



Greg Saville
Recently an 18-month old baby was stabbed to death and two months ago school-girls clashed there in a knife-fight. One was stabbed. Last year, area officials counted the number of attempted suicides at 26 — mostly young people.

The *Toronto Star* calls it "suburbia gone sour", "a metro tragedy" and the *Globe and Mail* equates it with "a ravaged section of New York".

Standing on the upper floors of York's Ross building or anywhere on the west side of campus, its low-income, dilapidated high rises and government subsidized row-housing beckon all who care (sometimes it seems not many do).

The Jane-Finch area has 60,000 people crammed into living spaces only a short five-minute walk from York.

About the area, North York mayor Mel Lastman says, "I guess it will take more murders before anyone will help Jane-Finch. I'm afraid I'm not able to solve the problems." And problems there are.

Metro police officials have stated Jane-Finch has the fifth highest crime rate of 18 divisions in Metro. But more alarming than statistics to some is the physical appearance of some sections in Jane-Finch. There is an unusually high amount of fenced area, bolted doors, wire mesh screens covering

storefronts and even a confectionery that closes at 9 pm (instead of at 11 pm as most others like it) because of the great number of thefts.

With no theatres, cinemas, few playgrounds and at least 15,000 teenagers, the one recreational community centre (a teen drop-in centre finally opened there two weeks ago) has its hands full. Kids calling themselves the "Driftwood Gang" and others known by some York University security guards as the "Shoreham Gang" echo a common phrase heard today — "There's nothing to do!"

A walk through Jane-Finch is deceptive. Turning onto Driftwood Avenue, off Finch, the first view is a tiny playground filled with happy youngsters and a paternalistic-looking, middle-aged white man.

"Excuse me, are you chaperoning these kids?"

"No," he replies, "I'm just walking the dog." He turns to a small, four-year-old black child and says, "Hey, leave the dog alone. I hope he bites you."

"Fuck off!" comes the reply.

Whether this scene is an accurate representation of racial problems in the area is hard to say. But about definite racial tensions in the area, it's not.

Inspector Hugh Adams, an officer in charge of 31 Division Metro Police

responsible for Jane-Finch, says, "There are blacks who don't get on with blacks. The Trinidadian blacks, for example, don't like the Jamaican blacks, American blacks don't get on with Canadian blacks. And then you have the Asian Indians, the Pakistanis. You get the same thing with whites."

Another noticeable aspect during a walk in the area is the signs bearing North York by-laws.

One warning is North York by-law 10377 — "E proibito parlare volgare" (Profane language prohibited). The four-year-old, unfortunately, probably couldn't read it.

On the York campus, security guards regularly turn young people away for fear of theft and vandalism.

"The break-in and vandalism at Osgoode Hall Law School in July is a perfect example," says York's director of security, George Dunn. "Two youths were stopped by security damaging the games machines and they were later apprehended by Metro Police."

According to Dunn the main concerns with off-campus youths are vandalism and thefts, especially from cars. He says the main attraction at York is the number of pubs and pinball machines. Even with York's security force and Metro Police patrols onto campus, there are still problems and it's yet to be seen whether York's new student

security force will have any effect.

But what of the local politicians and planners who put up signs like by-law 10377 about profane language? What role have they played in the past twenty years as problems were growing in Jane-Finch?

Some say it is they who are accountable for turning what's known as the Jane-Finch dream into what some call a nightmare.

In a report by York Environmental Studies Professor Alex Murray, it was noted that a majority of people questioned in Edgeley Village (a public housing project in the middle of Jane-Finch) felt it should have been planned differently.

Professor Murray, an urbanologist, spent five years studying Edgeley for the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

"Husbands were more concerned with public housing and wives were more concerned with recreational facilities," says the report, **Edgeley: A study of housing and human behavior**. "About half the respondents said if they could have made the choice to move to Edgeley knowing what they do now (after being at Edgeley), they would not have chosen to move there."

The report, done before and after occupation in Edgeley, describes the various proposals for land use from the first, made in 1956 by Percy Wright, the



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developer of Edgeley, and Irving Grossman, architect, to the final product.

It goes through various plans and programs by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Ontario Housing Commission, North York planners and planning consulting firms. It shows how enthusiasm and a veritable plethora of planning ideas turned to "less visionary recommendations" as financial goals weren't met.

"Urbanologists," said Murray in retrospect, "are primarily concerned with rate of population growth and the time needed for absorption of population groups into a specific urban area. The Jane-Finch area," he says, "is a unique phenomenon in North America because the area simply grew too fast."

"Planning officials managed to let the physical factors, such as provision of streets and sewers, determine the growth rate of the community. Reports since have shown the area was not up to handling the social services needed with such a rapid population growth."

Of possible causes for the Jane-Finch dilemma, he says, "The typical pattern of suburban settlement had previously been for new immigrants to settle in central portions of the city, and it was the second generation who moved to the suburbs... at least until the late 50's."

