

# Meter Maid has no favourites Justice rules with an even hand

The Maytag repairman has nothing on Debbie Matheson. As Perth's one and only meter maid (or bylaw enforcement officer if you prefer) Debbie has one of the loneliest and thankless jobs in town. At the age of 30, she's been ticketing cars and trucks parked illegally in Perth for the past six years. Born in Ottawa, Debbie moved with her family to Stittsville at the age of six and from there to Drummond Township when she was about 11 years old. Unfortunately Debbie's hockey playing career came to an end when her parents (Willis and Ann O'Neil) moved to the Perth area. In Stittsville, Debbie played hockey on a boy's team during the winter, and organized baseball with the boys during summer. "I've been playing sports

since I was six years old," she says. Commenting on her early hockey playing years Debbie says, "I was part of the boys, it was no problem at all." When she moved to Perth there were no hockey teams for girls and she wasn't sure how the boys would react if she turned up to play, so she decided not to bother. "I was a tomboy," she admits, "I was playing hockey before any of my brothers." Debbie has seven brothers and three sisters. Her love for sports has not decreased over the years. If anything it has grown. Debbie is a regular fixture at fastball diamonds around the Perth region. She plays first base and is known as a powerful batter. In winter her first love is broomball. She plays the sport and is active in officiating

broomball games throughout the area. Baseball and broomball may be Debbie's major sporting loves, but she'll try her hand at just about anything recreational. One of her great joys is her 10-year-old son Shane and she is thrilled he is actively involved in sports. Tickets Everyone No one is immune from traffic tickets when Debbie is on the beat. Despite criticism that she plays favourites, Debbie says she tickets everyone without exception. "I don't play favourites for anyone... my mother gets tickets and my sister gets them," she says, adding that members of Town Council aren't immune either. She says she couldn't do the job any other way, "It wouldn't be right."

## Profile By Steve Forster

While she has undergone some verbal abuse, Debbie says no one has ever threatened her physically and she still wonders why people who are parked illegally get upset at her. She doesn't make the rules, after all, she just enforces them and as far as enforcement goes, she's very efficient. "I just wish the people wouldn't take it out on me," she says. Debbie says she has 408 meters to patrol and she can't determine whether an illegally parked vehicle has been left for just a minute. "I don't know if they're there

for a minute, but that's what they all say," she says. Besides writing out tickets and appearing in court to follow them up, Debbie also repairs the meters. This fall will mark her sixth year on the job and for those traffic violators who wish she would disappear, Debbie says they're out of luck. "It's not a thankful job, but somebody has to do it. I'm planning on being here for the next ten years," she states. That means ten years of efficient enforcement of the town's parking bylaws. What Debbie would like people to realize is that parking legislation is determined by the town and she simply enforces the regulations. And most people, grumbling under their breath, would have to admit she does a darn good job.



## Missing Fish! The Private 'I'

There are fishy thieves prowling Perth by night. It has come to my attention that a Queen Street man had a quantity of catfish stolen from his front yard earlier this summer. Seems he had a bucket full of the fish one evening and thought he would wait until the next morning before cleaning the tasty, whiskered treats. He left the fish outside overnight in a bucket of water and when he returned the following morning all he had was an empty bucket. The moral of this story: don't leave your catfish out for hungry catfish burglars.

The mighty Tay River turns up some interesting items! Readers may recall last year a youngster found an ancient bayonet in the Tay. This summer three youngsters diving in the river came up with an old Robinson's Dry Ginger Ale 10-ounce bottle. The ginger ale, which was manufactured here in Perth, came with a guarantee of sorts: "Purity Assured — water from our artesian well". The youngsters, Frankie Kotsovolos, Louis Christopoulos and Brent Toderain, also came up with one of the old "stubby" type Pepsi bottles.

Where have all the derelicts gone! Actually derelict isn't a good name to describe those unfortunates with penchant for the bottle who used to prowl the streets. Some say our social system has taken them off the streets and put them onto welfare. One thing is certain — there aren't as many as there once were and their numbers were decreased two weeks ago when a well-known Smiths Falls man turned up drowned in the Rideau River. Interestingly, there was quite a contingent at his funeral. When most of us die, I doubt there will be a group of lawyers and a judge at our funerals. You see, for some strange reason, these people who live from bottle to mouth, build an odd sort of respect as the years go by. Has anybody seen my old friend Stanley?

