

SWEET ANTICIPATION

I miss the pungent aroma of the city streets, in the early spring, after a rain, from the time when I was really young. Maybe I was closer to the ground back then, but it doesn't seem the same these days. The air then was sweet with anticipation. The trickling water along the sidewalk edge, under the remaining curbside ice was our little musical urban brook. Even though the ice was black, this little stream was as refreshing as a wilderness creek meandering through a springtime forest. My home, on Park Row North, was a short distance from Dofasco. Hamilton air. I've absorbed lots of it, north-east Hamilton air. I lived in that little, comfortable house, on Park Row, for over thirty years, with nothing but positive memories. On those early spring days I would skip out of kindergarten, and walk the streets of my neighbourhood picking up popsicle sticks at the curbside. For some reason there were lots of them then. I walked the streets alone for hours until my pockets and hands could hold no more of those multicolour stained pieces of flat sticks. We kids built popsicle stick frisbees, and competed against each other's creation, by launching them against the brick walls of old Queen Mary school. The ones that stayed intact gave the builder prestige in our school yard. Once, I convinced my friend, and neighbour, Gary, to skip school with me, to go to Centre Mall, for popsicle sticks. The mall was open to the sky then, and there were lots of sticks to be found, especially when everyone else was in school. My wonderful hard working immigrant parents trusted me, at five years of age, to be responsible, when they were not at home, but Gary's mom was a stay at home mom, so she found out quite quickly that we were not at school. Children's Aid was called, and so my mom and Gary's mom agreed that Gary's mom would keep an eye on my school attendance, when my parents were at work. I didn't mind, because I got peanut butter sandwiches at Gary's house.

As I got a little older, I resumed my wanderings on Hamilton's vibrant streets. It wasn't long before I was walking downtown, about three miles. You could buy a lot with ten cents back then, so the trolley buses were mostly winter transportation. The streets were full of people walking home from shopping or work, families sitting on their porches, as well as with kids playing in their front yards. One day, Mayor Victor Copps was walking home along Kenilworth Ave., with one of his daughters in hand (possibly Sheila), he stopped to talk to me and asked where I lived. I guess he was concerned at how far from home I was, because he bought me an ice cream at Kenilworth and Cannon, and then walked me most of the way home, making me promise that I would do just that.

By my first year as a teenager, I was quite comfortable with my solitary downtown walks. There was plenty of stimulation in every streetscape, particularly along King and Barton Streets, and especially in the areas west of James Street. I decided then, that one day I would own buildings downtown, because that's where the universe started. That was also the year that many downtown merchants, west of James Street, were given six months to vacate their buildings. Soon after that, an unimaginable hole appeared within the universe of my youth, stretching from James Street to Bay Street. Not many people at that time understood that an existing fabric of stone and brick had value, and that vast amounts of new concrete, glass and steel, might not produce the best environment to be in. At thirteen, I also found myself standing under the east portico of the Royal Connaught Hotel when Prime Minister Trudeau came out of the hotel with John Munro. A Mountie, standing beside me, lifted me into the waiting convertible for a warm handshake from the Prime Minister. I liked that, because that made quite a few

of the older girls around me, a little friendlier. Thirty years later, John Munro and I became close friends, and to date I have not met many people that are as passionate about this city as he was.

So the air doesn't smell the same in spring, to me, here in Hamilton, anymore. It's cleaner I guess. I must have that messy air gene in me still. I went to university in Ottawa for five years, and couldn't wait to get out of that city's orderly emptiness, and get back to the thick ethnic vitality of Hamilton's central core. Urban renewal marched through the original core so efficiently leaving behind promises of futuristic, economically and environmentally responsible, neat and clean new structures, with nationally significant people places, which unfortunately, over the passing years, proved to be dead wrong. Soon after returning to my place of pleasant memories lost, around the time of the completion of the Standard Life Building in 1983, I enlisted with Nina Chapple's troop of heritage preservation avatars. That talented gathering of volunteer individuals, working with Nina accomplished so much that has benefited our community's built heritage and the streets that surround it. I believe one of the empty niches in the high level bridge should be occupied by a sculpture of Nina, as one way of saying thank you. Another niche should be occupied by a sculpture of Gil Simmons, facing in the direction of Hamilton Bay, but that's another story. I'll never forget lawyer John Nolan's passionate and extraordinarily eloquent verbal gifts of wise guidance to LACAC on many significant urban issues within our city core and beyond. If I had learned to speak as clearly and forcefully as Mr. Nolan, there might be just a bit more colour within Hamilton's streets.

Working as an architect in Hamilton in the early 1990's, I was able to build a little and dream a little. During that time, a playful little change house was designed and built at Mohawk Sports Park, and a new Tennis Clubhouse in the HAAA grounds, while at the same time (1992), I was asked by the planning department to think about what kind of redevelopment the soon to be restored (1996) T. H. & B. railway station could generate in the future, within the surrounding area. The resulting report, Guidelines for an Integrated Central Business District, showed images of a pedestrian only and mixed use promenade, that would extend from the T. H. & B. Station along Hughson street to a restored Gore Park fountain, in the middle of Hughson Street, within Hamilton's 'living room', Gore Park, and continue, extending through a public square at King William street, to connect with the, empty at the time, C.N. Station. I called this route 'the station to station promenade'. The study received extensive positive media coverage, even from London and Windsor newspapers. A Gore Park fountain restoration committee was started at that time, and raised private donations to build the replica fountain that is in the park today (1996). City council came very close to approving the placement of the fountain in the centre of Hughson Street, after a very spirited period of community discussion. Although the Hughson promenade was not implemented, I was fortunate to be able to work on the restoration of the C. N. Station, by LIUNA, in 1999, as the project architect. City council ultimately decided to create the promenade to the harbour at Ferguson Avenue.

