINA DAVIES

"I try not to take too many medicines or pills for my arthritis. I eat a lot of vegetables and greens. They say it's good for arthritis. I do exercises for my legs and knees. I go to aqua classes and walk every day with my dog."

New fair president came by title genetically

If the sun shines as brightly as Kim Empringham's smile, Markham Fair 2003 is assured of success.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville mother of two was elected president when the Markham and East York Agricultural Society held its annual meeting Jan. 22. She's looking forward to the challenge.

The former Kim Little, comes by her position honestly. Her father, Barry Little, was fair president in 1983 and her uncle Bob Little held the office in 1992. In addition, her grandfather, Archie Little, renowned for his whittling skills, seldom, if ever missed a fair, and her grandmother Helen's prize-winning quilts always attracted fair-goers attention.

Kim's memory of Markham Fair goes back to age three when she proudly led a Jersey calf around the ring. (Or maybe the Jersey calf led her, she's not quite sure).

At age five, she was showing regularly, advancing into 4-H competitions, the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and the Canadian National Exhibition.

"Our whole family was involved, my twin-sister Kelly too, until she entered university," Kim recalls. She vividly remembers, as a wee gal, gaining admission by sneaking through a hole in a fence. The fair was then located at Highways 7 and 48.

Kim served 17 years as a fair volunteer and a director since age 26. She's been involved in the 4-H calf club, the horse club, the veterinary club and the home-making club. She vividly remembers competing with her sister for top pie-baking honours.



**JIM THOMAS
ROAMING AROUND**

In 1989, Kim was selected fair princess and later served on the fair queen committee. She held the position of York Region dairy princess in 1988.

Following graduation from Markham District High School, Kim studied veterinary technology at Seneca College. Prior to her marriage, she worked at the Town and Country Animal Hospital in Ringwood.

Kim and her husband Murray have two daughters, Rebecca, 6, and Laura, 4.

Kim describes as "amazing" the more than 700 volunteers who work the fair. She notes many Ontario fairs aren't as fortunate.

"We try and treat our volunteers well," she says, "making a free lunchroom available during the fair's entire run and later hosting an appreciation banquet in November."

Kim admits that, as a volunteer herself, she never imagined holding the office of fair president. "It's an honour," she says. The first vice-president is Paul Reesor and the second vice-president is Lynne (Beckett) Harrington.

Junior directors are Gord Appleton, Brett Cosburn, Bryant Hulshof, Candice Lee, Jamie Redshaw and Lori Howard.

The homecraft president is Lorna Sheehy and the director of finance is Lesley English.

David Morrison continues as fair general manager, a position he's held since 1990. He was fair president in 1988.

Kim is strongly supportive of David, claiming his site rental skills accounted for an income of one-quarter million dollars during 2002 and a fair net profit \$60,000.

With many of the fair's buildings now 26 years old, maintenance costs are sizeable, Kim says. "Everything earned is rolled back in."

With the Markham-Unionville area undergoing major cultural change, selling the fair to newcomers remains an ongoing challenge, says Kim. "These are the people we must reach," she claims, "to let them know how important they are to the fair and how important the fair is to the community."

Even nine months in advance of the fair, wheels are already turning as planning procedures begin, says Kim. Chuckwagon and chariot races, that proved so popular last year, will be continued, as will the firefighters challenge.

Fair dates this year are Oct. 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Kim agrees the success or failure of Markham Fair rests in the hands of the weatherman. "Seldom would we ever have four straight days of rain," she notes, (keeping her fingers crossed). "It seems people today pay close attention to reports and come when the weather's best."

While the area's becoming more urbanized, Kim says Markham Fair has always been and will continue to be a place to meet your friends. She claims despite ongoing build-up, agriculture still has a vital role to play in peoples' lives.

"It's up to us to make this point and prove to newcomers we're not just another Royal Winter Fair or a CNE."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.