



Jane Jacobs, former New Yorker, believes that although cities will continue to grow larger, they will be able to support a creative life for urbanites. She holds short shrift with Lewis Mumford's pessimistic view on the inevitable decline of cities. "Well, Mumford doesn't really like cities anyway."

Jane Jacobs likes, no, she loves T.O. She even decided to move here from New York and settle near the Kensington Market area. She's the girl who wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

She has also been an associate editor of *Architectural Forum*. Obviously she is no ordinary city dweller.

Why she chose the Kensington Market area, why, indeed, she chose Toronto at all, were only two of the many questions Mrs. Jacobs answered during the lecture hour of Social Science 174 (Atkinson) at Glendon last Friday night.

Since Jane Jacobs wrote *The D and L of GAC* in 1961, she has become required reading for all students of modern city life. She is often contrasted with Lewis Mumford, who holds opposing, and very pessimistic views that cities are declining irreversibly.

George Martell, course director, swiftly and informally dispensed with the introductions. With a slight smile, he suggested that since everyone had surely read the book (required reading), Mrs. Jacobs needed no introduction. With that, she was left on her own.

Mrs. Jacobs looks more like a kindergarten teacher than a well-known critic of today's cities, a woman with a powerful insight into the delicate problems of preventing cities from destroying themselves.

She stood in front of lecture hall 204, a woman of medium height, round face peering from behind large spectacles that sat on a very prominent nose, her short blonde hair arranged in bangs across her forehead.

But when she speaks, it is plain that her most important quality as a critic is her clear sense of a priority of problems.

Whatever the cause of large scale social problems, such as prejudice, the cause of many city problems can be found right before us, in our own stupid mistakes.

It is foolish planning to deliberately build a large arts complex that has no potential for diversification, no shops to attract people during daylight hours, no restaurants in the immediate vicinity for after-show dining. Mrs. Jacobs suggests that the Lincoln Centre in New York just barely escaped this fate.

In fact, we can point to our own examples. Nathan Phillips Square is famous because it is always in use. It attracts the lunch hour crowd, evening sightseers, even weekend skaters during the winter — the very time it might be a cold, deserted place.

HONEST ED AND CITY PLANNING

To use a rather more crass example, *Honest Ed* was using good planning sense (to say nothing of good commercial sense) when he built the Warehouse Restaurant next to the Royal Alex. Jane Jacobs makes the strong point that muggers and thieves would hardly station themselves at a popular meeting place.

The gravest mistake, in Mrs. Jacobs view, is to consider an area hopeless, and allow a city government to legislate a massive urban renewal scheme. It is an open question, to use a current example, whether or not the recent budget cut over the Trefann Court urban renewal scheme is a blessing in disguise. The money that remains allocated for them might be better used for small loans and particular improvements in the way Jane Jacobs suggests rather than for massive rehabilitation.

I drank beer with Jane Jacobs, author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Many prominent and interesting people lecture at York and most of us don't hear about them. *Excalibur* reporter Richard Levine and photographer Mike Jordan partially remedied this unfortunate situation in the following interview with Jane Jacobs, well-known writer on the decline and rise of cities, who spoke at Glendon last Friday. Many of her ideas are especially important for the Toronto scene.



Nathan Phillips Square is a good place to go on New Years Eve.

