

of its charm. No one knows exactly how it got there, but for more than eight years kids and parents have convened around a basketball hoop on a patch of land owned by the District of North Vancouver. Cemented into the ground next to a public walkway, it has been maintained by residents over the years. But an unidentified homeowner complained to the district about the hoop, and

and how one person "with a bee in their bonnet" can alter their neighbourhood. "It's ridiculous that one person can dictate to the rest of the block what goes on on the street," said Barker. "I think the majority should rule."

His son Kevin Barker said endless hours of practice at the hoop helped him win a spot on the Upper Lynn Elementary school basketball team. "I'm just going to be mad



Scooped again: The Province was there.

ANATOMY OF
a slow news day

Get me rewrite!

When hoop dreams are shattered on Evelyn Street, can trouble be far behind?

BY EVE LAZARUS

I looked out of my home office Monday to see Global news interviewing my neighbour Jeff in front of what's left of a basketball hoop. There's only a post now, but my neighbour Jane had added a sign with the words "gone but not forgotten" and two basketballs were propped at the bottom next to a bunch of blue and pink hydrangeas. As the rain poured down, other neighbours huddled under a tree watching how news is made.

My daughter was on the front page of the *North Shore News* Sunday, my son and daughter in the *Province* twice this week and a bunch of the neighbourhood kids on the television news. The hoop was discussed on CFMI, and listeners called into CKNW. My neighbour Monica got into an on-air spat with a man who lives nearby and didn't want a basketball hoop on his street either. Strangers drive up and down our cul de sac, and a woman came from Deep Cove to offer support.

This little suburban melodrama has come about because an anonymous caller complained to the District of North Vancouver that a basketball hoop used by a couple of dozen kids for the past decade sits on district land. According to a by-law that's illegal, and the district sent a letter to the neighbours on either side of the land telling them so. District officials would rather fill potholes than act in our street theatre, but they had received a complaint and had to follow through. The hoop, they wrote, would either come down voluntarily by Sept. 5 or be removed.

Now, as a reporter I've covered my share of silly stories, but let's face it, we're talking about a piece of metal and a bunch of North Van kids who are not in the least bit deprived. So, I can't help but wonder, did the media just need more than the Indy to fill its pages and air space last weekend, or is there really something compelling about our hoop?

The *North Shore News* ran the headline: "Hoop dreams shattered on Evelyn Street." Michael Becker, news editor, says it was "purely an interesting community story where you had an *ad hoc* facility that was working for kids in the immediate neighborhood and was caught in this by-law net."

"Neighbours protest as hoop on hit list," ran in Monday's *Province*, and then on Wednesday the *Province* ran a letter to the editor with yet another photo of two of my children and the caption: "Without their game, can trouble be far behind?"

Well, I appreciate the support, I really do. But I don't think the loss of the basketball hoop will turn my seven, five and two year old on to a life of crime.

As for the media train that followed, Clive Jackson, assignment editor at BCTV, says the story made for great television. "It had a group of ordinary people. Someone had squealed on them, gone to the bureaucrats and hadn't consulted the people who had been using this hoop for years," he told me. "It had all the elements of a really good story with kids and families and street and neighbourhood."

Too bad they couldn't use it. A BCTV reporter arrived an hour after the hoop came down and there wasn't a kid in sight. No hoop, no kids, no news. Global had more luck a few hours later. Kids were back from soccer, tennis, hockey and the park and delighted to give their opinion. George Froehlich, executive producer of sports and news, says it smacked of the same elements that had Coquitlam kids banned from playing street hockey last May. No Tiger Williams in our story, but it had similar ingredients: the mean and nasty resident who called in the complaint (we know who you are); some really cute kids; and a bureaucracy that says they can't play a harmless game like basketball on their own street.

Says Froehlich: "The story itself is compelling because it's a story about a bureaucracy. When people are dying we worry about the (location) of our basketball hoops and whether they are turned in the right direction, so intrinsically you've got the bureaucracy versus kids and I think that's a very fascinating story and it says something about our whole social situation."

I called Simon Fraser University's communications department to see what they thought about the news value of this story. "We used to call that junk-food news," snorted Donald Gutstein, communications professor. "On the face of it, it's a joke, it's a parody. What does it say about the media if that's what they are reduced to?"

Outside my window today, a bunch of kids play tennis with a dangerous-looking net strung haphazardly across the street. It's already caught one cyclist. We'll be sure to call the media at the first sign of violent injury or confrontation.

Eve Lazarus ordinarily writes for *Marketing* magazine about lofty issues such as beer labels and where ad executives spent their summer vacations.