

# 'Dear editor...'

By PAT ZAMPERIN

Apathetic Jane England is not. Nor is she lethargic, impassive or unconcerned.

Rather, the 66-year-old Mississauga woman is the epitome of an involved, vivacious, watchdog citizen. And she rarely has to leave her Cawthra Rd. home.

Jane England is a letter-writer, specifically a "letters to the editor" writer.

Her name is recognized by Mississauga and Toronto newspapers alike because Jane England, over the past 10 years, has written nearly 2,000 letters to various editors.

Jane England has an opinion on every conceivable issue and topic of conversation.

A brief perusal of her letters (she keeps carbon copies of all her correspondence to newspapers) uncovers Jane England's opinions on: seatbelts, the Cawthra Elliott Estate, the Humane Society, police, AIB regulations, bank hold-ups, Wintario grants, American television versus Canadian television, kitchen stoves, prison, venereal disease and the LaMarsh study on television violence.

Her conversation is peppered with phrases such as "I'll tell you what really annoys me," and "you know what really makes me mad?"

What really makes Jane England mad is anything from infrequent usage of a city facility to politicians who vote themselves raises which are contrary to AIB regulations.

And the spry senior citizen says she really lost her cool when, during the most recent postal strike, mail was sealed within neighborhood boxes.

But Jane England's letters aren't always critical. She says she's just as happy to hand out laurels when they are merited.

Any topic of general interest attracts her attention and prompts another letter to the editor.

England believes the urge to put her thoughts down on paper was originally born and nurtured while she was employed as a secretary. The mother of two girls worked for a boss who never dictated his letters, but rather left the composition of them to England's discretion.

"Well," the senior says, "I had a knack and I liked doing it. So about 10 years ago I began writing my own letters — to the editor."

The senior citizen has had astonishing success to date with virtually all her letters appearing in print in the newspapers to which she has directed them.

"I figure maybe one per cent of my letters don't get published," she says. "A friend of mine used to get really upset at the number of times my letters appeared. He had been writing for three years without one ever being published until this day he called, absolutely thrilled, to see if I'd seen a letter of his in print. They had finally published one and he was simply thrilled to death — and I had two in the newspaper the same day."

The secret of successful letters to the editor, according to Jane England, is in the selection of a topic.

"I just choose something of general interest to the public which has recently been in the news. I type all my letters, never write them by hand, and though I make a few spelling or grammatical errors, the letters are still neat and legible. And I keep them short."

Occasionally, the senior citizen says, she will send identical letters to several newspapers. To do so, England visits a stationary store in the neighborhood which has a

photocopying machine and runs off as many copies as she wants.

"I get a lot of compliments from my friends about my letters," England says. "They're always very pleased that I write in and I feel strongly that I am writing for other people as well as myself. It's kind of like a community responsibility."

The senior only wishes more people would react to news by writing to the editor. While she admits there are more active ways to get involved, she also insists there is nothing more effective than the printed word to get action.

"That's another thing that irritates me. Sure I know Mayor Searle has his day when people can go and visit and talk. And residents can attend council meetings, but I'm too lazy to trip all the way up there. And those council meetings . . . they really don't get too much done and there are really very few opportunities to voice your own opinion. When you write your opinion, however, it's right there in black and white."

England says she has geared down in her prolific writing career during recent years from approximately 20 letters each month to 10. Grandchildren and board meetings are taking more of her time (England is the treasurer, board member and contributing writer to the Peel Senior newspaper) and she and her 71-year old husband James are traveling more frequently.

"If I stopped I think I'd fade away. God gave us all gifts, and though writing letters isn't really a gift, to me it's something I've got a knack for and something I love doing."

England says she also has the unique opportunity to read all her old letters and compare how she felt 10 years ago to how she feels now.

"Mind you," she says, "I looked through them the other day and was quite pleasantly surprised — I still agree with myself!"

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She's not argumentative, she's simply a concerned citizen! Jane England, a 66-year-old Mississauga resident who has written nearly 2,000 letters to the editor over the past 10 years says "I tell it like it is. I don't gloss things over."

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