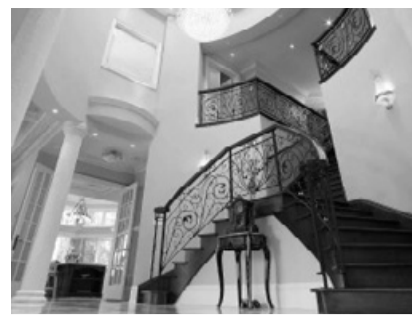


FIX

When it comes to decorating your home, your front hall may not take precedence, but it should. It is the first place people see and want to be made welcome. Awkwardly shaped, often dark and frequently a dumping ground for all manner of books, bags and footwear that marches in the front door, this can be an eyesore area. Before you refresh it, take a critical look and ask yourself what is really wrong. Consider your first impressions. Are you feeling crowded or is the paint chipping? What about the light? Could you do with a few votives for evening ambience or some spot lights to focus on artwork? What about furniture: Do you have to balance on one foot while you tie your laces? Is there anywhere to toss the keys? For ideas to dress up your foyer or front hall, turn to hgtv.ca for solutions to these problems and more. *Weekend Post*



HOMETOWN



COURTESY RON CSILLAG

The Lalonde sisters, from left, Marion Hammond, Caroline MacMillan and Hilda Doon were born in Swastika.

‘It’s a part of history; you don’t write off history’

Fighting proud and from Swastika

By RON CSILLAG
in Swastika, Ont.

Save for a few lapel pins, buttons and historical artifacts preserved behind glass, there are no actual swastikas displayed in Swastika. That’s in deference to those who are offended by what has become the most potent symbol of racial hatred.

On the other hand, folks in this picturesque Ontario village of 500 are proud of their name, almost to the point of pugnacity. We were here first, they proclaim, and to hell with Hitler.

As for the infamous emblem of Nazi Germany and contemporary hate groups, they add, it enjoyed a long and illustrious history as a good luck charm and icon of well-being long before it was co-opted and corrupted by the Third Reich.

Still, the name on the highway sign, train station and post office can’t but check the eye. Yes, there is a Swastika, Ont., 575 kilometres due north of Toronto off the Trans-Canada Highway, and it celebrated its centennial last weekend in a three-day extravaganza that included a parade, golf and softball tournaments, walking tours and a “ducky race and BBQ.”

Change the name? Don’t go there. People here talk about the last time that was tried as though it happened yesterday. It was December, 1940, and the village’s name was a matter of almost international controversy. The Smooth Rock Falls branch of the Canadian Legion, many residents of the United States and many others demanded it be abandoned. Mitchell Hepburn, then Ontario’s premier, called it “symbolic of everything ruthless and dictatorial.”

This was a generation that remembered when the town of Berlin, Ont., changed its name to Kitchener during the First World War.

So the province’s highways department moved unilaterally and erected signs proclaiming the town of “Winston,” honouring Britain’s prime minister.

As quickly as they were put up, residents, led by the community’s doctor and pharmacist, J.F. Edis, tore them down and chucked them into the rapids of the Blanche River. The new name was quashed for good at a public meeting of 300 citizens who voted unanimously to keep the name Swastika.

“There’s absolutely nothing wrong with Winston,” says town historian Carolyn O’Neil, a gruff woman who’s spent 60 of her 64 years in Swastika and has been chronicling goings-on

here for decades. “But we weren’t given a choice. It was done very dictatorially.”

Over a breakfast of eggs, sausage and baked beans served at Swastika Public School for the 400 registered participants in the centennial bash, O’Neil nods toward a glass case that holds photos of local boys in Second World War uniforms. “We had men die over there, fighting for democracy.”

The eyebrow-raising name came about as early as 1907, when prospectors James and William Dusty, who hailed from St. Marys, Ont., were sent north by a group of investors in search of silver. The Dusty brothers staked a property on Otto Lake, six kilometres west of Kirkland Lake, and instead struck gold.

They christened their find — northern Ontario’s first — the Swastika Mine. One story has it that William Dusty chose the moniker after a swastika charm he’d seen on a woman’s necklace or brooch. Another possibility, the one O’Neil seems to prefer, is that the brothers met an Indian whose canoe was adorned with a swastika, a native sign of luck.

As O’Neil explains it, “swas” means joining, possibly in the Cree tongue, while “ika” means water — the place where the Blanche River meets Amikougami Creek and flows into Otto Lake. The insignia also denoted the four sacred directions in Aboriginal spirituality.

