



Jennifer Crane

The view from lot 3A

By Anton Katz

Every day from September to April, about 560 York students drive past someone who they will probably never know. He's the man who sells those \$3 one-day unreserved parking passes, and checks to see if your decal is displayed. He then gives you a reassuring nod to go ahead. There are about 25 of these people at York, officially called Parking Control Officers (PCO), who are stationed in reserved and unreserved kiosks. The man in the booth of unreserved lot 3A is Gordon Munro.

Munro is like the best friend you sat next to in fifth grade. He talks eagerly, eyes full of expression, hands constantly moving about expressing a point. He's only five years from retirement and has lived an active life. Born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, he left high school in 1948 to join the Canadian Navy. In the Navy he went from being an ordinary seaman to a petty officer but his lack of a university education prevented him from further promotion. Because of this shortcoming, he urges his children to get a good education.

During his 10 years in the Navy, Munro travelled the world and was present for the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth. He says his favourite port of call was Copenhagen, Denmark, "because the people were so nice there." While in the Navy, he developed a flair for entertaining and, with an honourable discharge in 1958, went to Montreal to become a night club singer.

As we talked, Munro's steady fingers turned the pages of an old, battered photo album. "This is me on board the HMCS Ontario in 1952," he described, flipping a page. "Here's me at a Quebec nightclub, singing with . . ."

In his youth, Munro performed as an entertainer for CBC television in Halifax, and described his beginnings as taking place "in an age of black and white TV and old pianos." He continued to sing at Montreal night clubs, achieving local fame and occasionally seeing his name in the papers.

In 1975 he taught himself piano to complement his talents and played in various cocktail lounges. Soon, a hotel hired him as a singer and piano player. He also sang calypsos at the Jamaican Pavilion in Montreal as part of a summer event from 1977-1980. His absence from club singing in Montreal left its mark. One day he even noticed an article in a Montreal newspaper with the headline "Vous Souvenez-Vous Gordie Munro?" (Do You Remember Gordon Munro?).

By 1983 it was time to move on to Toronto. He had built up a repertoire of 400 songs, yet only about 10 were in French, "and everybody had heard those ten," he said.

In Toronto, Munro did a stint at Aquarius, a downtown piano bar, and soon found his self-taught skill was insufficient. He found the competition against formally trained pianists too much and, at 55, he left show business after 25 years.

With his experience in the naval military service and an ability to speak "a smithering" of French, he applied to be a security officer at Glendon. He spent two and a half years working security there, but ultimately transferred

out of it. Having to do round-the-clock shift-work, he found he wasn't spending enough time at home with his family.

Now in Parking Services at York, where he's been since August 1987, things are different. He has had his weekends and holidays off, meaning he can drive his two boys, Kevin and Mark, to their hockey games. It also means he can take vacations with his sons and his wife Jane, a school teacher.

Aside from selling tickets and checking parking decals, Munro is also an information agent because the university only has one official information booth (at section 1 information kiosk). He says, "Each person in a booth is considered an information specialist," and is often asked questions about building locations, necessitating that his orange York handbook, as well as a smaller book which he's filled with a compilation of questions and answers from the past.

Munro says PCO's "have a prime duty in the university because they're the first people in contact with new people on campus who need information."

He gets his share of ignorant questions too, his all-time favourite being, "Do you know where Mike is?" In general, he finds the majority of people he's in contact with to be cooperative. This is fortunate, as those who park illegally are ticketed by the three parking enforcers on active duty, and he has a direct telephone line in his booth to report cars who drive through without paying.

There aren't a great deal of provisions in the 3A booth. The heating is turned on, the radio is playing and an air conditioning unit sits idly. There are two phones — one inside, one outside — but neither is for pleasure talk as the line is direct to Security. Resembling a policeman, he wears the dark blue Parking uniform and hat, which differs from York Security's only by its badge. Above Munro's head are the 12 current valid parking decals. He explains the differences between them, saying, "That's the top of the line sticker," as he rises from his chair and points to the gold Board of Governors' decal.

His busiest period of duty is from 8:15 to 9:30 in the morning, with comings and goings in the afternoon less steady. Munro gets two coffee breaks and a lunch, and there are three people on relief duty who relieve successive booths. This allows the PCO to go to the lunchroom.

Munro's been at lot 3A for the past three months and has now worked all the booths and done full-time relief duty. He mentions another attendant, Karl Beckerman at lot EE, who has been with Parking for 20 years.

Inevitably, time goes by slowly in the booth. What does one do to quicken the time?

"Some people study, some read books," says Munro. At nights, he's been taking a typewriting course so he studies a diagram of his typewriter keyboard in the booth.

"I'm five years from retirement," he jokes, "so I'll stick with this job unless I win the lottery".

Then, on a more serious note, he talks about the importance of having the right perspective towards his third career. "It's something to do," he says, "I'm seeing my family more often and when it's not busy it can be quite relaxing."

Visit lot 3A and see York from Gord Munro's perspective. Ask him about Admiral Budge from the navy. Or the nightclubs in Montreal. Maybe he'll even sing you a song.