According to Murray, the urban phenomenon unique to North America started in Toronto suburbs in the 70's. Partly caused by the high prices of downtown housing and partly by the ability of first-generation immigrants to move into suburban, relatively low cost areas, "a whole new environment was created." Hence, Jane-Finch.

There are, however, differing attitudes. In describing what Murray calls "a unique phenomena in North America," one Metro Social Planning Council report states federal and provincial governments must claim responsibility for what's happened.

In one story, the *Toronto Star* says it this way, ("Symbol of a decade of neglect," *Toronto Star*, August 26), "Jane-Finch is a planning disaster that's been 20 years in the making. And it's still going on."

"Almost everyone agrees that Jane-Finch was a mistake. Governments brought immigrants to Metro and plunked them along with masses of other disadvantaged people into Ontario Housing buildings in the midst of householders who didn't want them there."

Yet, a question still remains — have recent news stories exaggerated the racial and social problems in Jane-Finch?

Official studies done on Jane-Finch seem to confirm the newspaper headlines. A recent example was the controversial Social Planning Council report called, "Where's Welcome House?" by Marvyn Novic. His

report seemed to indicate the area's hardest hit groups are immigrant kids and single parents.

Between 1971 and 1976, it says, North York had more than twice the increase of single mothers elsewhere in Metro. The report also shows that in one group of streets in Jane-Finch more than 20 per cent of the mothers are single.

Author Novic puts it more bluntly. "Jane-Finch is the symbol of a decade of neglect, it's just not working out for the people there."

Not everyone agrees. Those most often opposed are people working to improve conditions in the area.

"Ontario Housing is sincerely trying to do their best to help mankind, here. It's just that the problems are so complex," says Reverend A. Nest of the Community Centre

Church. "I think they're putting forth their best effort and I take my hat off to them and thank God."

Nest thinks recent press coverage of the area is "sensational" and "untrue". He's not alone.

One drugstore manager, a seven-year resident in Jane-Finch, also has more than a gleam of hope for the area. She felt the problems were normal for the type of population density and housing.

This optimism was a ray of hope not evident from first glance. It shines through every now and then. Like when people such as Rev. Nest say, "I've been in over 80 countries around the world and people are people everywhere. Here in Jane-Finch people are the same... no better, no worse."

Maybe that ray of hope will prevail in spite

of findings of *Toronto Star* reporters Liane Heller and Ellie Tesher, ("Suburbia gone sour: The Jane-Finch tragedy", *Toronto Star*, Aug. 26) who reported, "In the face of overwhelming needs of kids in areas such as Jane-Finch, the board of education nonetheless fired 400 teachers and slashed essential programs such as special education and language upgrading. The board also sent \$1 million back to Metro, claiming it wasn't needed."

And maybe that ray will even prevail in spite of Professor Murray's recognition of governmental utility when he states, "I can see how Mayor Lastman feels boxed in."

Then, maybe, in another ten years when a York student takes a short five-minute walk west of campus where an 18-month old baby was once stabbed to death, that ray of hope will have created a very different story.

Trapped in the ghetto

Hugh Westrup
Jesse Stephens sits surrounded by domestic chaos. Toys, cartons, magazines, dime-store artifacts clutter the floors of her cramped town house. The confusion tells of the turmoil she's lived through since moving to an Ontario housing project in the Jane-Finch area four years ago.

"If somebody had only whispered to me that this was not a good area to bring your kids into," she laments, "I would have gone somewhere else."

She brushes a mound of laundry off the couch and lapses into a remarkably candid recollection of events that have broken her home since the move. In the background two immaculately coiffed women prattle about their problems on an afternoon soap opera; their dialogue is painfully comical in contrast to the story that Jesse traces back to the troubles first brought home by her oldest son, then 16.

Before moving from Scarborough to Jane-Finch, Jesse (not her real name) saw her son as a "typical teenager". But in the new area his interest in school began to lag as he spent more time on the streets with friends. Eventually he joined them in nighttime escapades of breaking and entering, and theft.

"It came to a point where every time I heard a rap at the door," Jesse anxiously remembers. "I would think it was the police. My nerves had gotten that bad."

"It's a war between the police and the kids around here. The kids hate the police and the police hate them."

At work in a nearby factory she was constantly on the phone. She worried not only about her son, but that the four younger siblings would follow his example. "The only time I felt good was when they had him locked up," she admits.

But even with the son eventually in jail,

Jesse was advised by her social worker to leave the job; the other children were still susceptible to peer group pressure and needed more guidance from a parent. Her four year old son was especially active and constantly racing through the streets.

"What finally made me quit was when one woman in the neighbourhood warned me that they were going to scrape my little boy's body from off the street one day. That really got to me."

Reluctantly, she left the factory and accepted mother's allowance. But her fears continued; being at home didn't stop what was happening in the streets. "It's a rough area. You'd hear the kids talking and one of them would say about a friend, 'She's got a pimp'."

