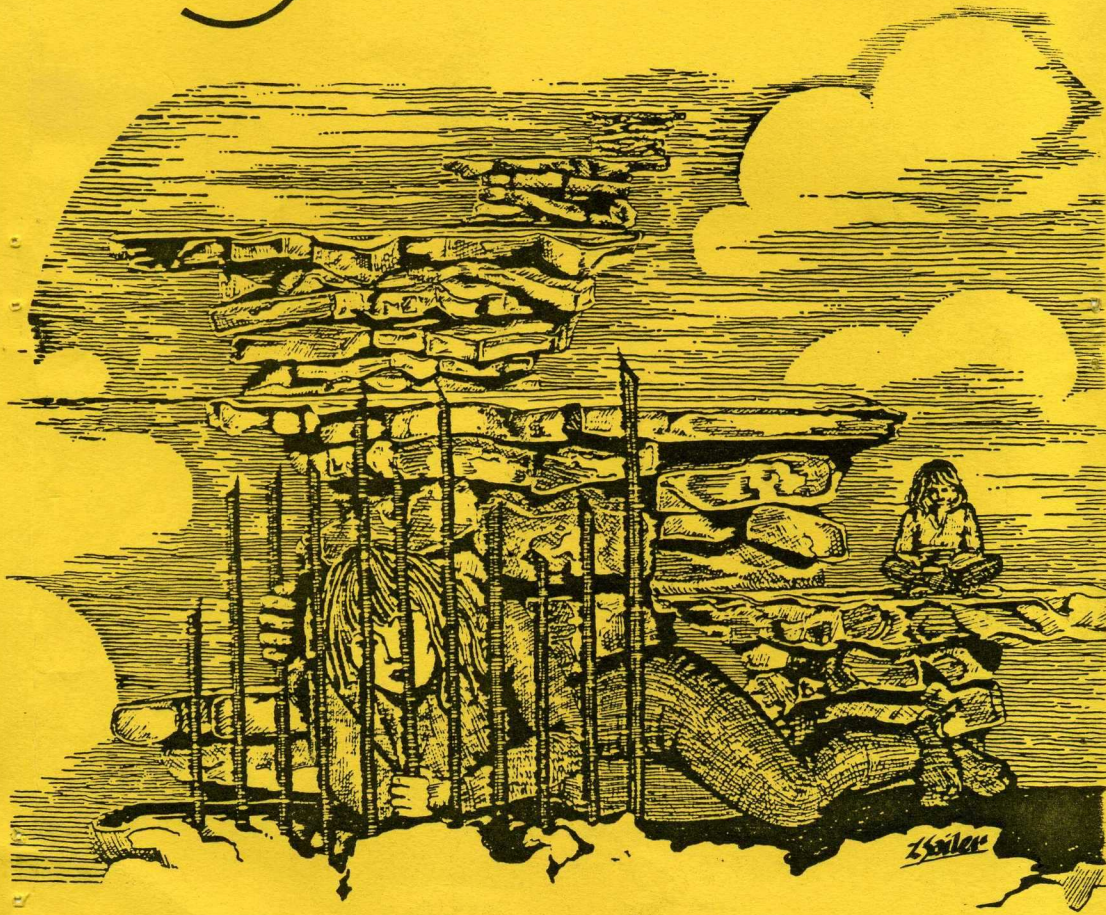


R

tightwire

Spring 1986



...SPRING 1986

It's been a busy quarter for us here at TIGHTWIRE. As always, everything seems to happen at once. Issues involving the media, institutional policies and national equality are all covered.

We are still waiting for feedback on a few of the articles and any responses will be covered in the next edition of TIGHTWIRE.

We couldn't hold this one back any longer.

We had to say good-bye to my co-editor, Gail, back in February. No one could operate the machines like she could. Linda has taken her place and brings with her a creative and artistic ability along with nimble typing fingers. Both are greatly appreciated.

So, kick-back and enjoy this issue of Tightwire.

Fran Smith,
EDITOR

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A LETTER FROM THE P4W INMATE COMMITTEE

We are attempting to send out a warning before the storm breaks. There is an unprecedented amount of tension in the building due to the sudden transfer of two inmates from the Protective Custody Unit on January 20th, to a privileged area, the Wing, which the rest of the population has to earn the privilege of living in. On the wing the P.C. women are under the constant watchful eye of the guards. How long the Prison for Women administration intends to afford them this individual protection we can only guess.

The inmate committee has attempted to warn the administration that trouble is festering and will come to a head sometime in the future but they dismiss our warnings with the statement that we should not judge custody inmates in the population.

As you are aware there is a 'code' in Canada and all over the world that prisoners adhere to. Women who have killed and abused children, men who are rapists and child molesters, and informers are not accepted into the population. This means that if they are put into the general population, they often get killed or stabbed. Because Corrections Service Canada is well aware of this prison code, women who have killed children are usually placed immediately in the protective custody unit upon their arrival at the Prison for Women. These two women are the first that we are aware of in many years who have been moved directly from the protective custody unit into the general population.

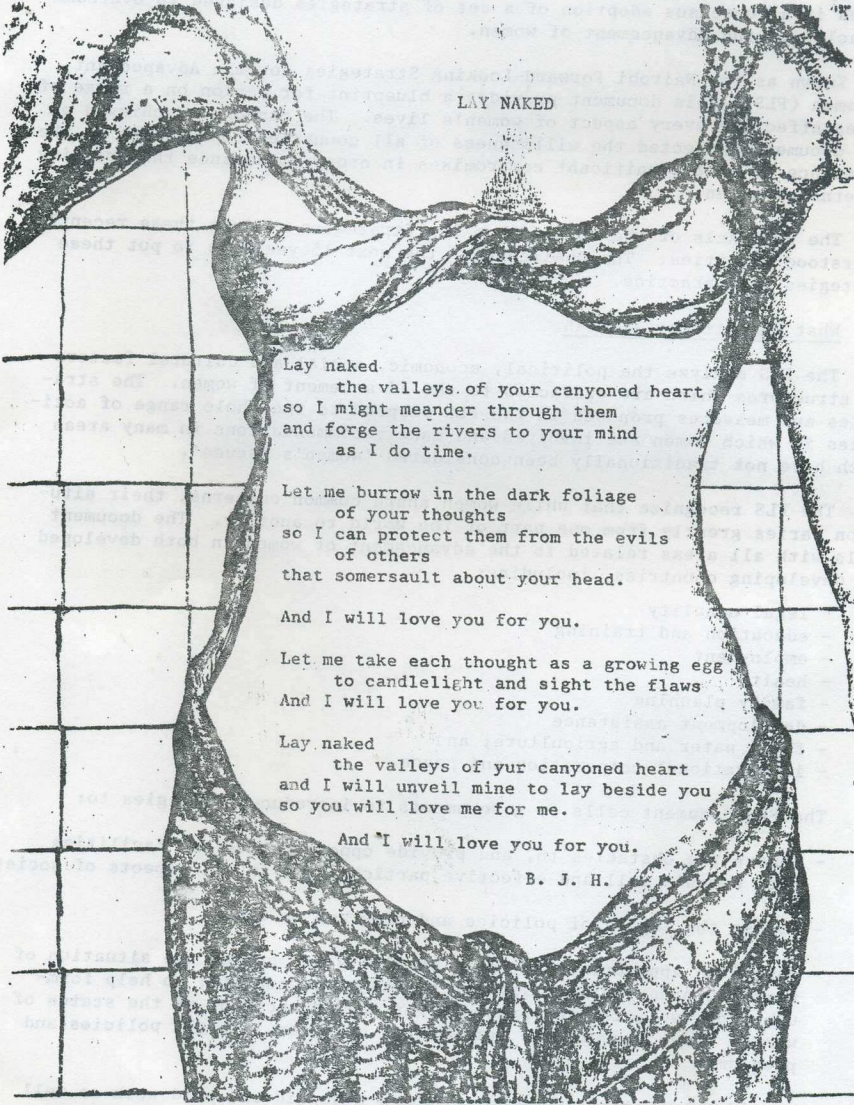
Our grave concern is that a time bomb is ticking here. Everything may appear peaceful on the surface today, but next week or three months from now, someone is going to get seriously hurt. When a woman who has killed a child is sentenced, either the judge sentences her to protective custody or she requests it. The CSC recognizes this and provides facilities across Canada for P.C. inmates. Every male federal institution has separate facilities for P.C. cases. For example, Kingston Penitentiary is used for protective custody. In the Prison for Women, there is a separate protective custody unit within the building.

We feel that it is the responsibility of the administration in particular and the CSC in general to provide protection for the P.C. inmates by keeping them out of the general population. One of the responsibilities of the CSC is to provide some safety to those of us who must live behind these walls. Apparently the protective custody inmates are in population because the P.C. unit is full. The CSC must be able to provide a better solution to the problem besides putting known P.C. inmates into the population to serve as walking targets.

Already women are being given institutional charges for refusing to work around the P.C. inmates. The tension in the building may be invisible to the administration but can be seen, heard and felt amongst the prisoners. The tension results in poor work performance, petty fights and other problems.

We feel that if something happens because of P.C. inmates being placed in with the general population, the responsibility for these incidents will fall on the administration's head. We seek your active help in this matter for all of us who are behind bars.

Such was the case in January of this year. Here it is April and not much has changed. There have been a few incidents of fighting and the CSC has shown us their double standard policy. Where before, both parties involved in a fight went to segregation, now only one goes. And it is not the P.C. inmate. Legally, we can do nothing except file grievances and bring the matter to the attention of various human rights groups. All of this has been done and now it's a matter of waiting. It may not be over, but no one knows yet where it is all going.



