

OPINION

Living

WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

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34 Civic Ave., Stouffville L4A 7Z5
Phone: 905-642-1908 Fax: 905-640-8778
e-mail: starmarketing@ymg.com

PUBLISHER Ian Proudfoot

PUBLICATION MANAGER
Anne Beswick

BUSINESS MANAGER
Rob Lazaruko

MANAGING EDITOR
Conrad Boyce

SALES REPRESENTATIVES
Annette Schmidt

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
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Con-fessions



Conrad Boyce

The Luck of the Irish

To be sure, St. Paddy's Day or not, there are times when it's not all that grand to claim Irish blood in your veins. Not long ago, for instance, you couldn't be too proud of the Catholics and Protestants blowin' each other up in Northern Ireland. As feisty as the Irish are, it was still hard to understand. Despite their failings, however, the folk of the Emerald Isle can lay claim to a number of wondrous things, Guinness and Bailey's Irish Cream being among the most delicious. The plays of Synge and O'Casey, or the poems of Yeats, are close behind. There's a lot of magic in the soil over there.

Now, I was not even certain of the presence of the Irish in my family tree until I actually paid a visit to the place in 1976. My mother's folk are German and English, but the Boyces were Normans (originally Du Bois) who came over with William the Conqueror in 1066 and then dispersed all over the British Isles. Some of them wound up in Ireland, my own ancestors reputedly among them.

But it wasn't until I was wandering down the main street of a large town called Letterkenny in Donegal, near the northwest coast of the Republic, that this ancestry was confirmed. I got a strange feeling as I strolled down the cobblestones, and I looked up and noticed that of all the shingles hanging out over the shops almost every other one identified the proprietors as Boyce or O'Boyce (that is, son of Boyce). I ran to a telephone booth and consulted a directory, sure enough, there were literally hundreds of we Boyces in Letterkenny, and if I ever fully investigate my inheritance, I'm sure I'll find that at least some of my family knew that main street well.

And there's one Irish moment that stands out from my time there a quarter-century ago. I was hiking with a companion in the hills of Connemara, near the Galway town of Clifden. It was a fine July day. We came to the shores of a large pond called Lach Inach, and wanting to cool down, we challenged each other to a race out to a rock in the middle of the lach. But storms can come up suddenly on the west coast (as I learned later), and as we were swimming clouds arose and the temperature of the water plummeted by several degrees.

I cramped up and panicked. To shorten the tale, my companion was forced first to drag me out to the rock, make me as comfortable as possible, then swim back to shore, break in to a boat house, and row out to rescue me. By the time we both got back to our clothes on shore, the clouds had passed, the sunshine had returned and it was as if the whole saga had never happened.

It was one of my few brushes with death; the incident with the chicken ball in the Chinese restaurant wasn't nearly as dramatic. But I wasn't very keen on swimming after that day. What if my companion had cramped up like me? If I truly am part Irish, the luck of my breed was indeed with me at Lach Inach.



Photo courtesy of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

Looking Looking back back

PICNIC AT BETHESDA - We're trying to rush the season a bit by showing this scene of a meal during an early summer barn raising near the hamlet of Bethesda, probably in the very early part of the last century. The women are finishing setting the table, while the men (and the infant sitting in the potato patch) patiently wait. A pencilled note on the back of the photo says the event took place at the 'Sherricks'. Do any of our readers remember the Sherricks of Bethesda? Write and tell us about them.

YOUR VIEW

Dear Editor,

The following is an open letter to Mayor Sherban and members of council.

I am writing to you regarding the town's funding of the Latcham Gallery.

I am a potter, and when my husband and I relocated four years ago, we were looking for a culturally diverse and active community to work and live in. I thought Whitchurch-Stouffville would be the perfect place: close to the city but with a rural feel... just the thing to draw tourists to the community for afternoons of gallery, studio, and store hopping.

Unfortunately, I was surprised by the lack of focus on arts and culture in the community. The downtown had little to offer for a weekend tourist excursion, and there wasn't even an established studio tour! The one beacon of hope was the Latcham Gallery. The gallery has been the cultural centre of this community for the last 26 years. When arts programs were being cut in our schools, the gallery was there to offer programs for all ages of children. When local artists needed help promoting their own work within the community, the gallery has been there. It is a desperately needed institution in our community!

If you look at the once-small towns of southern Ontario that are now thriving, such as Unionville and Kleinburg, what

they have in common is a very strong arts and cultural community, anchored by successful galleries. People gravitate towards lively communities. Businesses follow. I fear that Stouffville is becoming a commuter town with nothing to offer its inhabitants, and nothing to draw in tourists. With the potential loss of the Country Market, what is there to draw people to our town? A community is not built on subdivisions alone.

The gallery staff and their many volunteers have accomplished the huge task of securing the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant. Now it is time for you, the representatives of our community, to step up and support the gallery.

Sincerely,

JENNIFER CREEGGAN
STOUFFVILLE

ON OUR COVER



BRINGING THE DEAD TO LIFE - Gormley taxi-dermist Cyril D'Souza with one of his favourite "mounts", an African lion dragging a captured zebra. For a feature interview with Cyril, please turn to page 3. Photo by Conrad Boyce.

Rural Reflections



Ruth LeBlanc

Kitchen Hell

Just weeks before Christmas, I was feeling slightly bored one evening while sitting in the kitchen. Looking around, I thought that I never really liked the little island that housed the sink.

One day, far into the future, we had planned to switch things around, but this seemed to me like the perfect time to get started. Not much involved, should be easy work and little mess and what a nice present for the house, or so I thought.

The more I thought about it the better the idea became. I could have the sink under the window and enjoy the backyard view. Piece of cake, I figured. My husband did not. I was asked if I remembered which day I had lost my mind.

As much as I tried to convince him it was a small job, he told me to slow down, and reminded me that I always rush and can never wait for anything. Slightly offended but all the more determined, I tried in vain to convince him. Digging in his heels he remained adamantly opposed and told me to drop it for the time being.

Did I listen? Not a chance. I threw caution to the wind and went ahead with my plans. I figured I wouldn't get killed since it was so close to Christmas.

The plumber was called and I headed home feeling excited but anxious on the day of the "sink transferral." Entering the yard, I noticed that pieces of the cupboard that I was going to place beside the stove were now resting outside the house.

Dread filled me as I entered the house and saw the exposed floor boards where the island had once sat. Oh, I thought, oh this was not good and I dreaded facing my husband.

To make a long story short, a hole was cut in the kitchen floor to allow easier access to the pipes as they leaked and leaked and then leaked some more.

Old houses, I have now learnt, are full of surprises, most of them bad. The old pipes rebelled, and floor boards that were cut shifted and meant we now needed a new kitchen floor.

I hadn't counted on that, or the fact that now with the sink moved, I needed more counter space and without the island I need new cupboards.

Before the cut floor was properly reinforced, I arrived home to an awkwardly walking husband. It seems the floor gave way, and he fell through and couldn't get out for close to an hour. When he fell he landed on the cross beams and in pain he slowly clawed his way out.

I kept a straight face, and looked suitably concerned while I tried not to laugh. It was rather quiet in the house for a day or two after, and for that I was thankful. I really believe he was in shock, and the bomb that I expected to drop never did.

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