

Back to normal in the crosswalk

Total chaos! These words, exaggerated though they may seem, fall short of describing the scene at the Stouffville intersection of Glad Park Avenue and Millard Street last week.

How could everything go so wrong?

It was the first day of school.

For me, a crossing guard, it was the first day of two schools – Glad Park Public and St. Mark Catholic.

The administration, office staff and teachers were in a receptive mood, having enjoyed eight weeks of holidays. The custodial crew had given classes and corridors a final splash of paint and polish. It was their opportunity to momentarily sit back and admire what they'd accomplished.

Unlike 12 months previous, peace had seemingly been restored between the teachers' union and Queen's Park. Students, some bored after two vacation months, were eager to return to new classes and old friendships.

To top things off, the weather was cool, but pleasant.

But more importantly, for dozens of junior kindergarten kids, it was a milestone in their education careers. While they'd see many beginning years during their journeys of learning, nothing could possibly equal Sept. 3, 2013.

It was indeed a day they'd never forget.

Nor will I.

Having established six years of guarding experience, I approached a repeat of my position with enthusiasm and excitement. This feeling of exhilaration may be difficult for professional people to understand.

"What's so great about standing in the rain, the sleet and the snow? What's so satisfying about absorbing distasteful stares from exasperated motorists?"



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

It's immensely challenging, but extremely rewarding. It's not a job but a service — a service I'd willingly do voluntarily.

Stimulated by this degree of eagerness, I was logically looking forward to another round of enjoyable five day-a-week duties.

I would later learn that out of this residential development would come ready-made families including many school-aged children.

To make sure the site was the same as when I left it 60 days earlier, I re-visited the location the previous Monday to discover only a few minor changes. What I failed to observe were huge numbers of new houses already completed and occupied.

I would later learn that out of this residential development would come ready-made families, including many school-aged children. This fact of life sent shock waves through my system the following morning — lineups of kids as far as

the eye could see.

For one brief moment I imagined the piper of Hamelin had serenely tip-toed into town.

Between 7:45 and 8:15 a.m., 370 individuals walked the double white lines, with 33 more at noon and 367 in the afternoon for a total head count of 770.

In addition, columns of cars, trucks and buses extended east along Millard Street to the Ninth Line and west to Westlawn Crescent.

As frustrating as delays must have been, not a single profanity was uttered — at least none I could hear — and not a single horn was honked. Motorists simply inched their way along until finally reaching their chosen destinations. Patience was their virtue.

Not so for some parents, however. With sons and daughters in tow, several detoured across an unguarded route, a dangerous practice to be sure. Fortunately for them and their offspring, no mishaps occurred. More luck than good management.

Some parents couldn't believe the town would allow two elementary schools to be built across the street from one another.

Others talked about transferring their children to other area schools to avoid the traffic jams.

But fear not, Stouffville parents.

In case you're wondering, the next day was an improvement — a vast improvement.

Except for one five-minute delay, traffic flowed smoothly. So did long lines of children. Peace and tranquility had returned to the intersection of Millard and Glad Park.

And one previously beleaguered crossing guard completed his morning shift minus a migraine.

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

The villain revealed in cycling-driving drama

My Whitchurch-Stouffville cycling experience consists of the occasional two-wheeled, 10-minute commute to work through the backroads of urban Stouffville.

So, I'm no expert to weigh in on the debate between cyclists and drivers that's happening on our editorial page.

It all comes in the wake of the death of a Pickering cyclist on the York-Durham Line south of town last month. We'll say a prayer for the victim and his family and leave that investigation to York Regional Police.

I am just another full-time driver and occasional cyclist.

The debate is fascinating, because everyone is correct, if that's possible in an argument.

Yes, there are plenty of bad motorists on our roads.

Some are borderline crazy, if you believe the stories of pick-up trucks veering toward bikes on otherwise unoccupied rural roads.

Yes, there are cyclists who also don't follow the rules. Take the large group heading south on McCowan Road recently — two and three abreast while a group of us in cars and SUVs waited patiently for a safe place to pass.

Can't we all get along?

Apparently not.

This uneasy marriage of pedal and horsepower has been on the rocks for as long as I've lived in this popular cycling destination we call Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The villain — there's one in every story — is actually our roads system.

We're a society now bent on



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

fitness and lapping up the outdoors stuck with our old-school infrastructure that can hardly support itself.

If that was Europe, let's say Holland where bikes are near mandatory, I doubt we'd be having this conversation.

We'd have roads that would accommodate bikes and cars.

I'm a big fan of the new and improved Stouffville Road.

I love its silky smooth four lanes. I love its safer feel.

And I love the look of those aprons on both sides that accommodate cyclists far better than most of our other area roadways.

We know this is the look of the future. We know the Region of York and other governments are thinking of cyclists when they plan roads. They've said so.

We also know this won't happen overnight.

Until then, can we not co-exist?

A peaceful roadside truce?

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

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