LAY NAKED

Lay naked
the valleys of your canyoned heart
so I might meander through them
and forge the rivers to your mind
as I do time.

Let me burrow in the dark foliage
of your thoughts
so I can protect them from the evils
of others
that somersault about your head.

And I will love you for you.

Let me take each thought as a growing egg
to candlelight and sight the flaws
And I will love you for you.

Lay naked
the valleys of yur canyoned heart
and I will unveil mine to lay beside you
so you will love me for me.

And I will love you for you.

B. J. H.

3

THE NAIROBI WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985 marked the culmination of the U.N. Decade for Women. It resulted in a consensus adoption of a set of strategies designed to overcome obstacles to the advancement of women.

Known as the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (FLS), this document provides a blueprint for action on a range of issues affecting every aspect of women's lives. The consensus achieved on this document reflected the willingness of all countries represented at the conference to make significant compromises in order to advance the pressing concerns of women.

The proposals of the Forward-Looking Strategies reflect these recently understood realities. The challenge of the next 15 years is to put these strategies into practice.

What The Strategies Mean

The FLS analyze the political, economic, social and cultural factors and structures which are obstacles to the advancement of women. The strategies and measures proposed in the FLS respond to the whole range of activities in which women are involved and make recommendations in many areas which have not traditionally been considered 'women's issues'.

The FLS recognize that while women share common concerns, their situation varies greatly from one part of the world to another. The document deals with all areas related to the advancement of women in both developed and developing countries, including:

- legal equality
- education and training
- employment
- health
- family planning
- development assistance
- food, water and agriculture; and
- international cooperation and peace.

The FLS document calls on governments to introduce strategies to:

- remove the obstacles to, and provide opportunities and facilities for, women's full and effective participation in all aspects of society
- assess the impact of policies and programs on women
- establish appropriate national machinery to monitor the situation of women in order to identify the causes of inequality; to help formulate new policies and projects for the advancement of the status of women; and to ensure the integration of women into all policies and programs.
- provide statistics to measure women's unpaid and paid work as well as their activity in the informal economy
- monitor and evaluate mechanisms to promote the advancement of women
- promote the full participation of women in decision-making

Women's Conference - con't

- educate to change stereotypes, attitudes and values
- promote women's grassroots organizations and enhance women's self-reliance; and
- promote the sharing of domestic and parental responsibilities by all members of the family.

Implementing the Forward-Looking Strategies

The Forward-Looking Strategies call for a response from governments, and from women's groups and other organizations, educators, members of the business sector, and individual men and women. In Canada, work has already begun within governments on development of a plan of implementation for the Forward-Looking Strategies. Federal, provincial and territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women have met to discuss follow-up to the FLS within the different governmental jurisdictions. The federal government is in the process of identifying and analyzing the impact of the Strategies on all of its policies and programs. Canada is, and will continue to be, concerned with integrating women's concerns in all of the ongoing policy work of government so that any disparate impact on women and men will be removed or reduced before decisions are made. In implementing the FLS in Canada, the initial emphasis will be on an economic integration strategy for women, an initiative begun at the February 1985 First Ministers' Conference on the Economy and continued at the November 1985 First Ministers' Conference.

Status of Women Canada
November 1985.

CURSES! OATH RULED DECENT

Stratford (CP) A common four-letter word long regarded as an obscenity may not always be obscene, a judge has ruled.

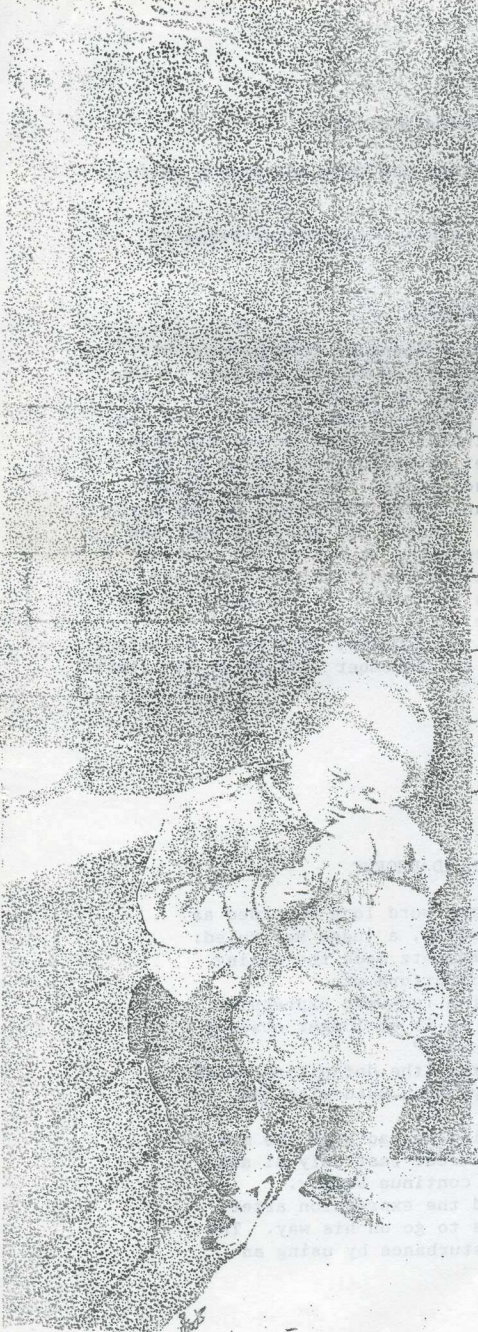
Provincial court Judge W.A. Eghoetz made the ruling in dismissing a charge against a Stratford man.

Eghoetz said the man's use of a two-word expression was vulgar and rude. But he said it is no longer obscene when used to tell someone to "go away."

The man's lawyer had argued that the definition of the word in the 1985 Oxford Dictionary, when used with the word "off," means "go away."

The arresting officer testified he had seen the man, 26, staggering along a Stratford street last July 21 and stopped him to make sure he could continue safely.

The man became angry and used the expression after the officer told him several times to go on his way. The man was charged with causing a disturbance by using an obscenity.



A MOTHER'S PAIN

To lose a child
Is to lose your life
If you lose your child by death
The pain is great
But to lose your child
To the Government and know
Your child to live
Is the worst ever pain yet
As the Government pays for the
Child's upkeep
But does not know nor control
The money hungry so called
Foster parents nor their Boss
Childrens' Aid Society
They use and abuse
The system
And what is even worse
They use and abuse your
Children with no care

NEWS RELEASE

Status of Women, Canada

April 1, 1986

No. 66-2

OTTAWA -- The Honorable Walter F. McLean, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, today announced the release of A Feminist Review of Criminal Law, an examination of the overall impact on women of Canada's criminal law system.

The report examines offences with which women tend to be charged, defences available to the accused, women as victims of crime, criminal procedure and evidence, sentencing, and the implications of the Charter of Rights for Canadian criminal law. The authors suggest a number of specific reforms and recommend further study and analysis in a number of areas.

"I hope this report will spark debate and further in-depth research on many of the issues raised by the authors," Mr. McLean said. "This report is not intended to be the definitive 'women's view' of criminal law policy. Rather, it is a contribution to the continuing discussion."

The study was commissioned by Status of Women Canada in 1984 to assist in evaluating the ongoing work of the Criminal Law Review and the Canadian Sentencing Commission, as well as other related policy initiatives. The report was authored by four experts in different areas of Canadian criminal law - Marie-Andree Bertrand, Christine Boyle, Celine Lacerte-Lamontagne, and Rebecca Shamai.

A FEMINIST REVIEW OF CRIMINAL LAW

A Feminist Review of Criminal Law provides a feminist perspective on the impact of all aspects of criminal law on women. In the view of the authors, many problems arise from applying to women a criminal law devised by male legislators for the purpose of controlling anti-social acts largely committed by men. The report identifies three areas in which women face problems under our present criminal law system:

- Morality. The exclusion of women from criminal law debate has resulted in priority being given to such values as private property and the security of the state, at the expense of other values, such as sexual equality, children's rights and the responsibilities of fathers toward their children.
- Legitimacy. According to the authors, the process of certain acts as crimes belie the legitimacy of criminal law. The authors found that 80 per cent of the charges laid against women in recent years do not meet the accepted definition of a crime.
- Equality. The treatment accorded women under the criminal justice system is often unfair and unequal.

Among the report's other findings:

- While most of the offences which portrayed women as chattels, ornaments or vehicles for family lineage or illicit pleasure have been repealed or amended, the vestiges of these 'protections' remain in attitudes towards women involved in the criminal process: not just victims and women who are accused, but all women including police officers, witnesses, lawyers and judges.

A Feminist Review of Criminal Law cont'd.

- The present law makes prostitutes more vulnerable to pimps, and a criminal record only makes it more difficult for them to switch to other kinds of work. It is unfair that persistent solicitation is criminalized while male harassment of women in the workplace or on the street carries no criminal sanction.
- Prisons for women are discriminatory because they do not come near to offering the services and programs available to inmates of institutions for men.
- Rules of evidence have classed women as incapable of giving independent evidence in some instances, incompetent to testify against their husbands in other instances, and incapable of conspiracy with their spouses in some situations because of the legal fiction of conjugal unity.
- The theory of law requiring corroboration of evidence in sex offences has historically reflected a very negative profile of women. Much of this law was abrogated by the 1983 reforms, but in some areas, the impact is still detrimental to women. The report recommends that corroboration not be required for any sexual offences.

The report's other recommendations include:

- Individuals should not be charged with contempt for refusing to testify out of fear, unless the state can prove that realistic protection is available.
- There should be a statutory defence of necessity ensuring a right to interfere with the property rights of others in order to feed, clothe and shelter oneself and one's children.