I've been hearing a few grumbings around town about a recent Voyageur bus line schedule change. Seems many people weren't aware of the change and were caught off guard. The bus system out of Perth isn't great at the best of times, but it's all we've got. The folks at Voyageur might think of advertising schedule changes ahead of time to give regular bus users some warning.

My feet and legs were aching just watching the runners in the annual Glen Tay Block Race last week. I doubt if I could make it around a Perth town block, never mind the Glen Tay Block. But one thing did catch my eye during the race — there are a lot more old people (er, that should be older) running in the race than young people. One might expect the field to be thick with teenagers, but such is not the case. In fact, the overwhelming majority would be in the over 25 category.

Quotable quote! During a discussion on traffic problems at a recent Town Council meeting Councillor Peter Burchell made this insightful observation: "The biggest problem with the traffic lights in Perth are the Perthites, not the lights".

Incidentally, at that same meeting and during that same discussion the problem of speeding traffic on Wilson Street West was discussed. It is a real problem and getting worse and perhaps a real police crackdown is needed. But there's also the problem of the pedestrians. Two weeks ago I was driving along Wilson West at a moderate speed when a woman walked in front of my car. She was looking in the opposite direction and didn't even bother to turn her head to check for traffic in the other direction. Had I been momentarily distracted, that woman would have been chatting with St. Peter today. Actually, the solution is the installation of a crosswalk near the IGA, but that is up to the Ministry of Transport, not the town. It has been requested and perhaps a letter to our MPP might help.

The rumour mill grinds! With a new store moving into the Beamish location on Gore Street there may be a chance that the gaudy Beamish sign will finally come down. That sign is an eyesore when compared with the overall main street heritage look and Heritage Canada has offered help in removing the sign. Also on the rumour front, I've heard that the Riv-Lar Hotel either has been sold or is very close to being sold and that it will become an actual hotel once again. Mind you, this is only rumour and hearsay.

There have been quite a few artists recording out at Altair Four Records in Lanark lately. Dean Batstone, well known to Perthites having performed here on a number of occasions, has just released an album on the Altair label and dropped in to say hello a few weeks back. Quite a variety of musicians, from country to new wave, have been out at the studio, including one group — are you ready for this — called The Trespassing Bearrays.

Speaking of Lanark, was that vehicle rolling down the hill last week without anybody in it really the property of the editor of the Era.

## My shot at the big time

The chap in the puce designer jeans leaned back and said something terribly clever about sex which brought gales of appreciative laughter from the interviewer and the studio audience. On the free end of each leg he sported a hand-tooled leather cowboy boot in keeping with the promotion of his new movie, a western.

"I had no real desire to sell my script when Jack called me at two in the morning," he was saying. "But you know Jack, all business, haw, haw."

The interviewer smiled the proper smile for just such a remark and nodded that he indeed knew Jack, zany devil that he was. "Yes, that would be Jack's way," he put in, and spread his hands before him.

"Couldn't wait to sign me up to a contract," the chap in the puce designer jeans went on. "I said, 'For heaven's sake, Jack, can't you wait until morning?' I'm, uh, with somebody right now, and I'm not exactly in a mood to talk business, if you know what I mean, haw, haw." So he said he was sorry for the intrusion and would I meet him for breakfast at the golf club at nine in the morning. And I said I just might, if you know what I mean, haw, haw."

The interviewer chuckled knowingly at this and laced his fingers together under his chin. "This is your fourth movie, is it not?" he pursued. "Tell us about your first big hit. They're still talking about that one in movie circles all over the continent."

"Well, haw, haw." He crossed one jeans leg over the other so that the sole of the cowboy boot faced the camera. "Funny thing about that," he went on, "really funny, haw, haw, if you know what I mean. I'd never written anything before and these four publishers kept phoning me, real big publishers, if you know what I mean, all wanting to buy my story, haw, haw." He paused and just had to laugh at the whole thing, it was so funny. The studio audience found it terribly funny too, as did the interviewer and they all had a real good laugh together.