Jesse also found it difficult, after always supporting her family—sometimes with two jobs—to accept welfare. "I felt like I'd lost my dignity. I hate accepting things that I didn't earn on my own. I've always been independent."

Symptoms of nervous tension—headaches, hives—began to appear which prompted her doctor to ask the government to transfer her to another housing project. The request was denied and Jesse found herself locked in a personal struggle against her own refusal to accept unemployment.

Two years later, Jesse is resurfacing from an immobilizing depression. She attends a "keep fit" class and was able to leave the area for a vacation this summer. Still, she suffers from headaches and finds that television is her only pastime.

She appreciates the opportunity to talk. It releases feelings of entrapment. "You always feel like running," she confesses. "It's a hell of a feeling."

Her oldest son finally did run, back to Scarborough, but Jesse doubts whether it was far enough away from trouble. She says she's given up on him now and can



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only be grateful that the other children haven't followed the same route. To make sure of this she tends to "ride them a bit" and has them enrolled in a separate Catholic school which is "stricter" than its public counterpart.

"My kids stopped themselves from going to the local community centre. There's all that fighting there. That centre should have been built a long time ago. When it was built, it was like locking the gate after the horse had run away."

Jesse doubts she'll ever stop worrying about what the area will make of her children. Just recently a ten year old girl

was raped around the corner of her building.

She is pessimistic about the future of Jane-Finch. "Things have gone from bad to worse. I think adult cooperation is needed. But people don't cooperate. There are projects that kids could be involved in. But the kids are left to do what they want around here."

Just recently a ten year old girl

On the beat

Barb Mainguy
1500 hours. My assignment—to accompany Constables Smith and Beeker of 31 Division of the Metro Police on their nightly rounds. Leaving the 31st we proceed on foot towards the Grandravine highrise development, site of the fifth highest crime rate in Metro Toronto. I anticipate running for my life through a dismal back alley, pursued by assailants unknown.

"You're just going to get wet, lady", Constable Smith says to me bluntly. "There's not going to be any people out tonight". They don't sound unhappy. A good night for them is one when nothing happens. Sergeant Joe Friday not withstanding, I am brought back to earth and start trying to see the situation from their point of view.

My companions, Smith and Beeker, are part of a team of foot patrol officers for the Jane-Finch-Keele area, which includes the strip bordering York University. The team has largely remained the same since its inception in 1977, and they tell me the foot patrol has become a vital part of police work in high crime areas. It's most obvious asset they say is to bring the police closer to the people and show them a more personal side of the law. In the wake of Albert Johnson I am suspicious. "You're kidding", I say, but it seems Albert Johnson was not in their area.

"How do you approach people?" I ask this wondering how a policeman shakes the current image. The officers smile. "You mean do we smile a lot? Sure, we're friendly and the people around here are friendly. We get to know them and about where they live. They get to know us. It helps if there's any trouble so we can find out what happened without necessarily making an arrest."

Does it work?

"Okay, there was a guy who came out

with us once for about a week, and we got to know him, and then about a month ago had to arrest him for breaking and entering. You're more careful next time."

We had been strolling along Keele Street and at this point Smith paused to stop a ten year old boy from throwing his friend into the oncoming traffic.



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"The ones who really hate us are the Dreddies," Smith confided. Dreddies? "Black West Indians who wear their hair in dreadlocks, mostly Rastafarians. They're the ones who cause the trouble around here, mostly stealing and fighting. There was a shooting last week and we had to make an arrest."

We turned into an alley between two buildings, emerging in a concrete quadrangle bordered by apartments. To our right was a brick wall. "They hang out in there." "In there" turns out to be

behind the wall, which marks the circumference of a basketball court painted on the concrete. More concrete. It's bleak and depressing.

We are within the complex of the Grandravine development, on our way to the Yorkwoods Village Store, a regular stop for the officers. It is a government project that hires only single self-supporting mothers. They have a largely West Indian clientele, who I'm told bring more than their share of hassles—mostly petty theft of goods from the store.

While the store could supply full and part time employment for a number of women, employees don't last long. "We had five girls quit last week," says Margaret Brooks, the manager of the store. She has been here since eight o'clock in the morning, unexpectedly becoming manager because of the sudden staff shortages. "One girl quit who was West Indian because she was afraid of getting hurt." Apparently she had been warned by the group who were responsible for the thefts. Another girl who had decided to stay and defy them quit after the windows of her house were broken two nights in a row. The officers were familiar with these incidents which Brooks says are not exceptional, but facts that the area residents live with.

The foot-police see their role here as a deterrent. While it sounds like the Rastas are firmly in control, they are nevertheless effective if only because people know they will be coming around.

Smith and Beeker take their leave. The rain has slowed to a slight drizzle now, but it's colder. Their unhurried patrol will continue until 2 am when another shift begins. By that time they will have walked nearly ten miles through the problem area, and they hope nothing will have happened. It's 1630 hours and a quiet night in Gotham City?