Criminal Code provisions related to abortion should be repealed.

- The defence of duress should be broadened to make it clear that threats can be directed against third persons, such as the child of the accused.
- Obscenity laws should be replaced by new offences to prohibit production of, possession of, and trafficking in pornography. The definition of pornography should be based on the concept of subordination, and at the very least should prohibit violent pornography.
- Corroboration of the unsworn testimony of a child should not be required under law.
- Policies to appoint more women to the bench should be developed and implemented by way of affirmative action programs.

LADIES' DAY

Who can satirize femglibbers as well as they ridicule themselves? They do it all the time of course, but rarely with such stunning clarity as this strange series of proposals for 'modernizing' the Criminal Code.

How stupid to bury valid findings about the plight of poor single mothers by asinine suggestions that these women should have the right to steal. But these are some of the ridiculous ideas in a 210 page report prepared - at a cost of \$15,000.00 - by an advisory group of 'feminist legal experts'.

Ladies' Day cont'd.

Their thesis is that poor women should be allowed to apply the 'defence of necessity'. Carry that through to its logical absurdity and poof, there goes civilization. The report cares more for revolution than civilization. Its a socialist manifesto all gussied up in baffleglib.

Walter McLean is the minister responsible for the status of women. He says on behalf of the government that it's not the definitive women's view of criminal law. Thank heavens for that! But what he should have said - that is if any Tory ministers are ever going to stop being all things to all people - is that the report's a crock.

It blames everything on the application to women of laws 'devised by male legislators for the purpose of controlling anti-social acts largely committed by men'.

That's sexist codswallop, and we haven't even got into their views on abortion and sexual intercourse. As they said so sagely about sex, not only is it the most common cause of pregnancy, women never seem to have control.

Oh dear! But they go on and on.

By the time they're finished, they have a bash at just about everything as champions of the poor mother. If she has nothing, let her steal. If she has no home, let her squat in someone else's. If she's on welfare, let her cheat.

The idea that society can somehow be improved by allowing women to flout 'male' laws is destructive.

An anti-male bias is no more acceptable than an antifemale bias. Where in all this welter of weird thinking is the mind that is simply pro-human?

Not only has \$15,000.00 of the taxpayers' money been wasted, this shoddy tract has thrown up barriers of nonsense before any useful changes that might have come.

The Toronto Sun,
Thursday, April 3/86

* There was no by-line for the above article, so we'll give credit to the managing editor Peter Brewster. It is unfortunate that some people have chosen to take certain recommendations within the report and blow them out of proportion. They are ignoring some of the basic fundamental issues of equality brought forth in the report. The report, submitted by four professional women, is not proposing that women be allowed, with impunity, to break the law. What it is trying to do, is initiate the kind of soul-searching that is needed in order to address social inequality.

The report is available through the Tightwire office for anyone wishing to read it.

COMING BACK

The pieces were scattered from here to hell
The pieces were shattered like a broken shell

Nothing to join them, nothing to connect

Only a void left, an emptiness

A droid, surviving through life

Unaware of missing pieces out in space

With invisible connection cords

The droid begins to come to life

With open eyes she sees

The pieces coming together

They start to fit

To secure in place

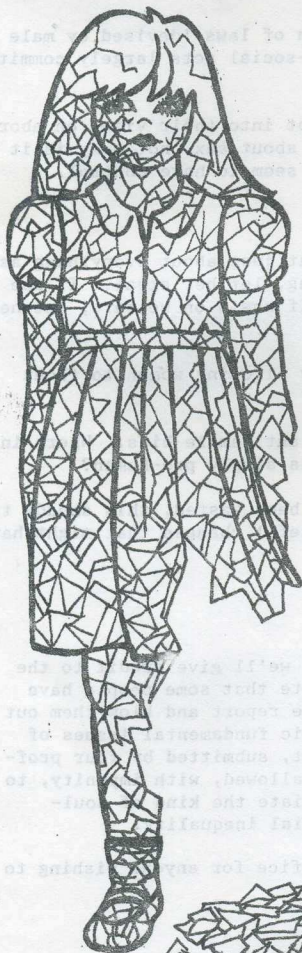
To come in focus

She feels the pieces taking hold

They have formed what they were meant to be

The pieces of a little girl

That was meant to be me.



A Sexual Abuse Victim

- originally published in
"Images", March 1986.

INMATE TESTING VETOED BY FEDS

OTTAWA - Federal prisoners won't be routinely screened for AIDS despite widespread concern when traces of the disease were found in an Alberta institution.

"It's a very long process to have tests and it's very costly at the same time", Correctional Services spokesman Jacques Belanger said yesterday. "Since we have lots of movement - people coming in and going out - it would be hard to track down."

Prisoners who appear to be suffering AIDS symptoms will be tested and active cases transferred to the prison's health care unit, Belanger said.

There are no Active AIDS cases in any federal penitentiaries but a prisoner at the Bowden Institute in central Alberta has an AIDS-related complex and is suffering symptoms of the disease.

Toronto Sun
January 1986

AIDS SCARE AT PRISON

DUBLIN - Six Irish women prisoners barricaded themselves in cells and cut their arms to protest their removal to a segregated unit after they were found to have AIDS antibodies, Prison officials said yesterday.

The incidents were the latest in an AIDS scare among male and female prisoners in Dublin's Montjoy Prison. A justice ministry spokesman said the injuries were minor and did not require hospital treatment. Thirty seven men have been moved to an isolated unit in another prison after blood tests found they had AIDS antibodies. Ten women have been isolated.

Toronto Sun
January 1986

COMMENT:

One of the primary means of transmitting the AIDS virus is intravenously which places drug abusers in a high risk category. With the stepped up security in detecting drug abuse within the prisons; through urinalysis testing, the CSC is acknowledging that they do have a drug problem. Since AIDS may be classified as an unwanted side effect of intravenous drug use, would it not seem logical to assume that the virus may have been contracted sometime during the addict's history? Isn't it wiser to know for sure?

There is a certain reluctance for prisoners to come forth and demand AIDS testing. While they may fear the disease, they also fear getting caught with drugs in their system and labelling which would go along with being a carrier. Even guarantees from the CSC that prisoners' blood would only be used for testing for the AIDS virus, and not for drug content, will do nothing to alleviate the fear of reprisal. Too many promises have already been broken and because there are still so many unanswerable questions about the virus, as well as inadequate hospital facilities in most prisons, chances are very good that a prisoner testing positive would spend the balance of their sentence in a segregation area, shut off from the rest of the population.

AIDS Scare Comment Cont'd.

Because of the alienation and harsh treatment which accompanies the AIDS virus, most people would rather just not know they have it. At least while they are still in prison.

According to the April 7th Edition of the Whig-Standard there is a new test on the market that is 'faster, cheaper, more accurate and easier to administer than other methods'. It is claimed to be a 'major advance in the quick and cost-effective detection of anti-bodies'. CSC has contended that testing was too time-consuming and costly. The new testing has made the argument obsolete. Now, if they can only discover a method of implementation in which prisoners will not be subjected to any repercussions they would be well on the way to solving the problem.

It is interesting to note: The CSC says "there are no active cases in any federal penitentiaries".

How do they really know without any tests?

F.S.



* A London provincial newspaper reported Council workers are to rip planks out of seats and make holes in the walls of bus shelters in an attempt to make the shelters too uncomfortable for hooligans. Councillor Harry Bill said, "Something has got to be done to stop the wrecking of these shelters. So far as I can see, this is the only way."

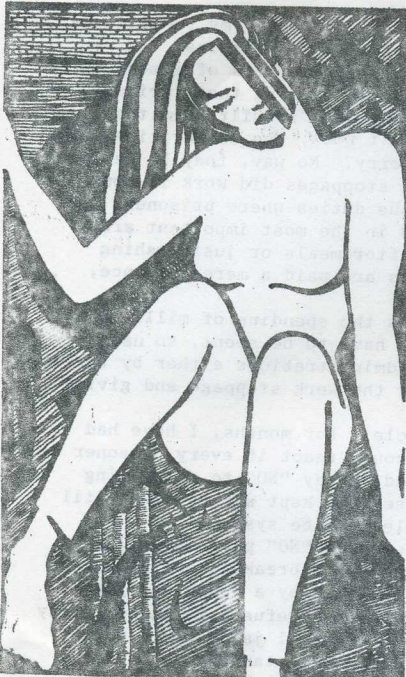
Ben Wicks Book of Losers
McClelland & Stewart
1979

LONELY SCREAMS

Here I sit, depressed and blue,
With no one beside me that I can turn to.
I see all this love, cut off by the hate,
It's a feeling I get, in which I can relate.
I wish there was someone, someone to hold,
To hold me together before I unfold.
I just want a companion, so I'm not so alone,
But if I was to go ahead, then I would be condoned.
It's not for the sex, or just to get off,
I need someone who's sweet and tenderly soft.
Someone I can talk to, somewhere I can go,
Instead of walking around feeling so low.
How do I say it? What do I do?
When all I need is someone to hang on to.
Someone who'll be there when I need them the most,
We could be each other's private leaning post.
Someone who's always there in my dreams,
To wipe away my lonely screams.
What can I say? How do I explain?
The loneliness I feel and all the pain?
Why can't I find someone to ease all this pain;
To take away this loneliness I feel again and again?
Someone who'll stand by me, proud and tall:
Me, their companion and friend, that's all...