He went on. "I told them I wasn't interested in going commercial just yet, if you know what I mean, and they said I could name my own price and I said I figured I'd just go back to chicken farming and forget the whole thing, haw, haw. But the next day all four of them were at my door and, well, they sort of convinced me I had an obligation to the public, if you know what I mean, and one publisher said he'd top any offer from the others and I said no I didn't feel right about it, if you know what I mean, and he said you just gotta sign this contract for five hundred thousand dollars and name your own terms." He had to laugh again at the great good funniness of it all, and showed a whole mouthful of perfect white teeth. The interviewer showed his own perfect white teeth at this and laughed right along with him.

The girl sitting on the next chair, who had been interviewed earlier, laughed very professionally, showing equally great teeth, and made an extremely clever remark about sex and dipped in with, "They offered me a half million for my first book too, and said there would be fringe benefits that I just couldn't possibly pass up. One

publisher even followed me home to my apartment and wanted to sign right then and there. I told him I'd let him know in a day or two, and would he explain about the fringe benefits." And here she laughed outright and doubled over in uncontrollable mirth and showed an absolutely magnificent set of white teeth.

This proved so hilarious to the interviewer and the audience that they all broke up on the spot and a commercial had to be flashed onto the screen and the announcer said not to go away because they'd be right back with a whole lot more of the same.

I guess I've been going at it all wrong. I've never had to argue a publisher out of offering me big money for my stuff. Instead, I've followed the old system of typing my copy neatly on 8 by 11 paper, leaving a two inch margin on all sides, stuffing it into a large manilla envelope (with return postage), registering the whole thing and sending it off to a publisher. And praying.

All this ever got me was weeks of anxious waiting, and then finally the return of my manuscript with a covering letter that usually read something like this: "We have given your work an appraisal and find it not suited to our needs at this time. We are returning your manuscript and hope it will be of interest to another outlet. Best of luck in your writing endeavours, and thanks for letting us have a look. Yours, etc., etc."

Since starting this column over four years ago (it was supposed to run only six months) I have received more letters and calls and notes than most writers receive in a lifetime. People say things like, "I look forward to your story every week," or, "It's the first thing I read in the paper," or, "You should put all those stories into a book," or, "It takes me back to a better time, and my grandchildren read it too," or, "Why don't you have those wonderful stories put in book form?" Some have even said (and I tend to discount it), "Your stories are the only reason we take the paper at all."

Well, sir, I'm a pretty modest guy and don't get a swelled head easily, but when comments like that kept coming in I figured I'd give the publishers one more chance. So I parcellled up 58 of my best stories, enclosed the self-addressed envelope, registered it and sent it off to a well known Canadian publisher. And waited.

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Three weeks later my travel-memo manuscript was dropped at my door by the mailman. It contained a covering letter that ran something like this: "We have given your work an appraisal and find it not suited to our needs at this time. We are returning your manuscript and hope it will be of interest to another outlet. Best of luck in your writing endeavours, and thanks for letting us have a look. Yours, etc., etc."

Dear readers, I love you, every one, and I appreciate your encouragement and loyalty. But let's face a simple truth — this stuff just isn't good enough to be published on a large scale for a wide readership. I could probably write a book with a lot of sex in it like everybody

else, it I could just remember how it goes. That would sell like hot cakes, but it's just not my kind of thing. You see, publishers don't phone me in the middle of the night begging me to sign a contract or publishing offer. Neither do they offer me great sums of money to just consider their offers. In fact, they'd just as soon people like me would quit taking up their time. Well, that's the way it goes. But if any of you know another approach to getting little, harmless stories like these published I'd sure appreciate your help. And I don't mean those houses where you pay two thousand dollars to get the stuff printed and then buy the books and have to flog them all over

## Stories that missed the headlines By Don Crawford



him to let me buy his work. By George, this stuff is socko!" And it would be kind of nice to sit in front of the tv cameras in my designer jeans and be interviewed and say things like, "Oh, it all started out as a hobby, Allan, and I really had no intention of getting serious about it." And, "Sure, I'm making big money, but the taxes are murder!"

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