Soon after the Hughson Street promenade concept was unveiled, the economic development group at the City of Hamilton asked me to extend this study toward James Street along King William. They also were looking for a 'what if' kind of imagining. That study resulted in design sketches for a new square opposite a future, fully restored Lister Block. This new square included pedestrian penetrations that

would sensitively connect to the corner of King and James, as well as mid-block to King Street and the Gore. The proposed name for this new square might have been Sesquicentennial Square.

In the later part of the 1990's I was able to talk about small urban renewal opportunities available in Hamilton, through a series of Spectator articles. One of my favorite day dream images, was that of a new mountain brow restaurant built just below Sam Lawrence Park, on the side of the escarpment, just above the jolly cut, before it turns west, using escarpment stone. This restaurant, seamlessly blended into the natural escarpment, would provide for wonderful views of Hamilton, and our Bay, as well as becoming an effective retaining wall against rock slides in that area. A pedestrian bridge could connect patrons and deliveries, over the upper portion of the Jolly Cut, to parking off Concession Street.

I also talked about the potential for a continuous park from the Sir John A. McDonald School site, north through Central Park, seamlessly connected to the west harbour front lands, which the city has now acquired. At that time I mentioned, that at the base of this park, at Colbourne Street, and extending to Stuart Street "a model community could be built, based on sustainable design concepts and advanced waste management systems, including public spaces, commercial uses, recreational opportunities and residential uses. This innovative, high density, low-rise and terraced waterfront residential community could build on, and complement the existing north end community fabric. The railroad marshalling yards would stay in place, but could be covered by the continuation of Central Park, with recreation facilities above, and rail uses below, providing an uninterrupted connection to Piers 1 and 2, and the bay".

My favorite daydream and article, was to develop a Grand Red Hill Canal waterway, in the place of the current Lincoln Alexander Expressway. I was kidding, but I had fun thinking about gondolas as water taxis moving people across the mountain, from Ancaster to Limeridge Mall, and onward to Carmen's, with canoeists portaging at Albion Falls to continue along the Red Hill Creek, to the beach. In winter, the skating would rival the Rideau Canal in Ottawa.

During the year 2000, I was able to fulfil my youthful dream of owning property in downtown Hamilton. I was able to purchase a building that had been on the market for quite some time, with the extraordinary assistance of the Business Development Bank of Canada. At that time, no one was interested in property down town, the banks especially, so many thought I was a little crazy. During the same time, I wrote, "I am, and will continue to be committed to being a significant contributor toward the resurrection of a central area, that surpasses the conditions of my youthful memories. My intension with this property, and others to follow, is to begin the process of healing our central business district, one building at a time".

The second building on James Street North was purchased in 2005, with the short term assistance of a wonderful private investor who trusted me to follow through on the ideas I presented to him. At the time of purchase, this building was empty for some time, and on the day of closing, my first task was to lock out the squatters. The third building purchase, in 2007, was also accomplished with the assistance of the same individual. This building was also unoccupied for quite some time. Here I was able to follow through on another long planned dream, of a short stay guesthouse in the core, calling this little gem, 'An Architects Guesthouse'. I am immensely thankful to the Effort Trust Company for their follow up

support in each and every of these purchase adventures. Today, no one thinks I'm crazy anymore, at least not about the value of downtown property.

The core area has been improving, one building at a time, and these days at an accelerated rate. I'm extremely impressed with the young entrepreneurs that have been starting wonderful businesses, over the last ten years, and purchasing properties for these businesses if they can. Soon these opportunities will be difficult to find, and will shift to those with deeper pockets.

My last thought is that, I worry about the light rail transit initiatives that are currently being debated within our community, getting derailed. The system must be implemented very carefully to ensure success. The east west light rail transit route is not easy to implement, due to the length and the many physical barriers and design challenges. In contrast, a light rail transit route from the airport along Upper James Street to a mountain brow terminal, at Southam Park, complemented by a small low rise boutique hotel/restaurant/transit terminal with very limited parking, could be implemented with much more ease. At this point travelers would connect to a new replica incline railway, that connects to a more frequent light rail transit train running on lower James Street, with stops at the two GO commuter terminals, and ending inside a waterfront hotel development, on Pier eight, ala Disney 1960. This light rail system could be built quite quickly, without much disruption, and provide interesting and exciting development opportunities at the waterfront, escarpment edge, and along the Upper James Street corridor. Instead of mountain automobile commuters driving downtown to work, or to connect with Go services, parking lots near the airport, or along the Upper James corridor, could gather these cars, keeping them off the congested Linc, and 403, and commuters could take the train. Who knows, perhaps with the LRT system in place, the Linc would become obsolete, and we could revisit the 'Linc's Grand Canal to Red Hill'.

Implementation of the east/west LRT route would receive much less resistance, and more patience, when the community can see the exciting opportunities and immediate success of LRT, as opposed to their first experiences being long term unimaginable disruption, and construction related business loss.

Over the years I have been reasonably strong, despite disruptions, because I was lucky to have experienced a childhood that allowed me freedom to learn, to explore, and to dream. Hamilton air keeps me going, even though it is a bit less messy, but in my 60th year, I'm still looking for that sweet anticipation.