In any event, the mine and surrounding camp were incorporated on Jan. 6, 1908, followed a short time later by the Lucky Cross Mine.

Business began booming. Joe Boisvert’s Swastika Hotel was full. James Doig’s General Store was moving flour, feed, dry goods, hardware and postal services. The four-armed symbol soon appeared on postcards, stationery, matchboxes — even medicine bottles. The Swastika Women’s Institute was formed in 1915. (“This is not a German community,” the women stressed in 1940).

The mines produced more than \$1-million in bullion and were worked on and off until about 1948. But Swastika has remained a railway hub. Today, it’s still a junction on the Ontario Northland Railway, with freight and passengers coming through from North Bay en route to Moosonee, and into Rouyn-Noranda, Que.

Other than that, it’s pretty quiet. In 1972, Swastika was folded into the town of Kirkland Lake for administrative purposes. Another kerfuffle occurred when Kirkland Lake’s council tried to remove “Swastika” from the train station. That, too, failed.

The public school closed last year. There’s one church left. The only businesses still operating are the Corner Link Variety Store, and Swastika Laboratories, one of North America’s largest mine assayers.

The village, however, has retained its own rugged individual character and, of course, its name. O’Neil calls it “the pioneer spirit.”

And pretty much everyone in these parts is conversant in — if a tad defensive about — their namesake symbol’s history as a benign sign of good fortune and auspiciousness. The word itself may also derive from the Sanskrit “su,” meaning “well,” and “asti,” meaning “is” or “to be” — thus translating as “well-being.”

The earliest known swastikas date from 2500 or 3000 BC in India and in Central Asia. It appears in the Hindu and Jain faiths, in Oriental cultures, in the artwork of the Hopi, Navajo and Apache peoples, and in ancient Ethiopian churches. Buddha’s footprints were said to be swastikas.

How did the Nazis get hold of it? According to graphic designer Steven Heller’s 2000 book *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?*, the symbol was used as early as 1912 by the anti-Semitic Germanen Order, and in 1914 by the Wandervogel, a militarist German youth movement.

The Nazi party claimed it around 1920. Hitler, a failed artist, saw in the symbol “the struggle for the victory of Aryan man,” he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, but according to Heller, his “major contribution” was to turn the swastika on its point and reverse its direction so that it appeared to spin clockwise.

“It’s a part of history,” offers O’Neil, who sports a small brass swastika pin on her lapel. “You don’t write off history just because one person uses something wrong. You say, ‘He did something bad; let’s learn from it.’ Wars haven’t stopped have they? I guess I get a little bit...” Her voice trails off.

O’Neil is involved in a North American group called Friends of the Swastika, which is attempting to rehabilitate the symbol.

More to the point on the emblem’s modern meaning is 70-year-old Marion Hammond, a lifelong resident. “My grandmother put us all straight on that one,” she says. “She said she had five sons and she’d saw down in that war, and she’d saw down any [changed] signs they put up.”

“I don’t want to change it. Not while I’m still here.”

Weekend Post

I say runaway, you say freedom

THE HALFWAY POINT

I want to really feel my last two months in the city

As a little girl, her dream was to be a big-city career gal. Life, however, took Rebecca Field Jager in another direction. Now this happily married empty nester wants one more kick at the can — even if just for the summer. Herewith, the third instalment of her monthly series on running away from home.

By REBECCA FIELD JAGER

I write to you at the halfway point of my running-away adventure. I’m not good at halfway points — realizing there is only 50% of the time left makes me panic. My reaction is to try to slow things down by experiencing the remaining days, hours and/or minutes more intensely. I try to really feel the fingers during the last part of a massage. Or really feel the fear during the last part of a roller coaster ride. Or, at the halfway point of a Caribbean holiday as I lie on the beach, I try to really feel doing nothing.

Mind you, the halfway-point panic isn’t all bad. Beyond the stereotypical mid-life crisis dude who throws away everything to relive his youth, there are lots of people who somewhere around the halfway point of their life change things up a bit. I see them everywhere.

For instance, two weeks ago I saw Kevin Costner (yes, the Kevin Costner) and the Modern West jamming at the Phoenix, a Toronto nightclub. Here’s a guy who, still very much immersed in his film career, wakes up one day and decides to start a band and add professional musician to his to-do list. And, judging by the frenzy he whipped his audience into, he’s good at it, too. Charismatic, confident and clearly having a ball, the look on his face is that of a man fulfilling a dream.