CHUNKY



JAILHOUSE BLUES

This place does nothing but bring me down;
Day in, day out, I wear this frown.
This pain inside is too much to keep;
It's getting so I can hardly sleep.
Sometimes I feel so tired and weak;
My mouth is moving, but I cannot speak.
The screws do nothing but sit on their ass,
While waiting for their shifts to pass.
They couldn't care less if we live or die,
For what they speak is but one more lie.
Of all the people here, you'll find few real friends;
Most just play the game, and though you're not aware;
They're not your friend, cause no one really cares.
For they will pass you by when you're down and out,
That's when you find out what they're really all about.
My feelings are cut shorter with each passing day,
For the deceiving and conniving never goes away.
If you're cold, you're hated, and too nice you're used;
But all the same you're still abused.
Somehow, someday they will succeed,
In making me feel no need to proceed.
Living this life on lies and hate.
But there's no longer this inmate
for you to push around,
Cause my friend, I've already fallen;
I've already hit the ground...

CHUNKY

IF EVERYONE SAID NO!

History reveals there has always been some form of imprisonment to control the populace of the countries of the world. The Egyptians used mass slavery to build one of the great wonders of the world, "the pyramids" while the slave galleys were used by the Romans to power their fleet of ships when they controlled the seas in one period of history.

Moving along in time, we come to the dungeons of Europe where people were imprisoned for such minor things as being unable to pay their debts. For years, the poor souls suffered until finally escaping by dying and thus cheating their keepers of a few more years of sadistic pleasure.

Canada, of course, had its share of common debtors, fraud artists, thieves (petty and grand), murderers and other form of criminals that have haunted every country in the world since the beginning of time.

To control this element of society, gigantic fortresses of granite block, steel and glass were constructed from one end of the country to the other end.

The punishment gradually became more refined over a 100-year period from really sadistic beatings and mental cruelty to what it is today where the modern day form of controlling prisoners rangers from electric shock treatments and mind-altering drugs to subdue unruly prisoners to the 1973-74 period at Millhaven, B.C. Penitentiary and prisons in Quebec where the use of tear gas, guard dogs, and the ritual of savage beatings being administered by the 'goon squads' on prisoners who were usually handcuffed and shackled before being beaten.

I'm sure by now, that you readers are wondering where my rambling is leading to. I've read and re-read countless newspaper articles, magazine stories, books and reports on uprisings by inmates of almost all of the penitentiaries in Canada. Tearing down and burning their prisons didn't phase the powers-to-be. The authorities just rebuilt over the burned out areas. Massive hunger strikes don't work, the authorities would just shrug their shoulders and say, "What, worry? No way, they'll be eating only too quickly in a day or two." Work stoppages did work in some instances because guards had to assume various duties where prisoners were employed, i.e. cleaning duties, laundry, and in the most important area, kitchen duties, be it cooking, cleaning up after meals or just washing dishes. For these duties which the prisoners are paid a mere pittance, guards were paid overtime.

We are well aware that the public abhors the spending of millions of dollars for such labours when only thousands have to be spent, so usually work stoppages are ended quickly by prison administrations either by threats or by promising to 'discuss' the reasons for the work stoppage and giving 'consideration' to prisoners demands.

Now, finally, the reason for this article. For months, I have had dreams and daydreams of how the government would react if every prisoner in Canada, both male and female, just decided to say "NO" to everything from the time of arrest until finally released and kept saying "NO" until the government agreed to reforms to the whole justice system.

Commencing from the time of arrest, the whole "NO" process would be carried out. "John Milanson, you are charged with breaking and entering. How do you plead?" "Not guilty. I want to be tried by a judge and jury." "Do you want to apply for bail?" "NO!" If everyone refused to plead guilty and demanded a trial by judge and jury, the provincial jails would not be able to hold everyone and the courts would come to a standstill.

The process would be repeated upon entry into a federal prison. "Where do you wish to work?" "I don't wish to work. You cook my meals, you clean my clothes, you scrub the floors and do all of the other menial tasks. You aren't paying me so I'm not working." "But, you can earn remission and get free sooner." "NO, I can't. There isn't any such thing as earned remission as long as you have mandatory supervision so I'll serve all of my sentence." In a very short time, all the penitentiaries would be filled to overflowing and would be in complete chaos so the government would be forced to do something in order to get prisoners to work. When the time arrived whereby a prisoner was eligible for parole, the answer would be, "NO, I don't want parole."

The net result of simply saying, "NO", would be overflowing jails and penitentiaries, non-working courts and chaos everywhere. Either new jails and penitentiaries would have to be built, new staff hired, or the entire justice system would have to be overhauled. Judges would have to start giving realistic sentences; bail laws would have to be more liberal; prisons would have to pay prisoners a reasonable wage; legislation such as mandatory supervision would have to be abolished and the parole board would have to do their job by releasing prisoners instead of, as they do at present, finding ways to send people to jail.

What did you say? What was the reason for this article? I was just dreaming - what if everyone said, "NO?"

John Melanson

Reprinted from the Tocsin

CONVICTS CHOOSE PRISON OVER FREEDOM

Two prisoners who are eligible for release from Kingston Penitentiary have opted to stay in prison.

There are now a total of 10 men in area prisons who could be on the street if they wished.

One of the prisoners became eligible for release in 1982 but, rather than be supervised by parole officials on the street, he has chosen to stay locked up until his sentence expires in March 1986.

All prisoners - except those serving life sentences or indeterminate sentences as dangerous sex offenders - are eligible for release under mandatory supervision after serving two-thirds of their sentences.

Why would anyone pass up a date with freedom?

"The reasons are many and varied," says prison spokesman Dennis Curtis. "If someone's supposed to be released in another couple of months and it's the dead of winter, he might want to stay in where it's warm," Curtis said.

There are advantages, as well, that stem from legal technicalities.

This means he became immediately eligible for release. Con-current sentences are served simultaneously and are not added to the time spent in jail.

There are currently three men at Kingston Penitentiary, four at Joyceville one at Collins Bay and two at Warkworth Institution near Peterborough who are staying locked up longer than legally required.

Curtis says a prisoner who chooses to stay beyond has mandatory supervision date can't then "just walk out (of prison) on a whim" once he decides he wants out. He must give the correctional service about a week's notice.

But even during times of prison overcrowding, the men have a right to stay locked up until their sentence is completed.

SPIDER AND I

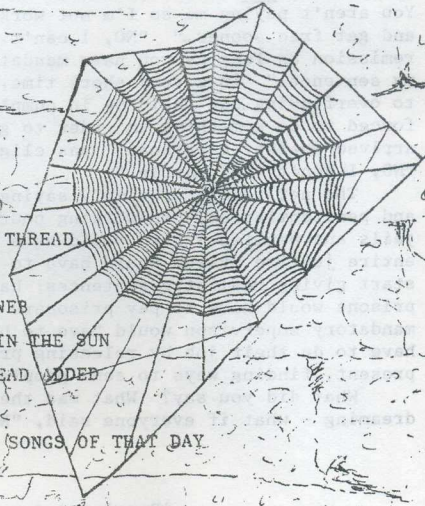
LITTLE SPIDER
ON MY WALL
SHOW ME HOW
YOU SPIN YOUR WEB
ROUND AND ROUND YOU GO
SPINNING THREAD AFTER THREAD
MY LIFE IS LIKE YOUR WEB
DELICATELY SPARKLING IN THE SUN
EACH DAY IS A NEW THREAD ADDED
EACH NEW THREAD HOLDS
THE DREAMS, WORDS AND SONGS OF THAT DAY

SOME DAYS WERE HAPPY
THE THREADS FOR THOSE DAYS
GLOW WITH THE JOY OF LIFE
SOME DAYS WERE SAD
AND THE THREADS SHINE WITH TEARS

THEN THE WIND RUSHES THROUGH
AND YOUR WEB IS BROKEN
ALL IT TAKES IS ONE GREAT CHANGE
AND THE WEB CHANGES

LITTLE SPIDER
WE BOTH SPIN WEBS
BOTH ARE FRAGILE
WE ARE TWO OF A KIND
YOU AND I.

Pamela Weiers
The Optimist
Vol.11, Issue 4 - Dec. 85



THE PRISON DILEMMA

Who is in Prison?

In order to qualify for residence and services it is necessary to 1) be accused of committing an act prohibited by criminal or other statutes, 2) be apprehended, usually by the police, 3) be found guilty of the act by a court of law, and 4) be sentenced to prison by the court.

The one single characteristic which is common to all prison inmates and which distinguishes them from "other people" is that inmates have been sentenced to prison. Many "other people" have broken laws as have inmates, but have not been charged and apprehended, or have not been convicted, or have been sentenced to suspended sentences, probation or payment of a fine. Only the prison inmate has been sentenced to prison, and that sentence is the "only characteristic of all prison inmates whereby they differ from other people."

While there is no validity for an assumption that criminal acts are not committed by other segments of our population, it is clear that if one commits a criminal act, his chances of landing in prison are markedly increased if he is poor, undereducated or native Indian.

How does one change in Prison?

When one arrives at a Canadian prison as an inmate, he is faced with a total transformation of environment: physical, social, economic and psychological. In response to these new experiences which would compose his new life, he would learn how "to do his time", and in the process would change, mostly for the worse.

The most radical change would be that resulting from his new identity. Regardless of his previous occupation, he is now entirely absorbed in the role of a criminal (an offender, a prisoner, an inmate, a "con"). Everything that now happens in his life would be based on this identity. All that happens to him inside the prison will reinforce his awareness of himself as a prisoner and a criminal. For a short while he may lose that identity and become involved in a trade that is offered, but the major reality to which he must adapt, if he is to survive, is that he is a criminal.

