

# EXCALIBUR

## Weekly

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### Jeannie does more than dream

Gary Cohen

"If you want to get into this business throw security out the door. You are at the mercy of the winds of the public out there."

Jeannie Beker, star of CITY-TV's recently syndicated New Music program, was speaking about media careers as part of the York Career Centre's ongoing speakers series. Looking spry and elfish (it must have been the burnt orange gaucho pants and metallic gold shoes) Beker spoke about her career with faithfulness to this credo of rolling with the punches and perseverance.

She was 16 years old and searching, but she knew that she "wanted to be a performer and that was it." Her desire led her first to a media arts course at Humber College. But when that didn't work out after a few years Beker moved to an arts school in New York City. She was 19, all alone in the big city and, within eight months of her arrival in the Big Apple, flat broke.

Beker got on her horse and came back to Toronto where she enrolled in the York theatre programme. While here she began studying mime, but disillusion soon followed her

return to York. She quickly had had it with university life ("I couldn't study something artistic in an academic atmosphere") and, with encouragement, decided to pursue her mime career in Paris.

"It was like something out of a Hemingway novel. I was 21 and in Paris." But once again, the bubble burst and she realized that "mime was hard work and I would probably end up starving in a garret somewhere."

Out of money and on the ropes again, Beker briefly returned to university only to shortly find herself in love, married and displaced. Her husband was given a scholarship to study folklore in St. John's, Newfoundland and Beker became the province's foremost (and only) mime artist. But she only made \$75 a week performing and teaching mime in St. John's.

On the strength of an old ACTRA card, her New York, Paris and York experiences and her chutzpah ("maybe I could bluff my way in") Beker landed a job with the C.B.C. in St. John's.

"I couldn't have done in Toronto what I did in Newfoundland," she cautions. "There was

no competition in Newfoundland. That's how I started in the business. That's how to do it."

Beker worked a regular spot on C.B.C. radio until 1978 when she returned to Toronto and proceeded to "knock on every door of every radio station in the city" before getting a break with CHUM.

Beker soon had a space on CHUM, creating and delivering her own reports. When CHUM bought CITY-TV in 1979 Beker saw her opportunity to get into television.

"In this business you want to reach as many people as possible," she proclaims, "and then there is that ego thing—wanting to get up there and perform."

Beker perceives herself as a performer first and a journalist second. She admits that she does not do much hard-nosed reporting and that she enjoys the more popular appeal that CITY-TV aims for.

"Things may have been different at the C.B.C.," she muses. "The C.B.C. aspires to too much pretentiousness. I want to be an interviewer, not a critic or reviewer."



Mike Therrin

CITY-TV and CHUM reporter Jeannie Beker: "I want to be an interviewer, not a critic or reviewer." Beker spoke yesterday at York as part of the Career Centre's speakers series.

### Students with children bound to face many difficulties

Diane Huff

Marriage is a partnership involving responsibilities and obligations which are irreconcilable with an "I am number one" attitude, so it's surprising that over 25% of York's student body have undertaken the responsibility of marriage and parenthood. It is difficult enough as a single student, responsible only for your own welfare, to withstand the stress of university studies. Imagine the additional obligations and emotions attached to that small child whose existence depends solely upon your care.

Most of the parents share common problems, the most obvious one being a shortage of funds. They are all getting by — but barely. Although many students with children commute to York from other points in the city, others find it both convenient and economical to live on campus. York University offers accommodation to both married and single parents in either the York Apartments (located on Assiniboine Road) or in Atkinson College. Since the Atkinson College apartments are unfurnished, they tend to attract local students who have access to furniture, whereas the furnished York Apartments are geared towards out-of-towners. Accommodation in the York Apartments is available only to those who are full-time students. Atkinson (which caters to the part time student), stipulates that the student complete at least three courses each year. Children may remain with their parents until they are no longer of pre-school age, at which time school tax must be paid.

The financial benefits of university housing are obvious. One bedroom

apartments, furnished or unfurnished, start at \$237.00 per month. A two bedroom unfurnished starts at \$328.00, a good 30-40% below most rental rates in Toronto. The only catch, — which is usually the case with any financial aid program, — is availability. Each applicant is put on a waiting list and assessed according to need. Unfortunately, more people are in need than there are places available. Many remain on waiting lists for months, and when an offer is finally made, are usually stuck with a lease that can't be broken.

Government assistance programmes have similar snags. The amount of publicity given to OSAP does not reflect its availability. Because of some of the seemingly "harmless" conditions which must be met in order to receive OSAP, many people are denied the help they urgently require. For example, a student is

#### SPECIAL REPORT

eligible to apply for an Ontario Study Grant for eight study periods, one study period covering a maximum of nineteen weeks. In most cases, this would be a just stipulation. Unfortunately, our unmalleable government bureaucracy does not allow exceptions to me made. I spoke to a single woman living in Atkinson who is a full time, fourth year undergraduate, with no job and one child to support. She was refused a grant through OSAP because she had spent two months at another university nine years ago, using up one "grant-eligibility period". Surely the present plight of the woman trying

to combine school and motherhood should overshadow those events in her past, especially since the conditions were not even in effect nine years ago!

Most of the student parents I met are quite satisfied with the day care facilities available in Atkinson. Director Jane Bertrand and Administrative Assistant Colleen Heffernan run the day care on a co-op basis. Participating parents must put in two hours of work per week in the nurseries on top of their regular fee. Exemption from these duties is only possible through the payment of an additional fee. Most of the children enrolled are either the offspring of students or faculty members living on campus or in Toronto. Children of parents not affiliated with York are also accepted. The unsubsidized monthly rates are too expensive for any student to afford, ranging from \$252.00 to \$267.00 depending upon the age of the child. Again, public services serve only the few. Of the 111 places in the York day care centre, only 48 are subsidized. The subsidized fees are computed on a graduated income basis, so like most other organization heads in our society, those involved with the Ontario day care system are crying to the government for funding. Not only is it necessary to reduce fees, but it is mandatory that more spaces be created for the thousands of children without care.

It is the single parents who are suffering the most. They comprise the greatest percentage of student parents in Atkinson. All single parents are mothers. Most are full time undergraduates. During the day, when their children are in day

care, they attend classes and work on assignments. Nights and weekends (which most students use for study purposes) are completely devoted to their children. Money is a scarce commodity. Grants are not readily available and interest rates make loans either impossible to carry or a constant concern. They are alone, without the support of a spouse, solely responsible for their child's needs.

Most married students with children live off campus, but even of those who do not, I did not find one example where one spouse was not working. Therefore, money is tight but not desperate. I met one part time graduate student who supplements his wife's income with a part time job. He outlined similar study problems encountered by the single parents, but he has an obvious advantage: when the crunch comes, he has both an ear to listen to his problems and someone willing and capable to relieve him for a time from his duties as a parent.

The problems involved when mixing school, marriage and children are not easily solved until after graduation. Government assistance always falls short of what is necessary, and is often difficult to obtain at all. Most agree that time for the family will increase once they enter or re-enter the work force. School is a constant pressure that you do not escape after five o'clock. Nevertheless, despite the "me first philosophy of the 1980's generation", no one I met regrets that they have accepted the responsibilities of parenting before becoming economically self-sufficient. As one father said to his son at the end of our conversation: "We're happy with what we've got."