

PAM IN PORTLAND

by Pamela Fry

I was astonished to discover I had not written a column for The Lantern since May, 1986. Surely it hadn't been that long! However, checking back in my diary for that year, I soon understood why. It had been a non-stop summer. For one thing, I had had a steady stream of work from a Toronto publisher. Three person-size books to edit, all of which must be ready for publication by early fall. Plus preparing for (and recovering from) Portland's Festival of Music in July, as well as coping with the usual influx of summer visitors. Early in May, I had also become aware of a critical problem concerning space. Just not enough room on the small desk in my small bedroom to accommodate all my work. So what about getting hold of an old door? From Jamesview Builders, for instance? Sure enough, Fred James was as obliging as ever. Within a couple of days I had my door. It went right on top of the desk, and still left plenty of room for me to get into bed at night! The nice touch about that door is that Fred told me he thought it came from "the old bank." This, I presume, meant Gallagher's original bank building on Main Street. I liked that. In August, there was a real adventure. Westport's Butternut Press was just coming into being, and its owner, Dave McGill, and I were to drive into Ottawa to talk shop with another editor. Dave has never driven to Ottawa before, so he was depending on me for directions. Unfortunate

man! Since I don't drive, I am hopeless about directing anybody anywhere. (While attempting to read maps, I have been known to take people fifty miles out of their way.) Well, we managed to get through Smith's Falls. Nervously. We even succeeded in avoiding Carleton Place. But soon we had reached the Queensway. I remembered that the bus always managed a neat little turn-off at or around Lyon. But alas! The inevitable summer construction crew was blocking that exit. So on we went. And on. "Shall I turn here?" "Well... no... I don't think so... maybe the next turn-off...." Growing panic. My hands, clutching the map, were like ice. Because this was the first day of Ottawa's famous Hydro blackout. We knew about it, of course. But since our meeting was supposed to take place in the Glebe, well south of the trouble area, we should have been alright. So long as we avoided hitting Center Town. Great. Except now I hadn't a clue as to where to get off the rotten Queensway. I was tense with frustration by the time we finally escaped it, ending up by the new Ottawa General, very far east indeed. Tortuously, we made our way back - and naturally found ourselves bang in the middle of Center Town and the blackout. No traffic lights. No sort of lights anywhere. People and cars shoving about like demented lemmings at all the intersections. I shall not bore you with the details of the next horrible hour or so.

Suffice to say that we eventually managed to collect my fellow-editor and ended up having a merry but slightly hysterical luncheon meeting. By candlelight, in the one dining-room the Four Seasons Hotel had managed to keep open. When my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I discovered Portland's Doris Graham, lunching with a friend at the next table. Small world! So much for travelling. With me, it always seems to be a risky undertaking. Recently, I had yet another small adventure while on the way back from Toronto. I had been there for four - as usual - hectic days. Trying to see too many people, and spending far more time than I wanted in TO's vaunted subway system. Alright, it is very clean and tidy, but why this habit, apparent in quite a few stations, of installing only down escalators? In due course, my visit came to an end, and I was planning a detour to Port Hope on my way home. So down to the Union Station, again a very fine edifice, but again with an escalator problem. Why have they never installed at least a couple of them to take you to the train platforms? Already cross and tired, I began to drag my baggage-rack-on-wheels up the very steep steps leading to the platform. A kind woman finally gave me a hand, I reached the platform, clambered onto the train in a disorganized fashion, with further assistance from the conductor and the jolly steward, and collapsed into my seat.