At times he may wish to assume responsibility for the acts of which he was convicted, and reassert himself as a reasonable and decent person, but his victims either remain unknown to him or are recalled as hazy, depersonalized entities whose suffering has no relationship to what he is now experiencing. He is absorbed in a completely enveloping process which was triggered by his criminal act, but in which that act is now almost irrelevant. The process is no longer concerned with something he did; it is now concerned with "him". It is engineered by "them" and except for maybe some small portion of him, it's got him. He is a criminal - housed, fed, scheduled, treated, mistreated, indulged, denied by "them". Either he resists - overtly or covertly - or he capitulates. He does not always understand what is happening to him. In most instances he merely responds and he is measured by his response.

The Prisoners' enemies and allies:

If one has been a member of the prison world before, he finds his place again very quickly. Instinctively he knows that the nature of his criminal acts has not only established his identity as a criminal or an inmate, but also his position within the hierarchy of inmates.

The Prisoner's Enemies and Allies cont'd.

The quality of responses he gets from staff members and from other inmates is significantly affected by the kinds of crime he is known to have committed.

Individual characteristics of toughness, consistency, an ability to look after oneself without complaint and to get what one wants, and the willingness to expose the "phonies" of the administration are viewed with admiration - and for the very successful, with adoration.

For the most part, the social life in prison is confined to the inmate population. Prison officials however, are also a very real power and must be taken into consideration, even though their influence on the daily routine is much less significant than that of the other inmates and the inmate power structure.

A guard generally deals with an inmate on an external level; more concerned with behaviour than with motivation. The guard is dealt with in terms of his attitude towards his role, and the relationship between prisoner and guard can become one of reasonable, comfortable antagonism. The classification officer and group therapists are approached very guardedly, until it is discovered that, while they play different kinds of games, "they really don't know what's inside of me" and "I can remain in control of the situation when I'm with them". An initial fear towards them tends to be replaced by contempt.

New Direction

The prison not only intensifies the very qualities in the inmate which are socially undesirable but also provides him with a reinforcing negative social context (the prison sub-culture which feeds into the criminal sub-culture outside the prison). By it's very nature, it tends to ensure that those subject to this sanction are increasingly likely to become constant repeaters of such prohibited behaviour.

In order to reduce the negative aspects of this dilemma, a number of programs exist (education, work, sports) in which individuals develop a positive identity of "doing" and have some value in encouraging individualism. One major drawback to this is when the criminal is trained in mechanics, for example, he is unable to lose his criminal identity and becomes a "criminal mechanic". The positive impact on the prisoner is very limited, although they do serve the important purpose of reducing tension within the institution.

Now here's the rub! The offender, being treated like an ordinary person, leaves unsatisfied the anger of the victims and those who fear they may be victims. In addition the general news media, which insensitively and disproportionately feature the dramatic and the pathological, fan the anger and fear to a degree far exceeding what is appropriate. Justified or not, this great reservoir of anger and fear is real and it cannot tolerate the 'bad guys' being treated as though they were not 'bad guys'. Give them vocational training, give them therapy, give them gifts at Christmas, give them pink and blue dormitories - but don't allow them to forget that they're criminals! Community anger demands that convicts be treated like criminals. Treating them like criminals, however ensures that they will continue to behave like criminals. The prison staff walks a tightrope; responsible on the one hand for appeasing the community's desire for retribution and on the other hand responsible to the demand that they make convicts into 'ordinary decent citizens'. Solomon confronted by an irreconcilable conflict suggested that the baby be cut in half; the prison all too often seems to carry out this suggestion, with gruesome consequences.

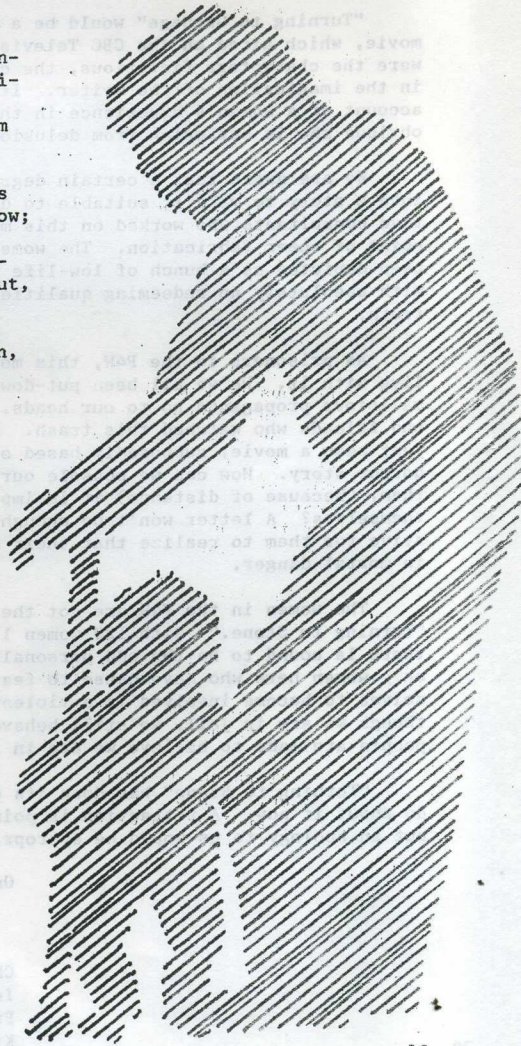
THE KNOCKER'S CREED

Man comes into the world with out his consent, and leaves it against his will. During his stay on earth, his time is spent in one continuous round of contraries and misunderstandings. In his infancy, he's an angel; in his boyhood, he's a devil. In his manhood, he's everything from a lizard up. In his duties, he's a damn fool. If he raises a family, he's a chump; if he raises a cheque he's a thief and then the law raises hell with him. If he's a poor man, he's a poor manager; if he's rich, he's dishonest but considered smart. If he's a politician, he's a grafter and a crook. If he's out of politics, you can't place him as he's an undesirable citizen. If he goes to church, he's a hypocrite; if he stays away, he's a sinner. If he donates to foreign missions, he does it for a show; if he doesn't, he's stingy and a tight wad. When he comes into the world everybody wants to kiss him; before he goes out, everybody wants to kick him. If he dies young, there was a great future ahead of him. If he lives to a ripe old age, then, of course, he's living to save funeral expenses.

Life's a damn funny thing, isn't it??

*This poem was given to me by my grandmother, who had it given to her by her uncle, over 70 years ago. Things have not changed too much, have they?

F.S.



TURNING TO STONE

This editorial was written on behalf of the women prisoners at P4W. It was sent to all major news publications, expressing our outrage at the movie "Turning to Stone".

Subsequent to this, we have the response of the film's director, John Kastner. You'll find his viewpoint entirely different from ours. Our response to his comments will be found on the page following his letter.

"TURNING TO STONE"

"Turning to Garbage" would be a more appropriate title for this CBC movie, which aired on the CBC Television Network, on Feb. 25/86. Not only were the characters fictitious, the complete story line could only dwell in the imagination of the writer. If this story was based on a factual account of a woman's experience in the the Prison for Women, then it is obvious she is suffering from delusions.

We are aware that a certain degree of sensationalism must be ingrained into a story to make it suitable to draw television viewers, but the creative consultants who worked on this movie have distorted the truth to the point of sheer fabrication. The women here at the Prison for Women, have been depicted as a bunch of low-life bullies, strung out on drugs and power, with absolutely no redeeming qualities. This couldn't be further from the truth.

As prisoners in the P4W, this movie angers and upsets us, but we can live with it. We've all been put-down enough times not to let a piece of malicious propaganda go to our heads. Our main concern is for our families and friends who watched this trash. How do we ease their minds? They've just seen a movie, supposedly based on fact, that is nothing short of a horror story. How can we console our families when, for the majority of them, (because of distance) it is impossible for them to visit and see for themselves? A letter won't be enough to alleviate their fears. It is imperative for them to realize that their Mother, daughter, sister or wife is not in mortal danger.

The women in the P4W are not the animals they were portrayed to be in "Turning to Stone." With 120 women living together in close confinement, there is bound to be the odd personality conflict, but these are rare. The only women here who have cause to fear violence, are those who allow themselves to become involved in a violent situation. We are women, and even though we are in jail, we still behave as women. Not the degenerates that people are made to believe we are in the movie.

"Turning to Stone" has done its damage and there is nothing we can do about it now. A retraction is pointless where the public is concerned; but an apology to us would be appropriate.

On behalf of all women prisoners,

J. Rousseau

Chairperson
Inmate Committee
Prison for Women
Kingston, Ontario

CRITICISM OF FILM ABOUT PRISON FOR WOMEN WAS PURE BUNKUM,
Producer Says...

Inmate committee chairperson Francine Rousseau's attack on our prison tele-film, Turning to Stone, was pure bunkum, and I'll bet she knows it.

She sweepingly dismisses the film as "garbage" (March 11). But what she neglects to tell you is that she was not even in the prison when the events portrayed were taking place, events she so authoritatively dismisses. How can you be so sure, Ms. Rousseau, if you weren't there?

But even if she were she would not be likely to write a letter warmly endorsing the film, if she had any concern for her safety. Readers of the Whig-Standard should understand that if an inmate - or a parolee in danger of going back inside - were to write: "Hey, thanks guys, for portraying those vicious goons we have to live with," she would not be very popular with those people, and would almost certainly have to face the music, which, as the film showed, can be very unpleasant.

However, other inmates - who were present during the events portrayed, and who feel sufficiently safely removed from the prison - have publicly endorsed the film, and vouched for its authenticity, in TV Guide, on CBC Radio's Morningside, as well as in other places.

Among Ms. Rousseau's most blatant misrepresentations is that the film depicted all the inmates as "a bunch of low-life bullies... with absolutely no redeeming qualities." This is quite untrue. There are several sympathetic inmates, such as Dunky, the solid con who wants to protect the heroine with no strings attached; Marcie, the tormented loner who slashes herself; Debbie, who spends her days in Seg contemplating suicide; not to mention Allison (the heroine) herself. That's more than half the cast (of principals).

