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They paved paradise and put up a no-parking sign

Joe Fiorito

We were sitting on the porch of Americo Alexandre's house on a weekend afternoon. Americo lives with his family, including his brother Rui.

They and I and some of the neighbours were looking out on Lansdowne Ave. where the road was recently narrowed, and the pavement is clean and black, the curbs are new and it looks so nice.

It is not so nice.

As we talked, a bus pulled up at the stop across the street and the cars bunched up behind it like clots during a coronary infarction. Lansdowne is now a hardened artery with honking horns.

The narrowing – a pet project of Councillor Adam Giambrone – was supposed to make the stretch between College Ave. and Bloor St. better and safer. Hasn't quite worked. Worse, the parking along the east side, where the Alexandre brothers live, has disappeared.

Americo said, "I moved here 26 years ago. I moved here for the parking. I need it for Rui. He doesn't work. He was born with cerebral palsy. He's 41 years old. He is picked up twice a day, five days a week, by WheelTrans. They take him to a workshop." But there is no place now for the WheelTrans bus to get out of traffic.

Before construction started earlier this year, there was a handicapped parking sign in front of the house where the Alexandre brothers live.

There is no such sign any more. "They replaced it with a No Parking sign," said Americo.

I fail to see how that's better.

Rui, who cannot walk unassisted, smiled and said, "Sometimes the driver helps my mom. He parks in the street. There's a lot of traffic. It feels dangerous, yes, a little bit."

It takes a good 10 minutes for Rui, with help, to board the bus and it is dangerous, yes, a little bit, because all the cars coming up from behind must come to a halt until Rui is safely inside.

And when those backed-up drivers get impatient they nose around the bus, which isn't exactly safe, not during rush hour nor at any other time.

Steve Barbosa, who lives nearby, said, "The narrowing was supposed to calm traffic."

It says here that slowing is not the same as calming; many drivers, furious, frustrated and in a hurry, are now spilling over onto the side streets, where they don't belong.

A neighbour who lives nearby on St. Clarens Ave., a formerly quiet side street, said she has counted seven dead cats in the last six weeks – or perhaps it was six dead cats in the past seven weeks – little flattened victims of the change in traffic patterns. Better a cat than a child, but you get the point. Things have changed, not for the better.

It isn't just the Alexandres; everyone on the east side of Lansdowne between College and Bloor is now

hampered: They can't pull up to unload groceries without blocking the lane; heaven forbid they want to renovate, because there's no place for tradesmen to park nearby; residents must now think twice if they want to have the grandparents over, because if the old folks have to park far away and if granny has a bad hip ...

Americo said that he tried to get the city to build a place for the WheelTrans bus to pull in. He had no luck. But he is getting a nice little oak tree planted in front of his house.

He just got a letter from the city; it reads, in part, "We need your help with watering the tree."

He smiled ruefully. "I asked them to help me, for my brother. They didn't help, but now they want my help."

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