

Praying for mercy in church choir

I've joined a choir. No, not just any choir. It's a mass choir - a vocal ensemble involving members of Stouffville United, Lemonville United, Christ Church Anglican and St. James Presbyterian churches in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The combined chorus will highlight Good Friday worship, March 29 at 10 a.m., in Stouffville United. Three anthems will be featured, all under the leadership of Courtney Britton.

While vocalizing has never been a personal achievement, I've sung on several occasions with a Stouffville Presbyterian men's choir. These auspicious events have occurred regularly on Mother's Day or Christian Family Sunday as modern-day Presbyterians prefer to call it.

Also, one time, several years ago, I joined wife Jean in a gospel duet. With respect to the latter, I'm obliged to reveal we were never invited back.

However, 70 years ago, while a senior fourth student at Markham's S.S. 19, teacher Barbara Stewart once told my parents I was "the best singer in the entire school", a proud fact I haven't forgotten.

Looking back, however, this profound statement is now more understandable since I was then the oldest pupil in a single-room enrolment of only 13 kids.

As you can appreciate, competition for top vocal status was extremely slim.

Regardless, the acclaim stimulated my singing energies to even greater heights with appearances on stage at various Sunday school Christmas concerts and other vocal venues.

I was also a regular in the tenor



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

section of the Markham High School glee club.

Since then, with the exception of the aforementioned, I've been content to sit back and let others carry the load. And they, safe to say, seem content to leave it this way.

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But where there's life, there's hope. Easter time's revival time. I'm eager to give it my best.

But not without some pre-service instructions from Jean.

"Don't sing too loudly lest you throw others off key."

"Memorize the words so you

can watch the director."

"Stand when others stand and sit when others sit."

"Don't dare laugh, not without your teeth."

And last but not least: "Don't put your choir gown on backwards or inside out."

I've promised.

During the past 50 years, I've attended worship services in Stouffville United Church on many occasions. However, except for a few times seated in the balcony, I've been perched in a comfortable pew always looking up rather than in the choir loft looking down.

What an exalted position, sufficiently close to the organ pipes to have discords completely inundated and far enough removed from the congregation to deceitfully mouth the words. For a choir apprentice, both are good for what ails me.

However, I must admit that, on one occasion, when no one was watching, I generated sufficient nerve to momentarily stand within this praiseworthy site. It gave me goose bumps.

However, come March 29 all will be for real.

So a couple of requests. Should I mistakenly drop from tenor to bass during the singing of an anthem, I hope the choir director won't interrupt proceedings and eject me on the spot.

Or should I be suddenly debilitated by a dizzy spell and take a nosedive over the railing, I hope one of four presiding pastors has the presence of mind to cushion my fall.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

Stouffville through the eyes of great, late visitor

My father died last Thursday. I'll be travelling to Thunder Bay for his funeral.

That's not big news in Stouffville, considering he lived 15 hours away by car.

Ken Mason was 95.

He did know several folks here. My parents visited us annually for almost 25 years, holding grandchildren for the first time, taking us all out for meals and celebrating birthdays and holidays.

Mom is still able to make the trek, thankfully.

Aside from the good times, I also enjoyed their insight into a community and its intricacies so many of us take for granted.

They loved Stouffville for its tree-lined streets (Dad was a forester; he'd cut down trees and I'd send them for recycling as ink-stained newsprint, we'd joke) and its century homes but mostly for its friendly inhabitants.

They enjoyed attending service at our church, St. James Presbyterian.

They'd plan trips around being here during the Strawberry Festival, especially the Lions clubs' roast beef dinner and pancake breakfast.

Dad took great interest in Parkview Village when the seniors apartment complex opened on Ninth Line, thinking he might be able to import the concept to Northwestern Ontario.

He got to know members at Richardson Masonic Lodge during his visits to their meet-



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

ings, telling stories of the temple he helped build, no doubt.

He asked many a question while he was here. Like other visitors and new residents, he didn't quite grasp the concept of the amalgamated Whitchurch-Stouffville.

"Where does one start and the other begin?" he asked.

(On their first visit, my folks kicked around urban Gormley looking for our street, thinking they were in Stouffville after pulling off Hwy. 404.)

The jogs in the Ninth and Tenth Lines led to more questions and confusion.

He wondered what happened to the war memorial missing from its perch in Memorial Park.

The kid from rural Alberta was amazed at the remaining farms here, in the shadows of the largest city in Canada.

Miss you, Dad.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune

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