It is perfectly clear that the film is not about all inmates, but about a single ugly aspect of inmate society, and viewers understood that, just as they understood The Godfather is about a particularly vicious element of the underworld, not about all criminals.

The fact is, the population of the P4W has changed dramatically in recent times, and a new inmate like Allison faces a majority of violent inmates. Twenty years ago most inmates were non-violent offenders, in for drugs, abortion and fraud. Lifers were a rarity. Today around a quarter of the population is doing life for murder. More than two thirds are in for crimes of violence.

Yet this matters little, according to Ms. Rousseau. All she will admit to is the "odd personality conflict". Oh sure, Ms. R. And doubtless the lion will lie down with the lamb one day, too.

Ms. Rousseau claims that Inmates' families were very upset at the prison horrors shown in the film. But I find it hard to believe that the families of inmates, who have been through the lengthy criminal justice process with them, are quite as naive as she claims. I do not know anyone who thinks that life in a maximum security penitentiary -especially for vulnerable first-timers like Allison- is anything but a dangerous and terrifying thing.

Turning to Stone was only part of the P4W's story. Another aspect of the story altogether will be seen in my documentary, Prison Mother, Prison Daughter, which focuses on the anguish of families wrenched apart by a prison sentence. It will be telecast on CBC TV this Fall.

John Kastner, Producer; Turning to Stone, CBC, Toronto

Major Newspapers
Editorial Dept.
Canada-wide

RE: Response to Mr. Kastner's Comments
"Turning to Stone"

In Mr. Kastner's editorial, he attacked the integrity of the inmate committee and the prison population at large. It confirms our belief that he shares the misguided opinion of the chosen few he has spoken to.

He questions our ability to portray the facts accurately, when we weren't present during the actual event, and yet he honestly believes the stories told to him by a few former inmates who simply could not adjust to prison life.

There are many examples during the film which raise doubts about the credibility of his facts. Four of them are: Allison appearing for a visit in her pajamas; another con coming in during one of her visits; the delivery of her skirt without it being logged and searched; and the fourth being that this is a multi-level security penitentiary, not just maximum security as Mr. Kastner has reported.

No one is stating that some of the events Mr. Kastner described could not have happened. We are only saying that it is a very one-sided viewpoint and happens only in isolated cases. To believe Mr. Kastner's film, is to believe that every new inmate suffers the same injustices that Allison did. If such were the case, then our protective custody unit would have to be modified to hold everyone that wasn't here on a violent crime. As it is, the majority, and we do mean majority, of women have little or no problem adjusting to prison life. A number of these women are first time offenders but, they still have the intuitive ability to do their own time. They don't need to check into P. C.

The 'safety' of expressing our viewpoints is not the issue here. Everyone is aware there is violence and drugs in prison. And everyone knows there are some dangerous people in jail. But under no circumstances could they be classified as 'vicious goons'. The only difference between us the people on the street is that we got convicted of a crime. Many people on the street are guilty of criminal activities but they just haven't been suspected or caught. They're still welcome in their neighbours' homes; and treated with respect. Why should we be classified as anything different just because we are in prison? Walking through that gate does not make us 'vicious'. It does not change our basic principals. We just do our best to adapt to a different living environment with a new set of rules.

Violence is not promoted every minute of every day. We develop new friends and families here and we defend them as we would on the street. Not always with violence (though some does occur) but with basic human understanding. Something we are still quite capable of.

Mr. Kastner seems to feel that we should fear for our lives when we walk the halls of P4W. He may be interested to know that, contrary to public belief, there have been NO murders in the prison's 50 year history.

Turning to Stone - cont'd.

There was no 'blatant misrepresentation' in the way we perceived the characters in the film. Mr. Kastner stands by 'Dunky', who may have helped Allison, but now without any strings attached. There was a strong sexual undercurrent present. That's what caused the friction between Dunky, her girlfriend and Allison. It would be too involved to go into what drives a woman to slash or to contemplate suicide, and these areas of the psyche are best left to professionals. Allison herself was a very weak willed person and hardly exhibited the redeeming qualities of a heroine.

If the film was not about all inmates, then why didn't Mr. Kastner qualify this by showing the normal aspects of prison living? Women being friends, helping each other and lending each other support. That happens here too, Mr. Kastner. A lot.

There seems to be some doubt about the lion laying down with the lamb. When it is possible to see some of our 'violent offenders' hiding tears during a love story on T. V., or playing with the children on family day, or participating in the Special Olympics or even giving some of their time to help organize events for other women here, then the lion has not only lain down, it has given the lamb a hug.

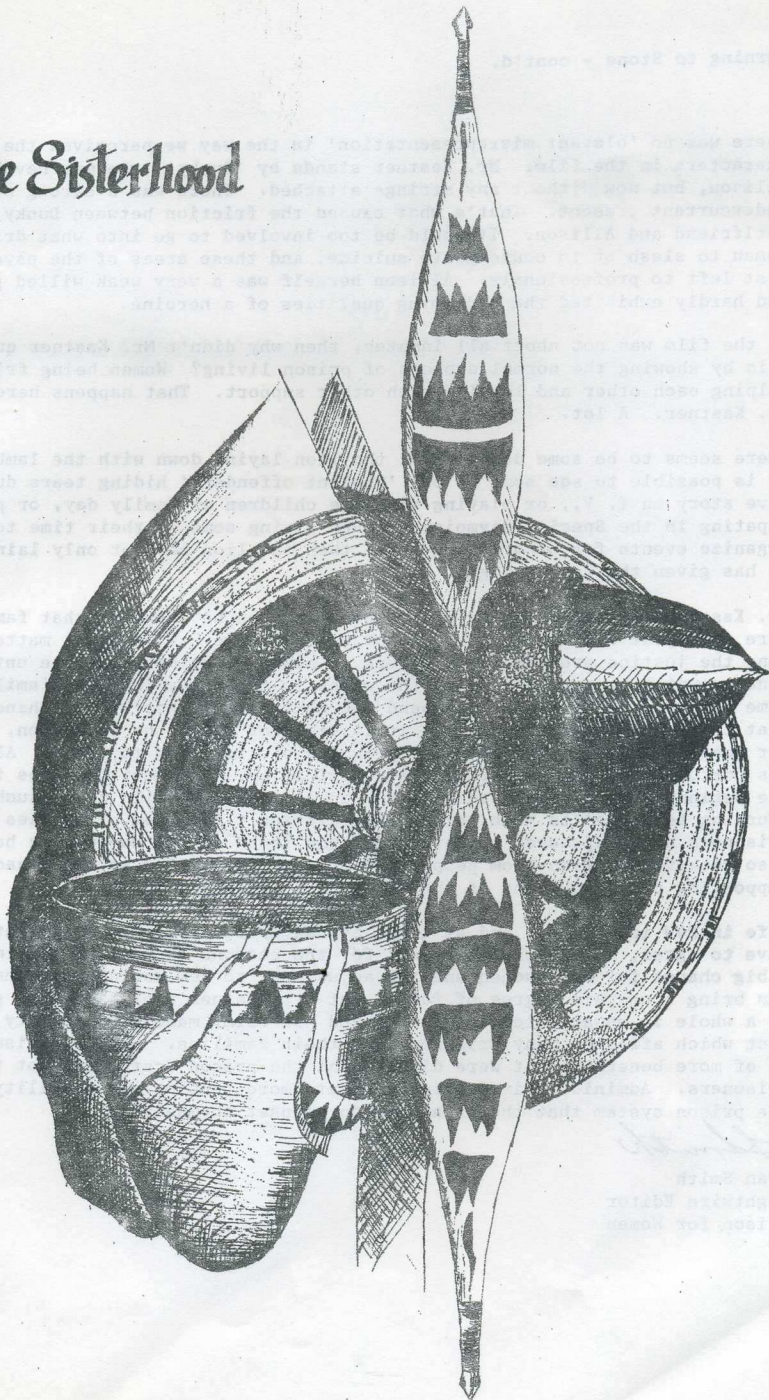
Mr. Kastner is over-stepping his boundaries when he suggests that families were not upset over the movie. A lot of them were. It doesn't matter how long the justice process takes; there is always a glimmer of hope until the final verdict is reached. Then the woman is torn away from her family and home and sent to Kingston, to spend the next part of her life. Chances are that the family has no idea what it is like for her to be in prison, and for most families it is financially impossible for them to visit. Allison was fortunate in that her father lived close by. For most families it is the beginning of a nightmare and they don't need a hostile film, such as 'Turning to Stone' to make things more difficult for them. Families of prisoners have expressed concern about the truth of the movie. We have also received letters from people in various communities across Canada, supporting our denouncing of the film.

Life in P4W isn't easy, and at times it can be terrifying. With that we have to agree, Mr. Kastner, but not for the reasons shown in the film. It's a big change for most women and the adjustment to new social environments can bring a certain degree of fear. But Mr. Kastner's criticism of prisoners as a whole is unwarranted. Both he, and his film, made a derogatory statement which affected many prisoners and their families. His criticism would be of more benefit if it were directed at the prison system and not the prisoners. Administrative policies create more tension and hostility within the prison system than the prisoners do amongst themselves.

Fran Smith

Fran Smith
Tightwire Editor
Prison for Women

Native Sisterhood



NATIVES NOT ONLY PEOPLE DRUGS AFFECT

Alcohol and drug abuse are not limited to Native people, or to Alberta. The self-destructive cycle of people in search of a high, of people seeking escape from a life they can't seem to tolerate, is reaching epidemic proportions in all age groups, at all economic levels, in all kinds of communities across North America and around the world.