Just the other day I had lunch with a woman in her mid-40s who started up a television production company. The industry wasn’t new to her but running her own company was.

“I feel so alive,” she tells me, her eyes wide, her energy palpable. “It’s like I’m surprised by what I can do. And I won’t stop here, I want to try all kinds of things.”

Or take the woman I met last weekend. There we were, two strangers sipping beer and chatting on a patio under a cloudy sky. After I told her about always wanting to live in the city and finally doing it this summer, she told me she could totally relate. Last year, at 39, she, too, decided she was going to pursue her lifelong passion. “I’ve been married, I’ve had plenty of boyfriends, but through it all I always felt this thing for women. Since coming out, I’ve been so happy. I love being a lesbian!”

Guess that tops my story, I think, and order more beer to celebrate.

It’s stuff like this that I love about my running-away experience, and as the last days of June slipped into July, I became a little crazy about making sure I really feel my remaining two months here. I was supposed to return to the suburbs for the long weekend but in response to my halfway-point panic, slipped into Extreme Runaway Mode. Never mind working all day and then reading a book in the evening, it’s time to experience T.O. nightlife. Never mind these loosey-goosey plans to do lunch, drinks or dinner, I’m going to make firm dates with friends to wine and dine on patios across the city. Never mind spending the Sunday of the long weekend in my backyard; I’m going to the Gay Pride parade! I must tell hubby.

The conversation, like most of our conversations these days, takes place over the phone.

“You know how you’re really into

working on your boat this summer and I’m really into the city?”

“Yeah.”

“And you know how I’m not really into watching you work on your boat and you’re not really into watching me be into the city?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I’m thinking maybe I’ll just stay here this weekend because there’s so much going on that I want to do, and you can work away at the marina to your heart’s content. Whatcha think?”

I hear a click. At first I think he’s hung up on me but then I realize it’s his heels.

Clearly, hubby has kicked into Extreme Freedom Mode.

Throughout this adventure, I’ve been asked several times about how my husband is handling the situation. Is he lonely? Does he eat? Hubby isn’t a writer so I interviewed him to get the story.

Me: You seem happy. Will you go on the record as saying you are happy with our current arrangement?

Him: Uh ... yes.

Me: And what specifically makes you so happy?

Him: I like the ... freedom.

Me: Specifically what freedom?

Him: Well, let’s see ... I like the freedom of my schedule, of coming home after work whenever I want and knowing that in the evening I don’t have to do something with you that I don’t really want to do.

In an unprecedented twist, it is the reporter who storms out of the room proclaiming: This interview is over!

At the halfway point, it’s time to tend to our relationship. We compromise: I end up staying for the parade but spending the Canada Day celebration on his boat, in his arms, watching the fireworks. Moving forward, we’ve come up with a new strategy: As a rule, he’ll come to Toronto every Friday night and we’ll spend the evening and part of Saturday soaking up the city. The remainder of the weekend we’ll spend relax-

“What I really want is to have my husband and everything we have, here in the city

ing in the suburbs.

By this point, I’ve learned a few things. One Friday night, my husband and two couples with whom we are very close made the trek from suburbia to my condo for an evening out on the town. I loved entertaining them in my new digs, serving up appetizers from Pusateri’s deli before heading across the street to Bistro 990. At one point, as we were gathered around my kitchen counter sipping pre-dinner drinks, one of my guests raised his glass.

“Here’s to living the dream,” he said smiling at me.

He meant, of course, my dream of living in the city. Prior to his salutation, everyone had teased me about how I’ve always babbled about one day getting an apartment here. But the moment he toasted me I realized why I was so happy that night especially. Living in the city is only part of the dream. What I really want is to have my husband, and everything we have together, transported here.

A few days ago, hubby and I were having lunch at a Korean restaurant on Yonge Street, one of those fabulous places where you cook your own food over a little fire pit. As I watched my husband tend to our “barbecue,” I felt this rush of happiness and couldn’t help but say what I’ve said a million times.

“I love living in Toronto.”

He carefully flipped over a thin slice of beef.

“I know,” he said, looking up. Our eyes locked. “But there is no way in hell that I would ever live here.”

I hear a click. This time, it is a door softly closing.

Weekend Post