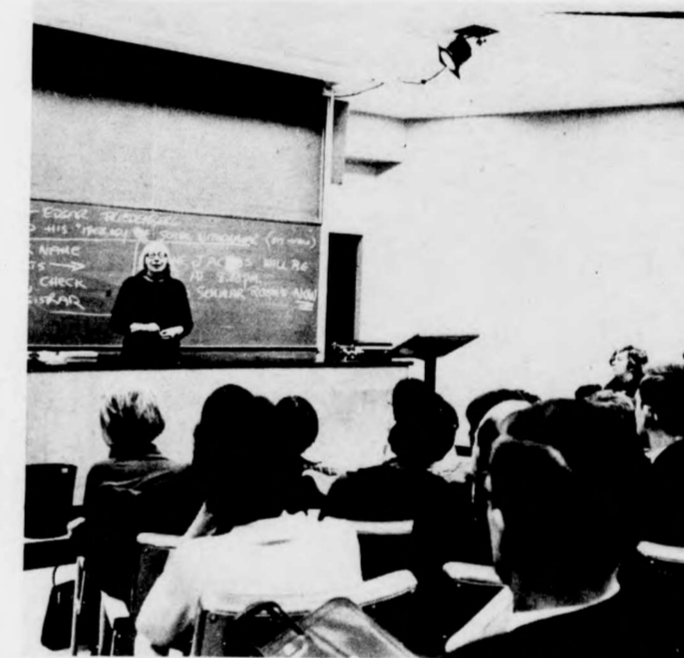
AN IMPORTANT STORY

The next question on everyone's mind was how she chose Toronto.

The answer involved a little story that, more than anything else, illustrates her interests. The year before, her husband, an architect specializing in hospital design, had come to Toronto to a conference on that subject. He was very impressed with the city — especially the Island. He had "a very fond feeling about that place."

Mrs. Jacobs wasn't joking. Early this year, she and her family arrived in Toronto and camped in Markham Township with their tent and Volkswagen. Their plans were hit and miss. After questioning their friends, they narrowed the choice to either the Annex or the Kensington Market area. They eventually settled on a house on Spadina Ave just above Bloor.

But choosing Spadina Ave. was no accident. When she speaks of the vital life in the cities, she refers to the older sections that have a very diversified street life, stores and homes more intermixed than in the suburbs and that are close to the city's central core. It is mainly the problems of these areas that concern her.



"Most North American cities lack a diverse street life. They seem to be snobbish about it."

AN APPEAL TO REASON

I was able to speak with Jane Jacobs at the Jolly Miller where a few of us gathered after the discussion for a chat. The Jolly Miller, well-known Yonge street pub and Glendon hangout, deserves mention if only to prove that an on-campus pub would not be the cultural wasteland that its opponents pretend. At no time did the beer and peanuts cause us to make rude comments to Mrs. Jacobs, nor to disturb others, nor to act in any other way to discredit our personal reputations or the reputation of York University. I do not deny, however, that there was freedom of expression and happy jokes.

REMINISCING IN THE JOLLY MILLER

I asked Mrs. Jacobs how long she had been interested in city life. And, over beer (it was quickly apparent she was no kindergarten teacher!), she remembered back as far as grade four that she had disagreed with her teacher that cities had developed because of their position near river crossings, waterfalls and whatnot. She forgets her precise arguments now.

Her love of city life drew her to New York when she was 18 or 19, where she wrote freelance articles for *Vogue* magazine. She chuckled when she mentioned that they were not the ordinary fashion articles, but articles about the garment, fur and jewelry districts, how they started and grew large and famous. Oddly enough *Vogue* published them and it was here that she got started on her basic approach to studying the city.

"I study the most ordinary scenes and events and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge from them."

Jane was not enthusiastic about city government.

"Governments cannot solve particular problems quickly enough."

She believes that a neighbourhood's best friend is its local Ratepayers association. It knows intimately the neighbourhood problems, and has the direct support of the people involved. She spoke of the famous example of Woodlawn, a once-slum in Chicago, that formed a group to protect the community against an unwanted urban renewal scheme, and to improve themselves in their own way.

UNSLUMMING

As the Kensington Market area is old, we asked her if it was really a depressed area.

Mrs. Jacobs was definite. No, it is not. She could tell by little clues: the gardens were neat and well-kept, people made improvements, small but important to their homes, such as rebuilding the front steps. It wasn't a slum. "A slum means an area where everyone is poor, and unable to improve himself."

At this point, Mrs. Jacobs moved to the next question, but I might pause for a moment for the way a slum can regenerate itself is one of her most important ideas. One sign of a slum is that too many people want to leave. There are many slum-like areas, however, that still enjoy a city public life and sidewalk safety, though these traits may go unrecognized by town planners.