Coverage of the Peerless Lake tragedy by the media in Edmonton might lead people to believe that this is only a Native problem, especially in isolated northern communities.

That is just not so. In the same week, the major newsmagazines "Time" and "Newsweek" had cover stories on drug abuse, clearly detailing how widespread the problem is.

Mass media coverage of reaction to the Peerless Lake tragedy (and our own coverage as well) does, however, point out a number of ways in which Native drug abuse, the problems associated with it, and potential solutions are unique.

While 12 year-old scotch or cocaine may be the poison of choice in executive and professional offices and beer is the favourite of the sports fans and the blue collar crowd, for the unemployed who have little or no money, cheap wine and anything else that will transport them to oblivion will suffice.

And while cocktail parties smothered in elegance and lines snorted through \$100 bills are the preference of the elite, are they really any different than a lysol party in an alley in terms of the intention of the participants to escape reality?

Obviously, the motivation for self-destruction is not directly related to wealth and position in society.

That does not, however, reduce the need for a considerable improvement in the living conditions of Native people in isolated communities. As many have said in the aftermath of the Peerless Lake tragedy, there is a need for improved training, employment, educational and economic opportunity, social services and health care. There is also a need for improved social and recreational activity.

The roots of the problem and the solutions, are far deeper and far more complex.

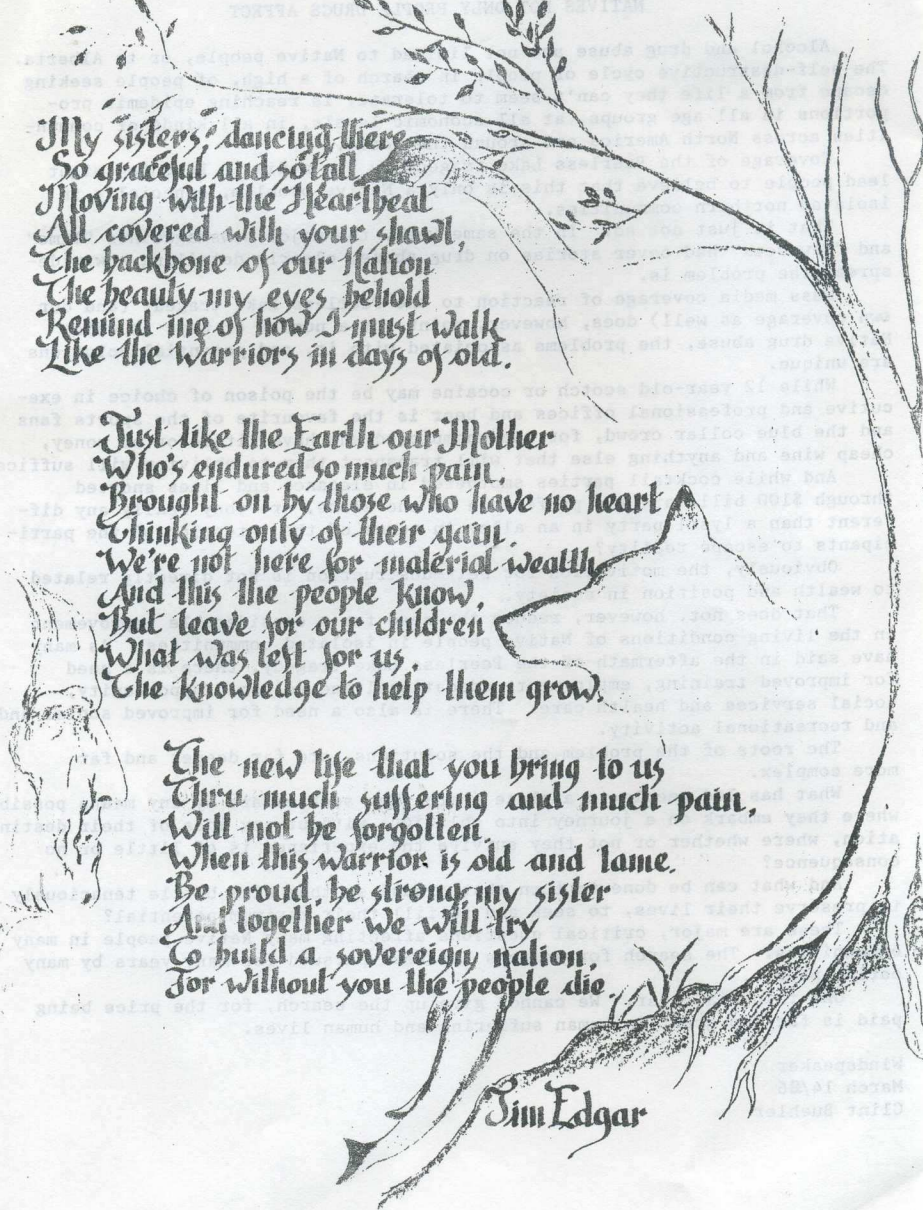
What has led people to a place where they seek escape by any means possible, where they embark on a journey into oblivion without any idea of their destination, where whether or not they survive the experience is of little or no consequence?

And what can be done to turn that around so they will battle tenaciously to preserve their lives, to seek and fulfill their maximum potential?

These are major, critical questions affecting many Native people in many communities. The search for answers has been pursued for many years by many caring people.

One thing is clear. We cannot give up the search, for the price being paid is far too great in human suffering and human lives.

Windspeaker
March 14/86
Clint Buehler



My sisters, dancing there
So graceful and so tall
Moving with the heartbeat
All covered with your shawl,
The backbone of our Nation
The beauty my eyes behold
Remind me of how I must walk
Like the warriors in days of old.

Just like the Earth our Mother
Who's endured so much pain,
Brought on by those who have no heart
Thinking only of their gain.
We're not here for material wealth
And this the people know,
But leave for our children
What was left for us,
The knowledge to help them grow.

The new life that you bring to us
Thru much suffering and much pain,
Will not be forgotten.
When this warrior is old and lame,
Be proud, be strong my sister
And together we will try
To build a sovereign nation,
For without you the people die.

Jim Edgar

Bands in Alberta are joining forces to fight the 1985 amendment to the Indian Act, known as Bill C-31, and have already filed a statement of claim against the federal government.

The suit, brought by the Sawridge, Sarcee, Blackfoot, Ermineskin and Sturgeon Lake Bands, who in turn each represent a treaty area in Alberta, was filed Feb 15.

However, Chief Walter Twinn of the Sawridge band, who is coordinating the joint action, says he is not ready to comment on it.

"My band and the other bands involved will be getting together this week to discuss this issue," he said from his office on the reserve.

But Twinn emphasized that the suit is not aimed at women's rights or the equality issue, as has been reported in the press.

"We've had a lot of bad publicity," he said. "People don't realize this action is not against women, and it has nothing to do with feminism, but rather Aboriginal rights."

Sarcee self-government liaison officer Bruce Starlight agrees with Twinn and points out that the government's push toward Indian self-government makes it essential that Indian nations are permitted to determine who their citizens are.

"We say Bill C-31 is unconstitutional because section 35, which recognizes our Aboriginal rights, supercedes the equality section in the constitution," said Starlight in an interview Monday.

Starlight explains that the Sarcee tribal tradition dictates that enjoyment of individual rights cannot endanger the collective rights of the tribe.

"The government's plan is for assimilation of Indian nations and the first seed has been planted with C-31," he said.

Starlight pointed out that not many bands can afford to take all the additional people who wish to regain band membership with the new legislation.

"If the government wants to give them additional lands and monies, that's fine with us, but we just cannot afford to have a large influx of people onto our reserve."

The Sarcee Band has recently formulated its own membership code and will be taking it to a local referendum April 16. The code is based on blood quantum, with an emphasis on Indian blood, not just Sarcee tribe blood.

After April 16, the band will drop the name Sarcee, which is the Blackfoot name for the tribe, and return to its original name of Tsuutina, which means Beaver people, says Starlight.

Starlight is also calling on other bands in Alberta and Indian Association of Alberta (IAA) to lend their support to the law suit.

"If we are to win this battle, we must have numbers," he said. "Any band can sign the suit and become part of it and the IAA in particular should lend its support."

Although IAA president Wilf McDougall was unavailable to comment, Treaty 6 vice-president Percy Potts said he felt it is definitely part of the IAA mandate to protect Aboriginal rights.

"The federal government imposed this bill which sets out who can be a member of any band," he said. "But I think it's only proper that bands who want the IAA to work on their behalf be willing to supply a band council resolution (BCR) to give us a mandate."

Windspeaker
March 14/86

A QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Should Canada restore the death penalty? There can only be one answer for a civilized western nation, and that answer is no.

With the prime minister pledged to a free vote in the Commons before his term expires, this issue will again provoke heated debate across the country.

Supporters of the death penalty, will, as usual, advance arguments that appeal to a large number of Canadians. If their campaign succeeds, it will be an unfortunate day for this country's tolerant tradition and humane values.

1) The Biblical case: The Bible does say, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but its general message concerns the sanctity of human life. Let's leave theology out of the debate.

2) The 'limitations' case: Most death-penalty proponents only want to restore the punishment for the horrendous murders - cop killers, repeat killers, mass killers and possibly terrorists.

But in terms of the central question - whether the state should, under any circumstances, deprive anyone of life - this issue is secondary. The real debate involves pragmatic and principled arguments. If these arguments fail, then the classification becomes an academic matter.

3) The 'deterrence' case: Now we get to the heart of the dispute. All available evidence shows that the death penalty simply fails to deter murder.

The most obvious example is the US, where statistics exhibit a rising rate of killings even where the death penalty exists in force. Advocates say that the murder rate in these states would soar even higher without a death penalty. They may or may not be right. Since we can't test this, we have to leave it aside.

