

Bruce Stapley is happy to come back to Stouffville

by Bruce Stapley

They say you can never go home. Don't believe it.

My recent return from a one year sabbatical to New Zealand has led to the rediscovery of that sense of fun and excitement that marked my debut onto the Stouffville journalistic scene some 14 years ago. It was last July, in the midst of a record breaking Kiwi winter that found us enduring temperatures as low as 5 C without the benefit of central heating, that I received an e-mail from Kate Gilderdale. My long time fellow Stouffville freelance scribe had been asked to serve as managing editor for a monthly paper dedicated to the celebration of Whitchurch-Stouffville and its endless array of notable people, places and things; a reaction to an apparent void, according to a groundswell of local citizenry.

Good luck, I e-mailed back, before sitting down to yet another lamb dinner. This would be a good thing, I mused, in that it would keep Kate off the streets. Flip ahead a few months. Another e-mail from Kate's corner of the world, this time proclaiming how the first two issues of Whitchurch-Stouffville This Month had been well received by residents and advertisers alike.

Two issues later and Kate was admitting to being absolutely gobsmacked, as my Kiwi friends would say, by the positive impact the paper had made on Whitchurch-Stouffville. And she was having the time of her life. Writing was fun again. "It's just like the old days when we were doing all those human interest stories for the Tribune," enthused Kate.

I immediately recalled my journalistic debut back in 1987 under the tutelage of Jim Thomas, the Norman Rockwell-esque patron saint of Stouffville journalism. Kate and I would traverse the town from one end to the other chronicling tales of people who had flown small planes from their rural Stouffville back yard airstrips, climbed the downtown clock tower once a week to wind the huge old imported timepiece, or pitched to Joe DiMaggio in Yankee Stadium. We were having the time of our lives, and the townspeople seemed happy with our collective effort.

Upon my arrival back in Stouffville just before the New Year, I inquired whether there might be a spot on the paper for a person with my varied background. Indeed there was an opening for an ad sales representative. I begged, and the paper's general manager, MaryAnn Fleming, took pity. As a result I'm now out there, full of spit and vinegar, singing the praises of Whitchurch-Stouffville's little paper that could to the local business fraternity.

So when you see me on Main Street, advertising sales folder tucked under my arm, please don't ask me to write a story about your oldest son who has captured the dwarf-tossing championship on the local bar circuit. Been there, done that. The steno pad's been traded in for an order pad, and I'm out selling something I truly believe in.

Oh, and did I say how great it is to be back home?



KATE GILDERDALE / STOUFFVILLE THIS MONTH

After a year's sabbatical in New Zealand, Bruce Stapley has joined Whitchurch-Stouffville This Month as advertising sales representative. Bruce, who was a local freelance journalist for 14 years, is also an accomplished furniture maker, and owned a retail store in town for several years. He and his wife, Susan, a teacher at Glad Park Public School, live in Stouffville with their sons, Griffin (left) and Drew.

Instant heritage poor substitute

To the Editor:

Sometimes I almost disagree with my ol' ma purely out of habit (and, boy, have I got myself backed into some awkward spots because of it); but sometimes I have no choice but to admit her point and move on. It seems to me she's right that what today's builders call 'heritage' just ain't so.

Then her comment about walking the old streets of town set me to thinking: why is it that modern developments rarely feel like neighbourhoods? Conversely, what makes the old streets so homey and welcoming? I don't think it's just because the trees have had time to grow and the bricks to weather.

No, it seems to me that it has to do with process. I know, they used to draw up plans of subdivision, which were approved by the town; but, then they didn't just go about madly slapping up houses, trying to get them all sold quick as a wink. Instead, people generally bought lots (sometimes a couple to make a large lot), then had a house built to suit their needs and budget. Lots didn't seem to have been sold in any sequence or any hurry. Fifty or sixty years later, some of the double lots were split, leading to the intermingling of a second

generation of houses, adding to the variety - I've always loved that about Blake Street, for example.

All these factors seem to create a delightful randomness on the old streets that no developer has ever effectively duplicated, in my experience. Somehow, from individuality and idiosyncrasy spring the look and feel of neighbourhood. Each property has a distinctive house, distinctively placed, expressing the character of the original owner and builder, creating the unique qualities that attract the subsequent owners. The result is a street filled with flavour that invites us to live there or just enjoy it as we pass through.

I suppose some people would like to mass produce this effect, but only the genius of people acting independently can produce it, and the impatience of modern developers is doomed to fail ('Cornell', down by the hospital, imitates some of the old working class areas of the city; but then, they were mass produced too). I guess we can only try to preserve it where it exists, right ma?

Just a thought.

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