Then, about fifteen minutes out of Toronto my heart suddenly missed a beat. My ticket! Where was my ticket? I'd had it in my hand all along, hadn't I? Frantic search through purse and pockets. Nothing. The conductor had already begun his cheerful progress down the coach. When he reached me, I waved my hands about in confused explanation. He was sympathetic but firm. "Well, Ma'am, if you've lost it you'll have to pay again. But you can get your money back. It'll be on the computer...." By this time, everyone in my section of the carriage was aware of my predicament. Flushed and embarrassed, I muttered something about seeing if I'd dropped the ticket by my luggage. The friendly steward helped me look under and around my bags. No ticket. So alright, it really was lost. Keep calm. Be philosophical. Avoiding everyone's eyes, I made my way back to my seat. And there, lying innocently before me, was the missing ticket. Before I could stop myself I heard my voice saying in outrage, "I've been SITTING on the damn thing!" I had no time to either blush or apologize for this disgraceful language, because the whole carriage burst out laughing. And the steward gave the final touch by adding with a broad grin, "Ma'am, that must be the hottest ticket on the train!" They were still chuckling when I got off at Port Hope.

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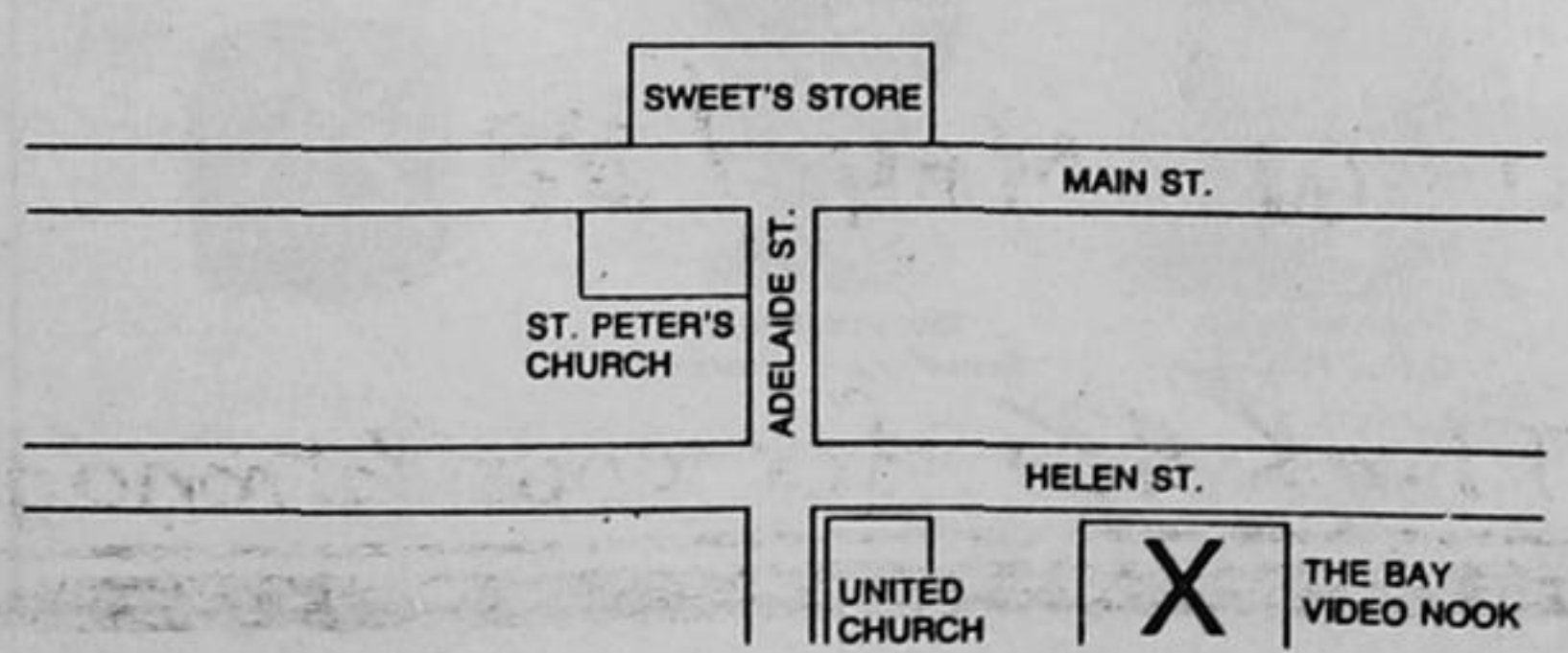
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