The key to unslumming a slum, she feels, is to encourage people to stay and improve it. Indeed, this is the natural thing to do. They are already in an area familiar to them, and they already know the people. There are also stores to serve them.

Mrs. Jacobs has seen slums spontaneously "unslum". Her own neighborhood in Greenwich Village underwent this change. But often unslumming fails to continue because the people lack the financial means to continue improvements.

They also fail because of badly-planned urban re-development that replaces the old neighborhood with uniformly dull residential districts. These, paradoxically, are less complex, diverse and interesting than the original. It is a kind of snobbishness that equates modern housing units with "the good life" and older buildings with a miserable life.

ON CHOOSING A CITY TO DWELL IN

Mrs. Jacobs certainly did not confine herself to talking about Toronto. But one question must surely be recorded for posterity. She was asked in what city, past or present, would she choose to live?

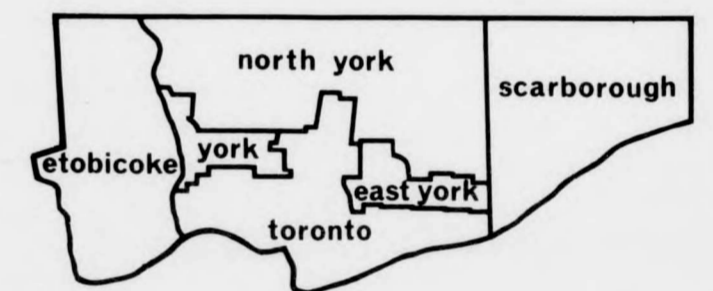
Most of the class groaned good-naturedly as if to say that she should not answer Toronto out of politeness, and in quite amusing fashion, she caught this and smiled slightly.

"No, I'm not being polite when I say Toronto. I like to live here. It seems to be a very creative city. The medical centres, Rochdale College — there's really nothing like Rochdale College in the States."

But it would be a mistake to suggest that Jane Jacobs looks at the world through rose-coloured glasses. She added a serious proviso:

"Toronto seems to have avoided many of the mistakes of the American cities. One of the things I like is that the downtown area is so well populated at nights, especially on weekends. But in ten or fifteen years, Toronto might be making the same mistakes as the United States; over urban renewal, over inefficient city government. I don't know. It's scary to think it might happen here."

Metropolitan Government 1967



A HEATED DISCUSSION OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT?

She then touched on a point that drew some heated discussion. She suggested that even the fairly new concept of metropolitan government is not a good enough solution to civic government.

But at this point the courage of my beer got the better of me, and, swallowing the last drop, I suggested that Metro Toronto has had a well-working metro government since 1953, and that disproved her theory.

(Metro government is a system wherein a civic area is split into local units such as North York or Scarborough to handle local roads, school boards, and other local affairs, while everyone is ruled by the Metropolitan Council in area-wide concerns such as trunk sewers, expressways, subways, etc.)

Since she had just moved here, however, Jane would not argue about the success of the present system. She did say, however, that amalgamation (one supergovernment) was even worse. Commenting on the recent political bickering reported in the daily press, she said that if Metro's boroughs amalgamate, they would be following the same mistakes perpetrated by cities in the United States.

I would argue that Metro is uniquely suited to Jane Jacobs' ideas. A neighbourhood group from Scarborough can more effectively apply pressure to its local council than to a massive central council, insensitive to the particular problems in one small part of its 240 square mile jurisdiction, the present size, believe it or not, of Metro.

Metropolitan government is the dark horse of our civic politics, that still hasn't received its due credit for Toronto's present success. The history of Frederick G. Gardiner, and his role in that success, for example, is just one of the many stories still to be written, but this needs another article, does it not?

In any case, it will not be surprising soon to hear Jane Jacobs' name quoted in the daily press concerning all sorts of civic issues and irate neighbourhood associations. If this prediction is true, remember that you read it first in *Excalibur*.