The stronger argument that supporters of the death penalty have, goes like this. Perhaps the murder rate is largely independent of the death penalty's existence. Perhaps the deterrence rationale doesn't work in general very well.

The real issue, according to thoughtful supporters, is whether the death penalty will deter an individual killer in an isolated situation. If just a few innocent people are spared by a small deterrent effect, then the death penalty is worth it.

Everyone can sympathize with friends and families of people who've been brutally and maliciously murdered, and this argument has been an undeniably powerful appeal.

But the flip side of this position carries even more unattractive consequences. For this brand of deterrence doesn't require that only guilty killers be punished. Deterrence will work just as well if innocent people are put to death.

Every year in the US, figures reveal that a significant percentage of those killed under the death penalty provisions are innocent. In the most serious crimes, judges and juries are even more likely to convict unjustly because of the public's desire for a scapegoat.

A Question of Life and Death cont'd.

This terrible prospect of the state mistakenly killing people - innocents killed not by one criminal among us but by all of us - outweighs the claims of deterrence. Imagine the feelings of a friend or relative of someone who has been executed despite innocence.

4) The 'retribution' case: Murder creates a sense of moral outrage and a desire for revenge. Killing murderers provides the most direct satisfaction of this impulse for those of us close to deceased victims and those of us horrified by egregious crimes.

Stop and think for a moment. When you have taken 'revenge' for something minor or major in your life, how have you felt afterwards? The peculiar thing about revenge is that while it produces intense sentiments before it is accomplished, it invariably produces an empty feeling after it is achieved.

True solace does not always reside in doing to someone else what they did to you. It comes, rather, from being able to rise above the sins of the transgressor.

Other options exist for retribution - not death penalties but life penalties. If citizens perceive that the prison system is too easy on killers, then the solution lies in tougher penal provisions. Resorting to the death penalty merely avoids the question at the cost of something far worse.

5) The "democratic" case: If a majority of this nation supports the death penalty, that has a strong but not conclusive effect on the debate. For most people in Canada also support their rights, and rights are premised on a fundamental right to life.

At the centre of democratic rights is the notion of individual human dignity. When the majority of, say, Iran or Zimbabwe decides to persecute and slaughter their minorities, we correctly hesitate to call them "democracies." If anything, we call them tyrannies because they deny the concept of dignity and reject the notion of rights.

Canada wouldn't, of course, become a tyrannical country by reintroducing the death penalty. But it would debase the very idea of human dignity if the majority took it upon themselves to risk the death of innocent people for the sake of a collective social goal.

Genuine murderers do violate individual dignity, and that's why we lock them up. Canada shouldn't, however, engage in the same activity that they do.

Laurence Grafstein
Toronto Sun
March 27, 1986

CAN YOU WIN??

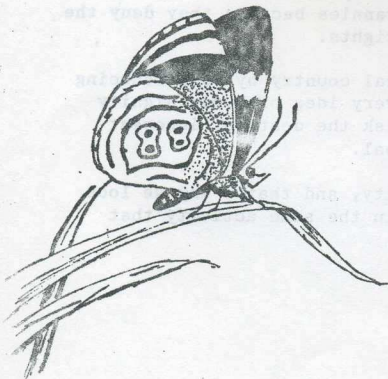
Can you win,
At this game called LOVE?
Or do you always lose,
And always feel
A little less each time?

Can you win,
At something
That was never meant to be,
But keep trying,
Because you feel LOVE?

Can you win,
Knowing it's useless?
Because what you LOVE,
Has barriers up
Should you still try to get them down?

Can you win?
Or should you
Just give up
Or find someone else,
Who can feel?
But can you give up
The one you LOVE?

DEBBIE GEGWETCH



WHAT IS LOVE??

What is LOVE?
Does anyone know?
Can you see it, feel it, smell it, be it?
Someone tell me, I need to know!

What is LOVE?
Can you give your all and not get hurt?
Is it right to give,
And not receive?
Someone tell me, I need to know!

What is LOVE?
Is LOVE suppose to hurt?
Is it suppose to tear you apart?
Someone tell me, I need to know!

What is LOVE?
Is it suppose to make you cold,
After you've been hurt?
If this is LOVE,
Then I don't need it!
But someone tell me, I need to know!

DEBBIE GEGWETCH

THE "RIGHT" TO VOTE...

The following is an article which appeared in the December 21/85 edition of the Vancouver Sun: It focuses primarily on the rights of prisoners in Quebec to vote in Federal Elections. It also speculates (with an unnecessary degree of dry humour) on the possibilities of prisoners participating in Municipal Elections.

While it has already been established that a well organized group can indeed sway the outcome of elections, it is also known that not everyone agrees when it comes to politics. Mr. Bewley believes that strong-arm tactics will be used within the prison to persuade reluctant individuals about whom they should vote. He fails to realize that we will have some privacy to cast our ballots and that the way we choose to vote will not be posted on the bulletin board for all to read.

While Mr. Bewley caustically views the rights of prisoners to vote as a major 'goof up' in the Charter of Rights; the prisoners themselves are claiming a small victory. To be able to elect a delegate who is both sympathetic and knowledgeable of the hardships endured by prisoners would be considered a breakthrough in having our concerns heard. It is hoped that the media coverage of parliamentary debates would result in broader awareness of the conditions we, as prisoners, must tolerate.

Prisoners at Stony Mountain in Winnipeg have recently experienced the 'full effect' of the ruling. No prisoners names were entered on the voters list in the recent provincial election. In spite of the Federal ruling, the provinces' Deputy Attorney General, Tanner Elton, upheld a decision made by Court of Queen's Bench Judge John Scollin to await the results of any appeal of the decision or a change in the current laws by the new government. It would appear that the only consistent rule regarding the Criminal Justice System is the right of "selective application".

F.S.

PRISONERS WITH POLITICAL CLOUT

A judge of the Federal Court of Canada, who himself is not permitted to vote, must have gritted his teeth last month when he ruled that 2,000 convicted prisoners in Federal prisons in Quebec had the right to vote in that province's recent election.

The court had to agree with the argument of the three lawyers representing a prisoner that our wonderful new Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees that "all Canadian citizens have the right to vote in any Federal or Provincial election," over-ruled the Election Act, which until then had denied prisoner-citizens that right.

One of the prisoner's lawyers - it is marvelous what mischief high-minded professors can innocently unleash when they set out to prove a fine point or advance civilization - was Professor Irwin Cotler of McGill University.

The professor, elated by his victory over the grungy old idea that those who break laws shouldn't have the right to elect the lawmakers, announced that he was "hopeful this would set an international precedent" and predicted, probably correctly, that this Charter ruling means that all convicted prisoners will surely gain the right to vote in other elections.

Prisoners with Political Clout cont'd.

The professor sincerely believes that is progress.

One can readily envisage the appalling or ludicrous consequences of this famous victory.

Politicians, who live and die by numbers, not principles, will now have to ingratiate themselves with killers, rapists, con men, thieves and scumbags, (He's gotta be joking!) outbidding each other with promises of goodies in order to curry their favour. Jailhouse lawyers, ably coached by campaign managers, will quickly educate prisoners about the power of block voting for a candidate or party. Those who decline may change their minds in the showers. They won't have to go out in the cold and wet to vote; their ballot boxes will be brought to them.

While the Charter of Rights refers only to federal and provincial elections, it could well be decided in future that prisoners should also have the right to vote in municipal elections. This could provide some interesting situations.

The District of Kent in the Fraser Valley, for example, has two federal prisons within its boundaries containing about 530 inmates. The municipal government of Agassiz in that district is elected from a small voters list of 1,879. In their last municipal election, 750 voters turned out. The mayor won by acclamation. The two aldermen elected received only 494 and 460 votes respectively.

Given the right to vote, the prisoners of Kent and Mountain prisons, properly advised, could elect the mayor and the council of Agassiz. They, and inmates of other prisons in the area, with over a thousand votes available, have the potential power to elect or defeat a member of the legislature for Chilliwack or a member of Parliament for Fraser Valley East.

Far fetched? Remember how easily the followers of Guru Bahwan Shree Rajneesh, voting en bloc, completely took over and ruined the peaceful little town of Antelope, Ore.

Nice going, Charter of Rights. Nice Going Professor

Les Bewley
Vancouver Sun
Saturday, Dec. 21/85

- * Speaking about a sixteen-year-old boy who was accused of offences against two girls, Mr. Stephen Coates, a psychologist, said at Luton Juvenile Court: "Previously he has been found guilty of offences which suggested a homosexual nature. These latest offences are at least a step in the right direction."

News of the World
Ben Wicks Book of Losers
McClelland & Stewart
1979

AS I WAS, ALONE

If I sought the truth and found it and expounded it,
shouted it and whispered it, sang it and offered it;
would I find one who would believe it?
Or would all doubt it and all ears turn away,
and all men leave me, as I was, alone.

I sought and found the truth.
By word and song and deed, I informed the world;
And the world laughed at me, and I wept.
I wept till my tears were dry,
And they left me, as I was, alone.

I wondered why the truth I found - the truth that might
set men free - had turned men to monsters seeking to kill.
They said, "Deny this lie you have told!"
And I was silent.
They said, "Then you must die."
I must go with them, if truth was to live,
and be, as I was, alone.

They shouted lies. With more lies they tempted me,
and they left me to die, as I was, alone.

B.J.H.



WOMAN AM I

Love me or leave me and let me be.
Woman am I, radiating every desire to be loved in ecstasy.
I'm cunning, sigacious and I'm capable of passionate caress.
If once dared, I'm never forgotten for the warmth I possess.

Not much to look at; perhaps not even your style,
But I challenge you, and I bet, you'll be around for awhile.
Age doesn't matter at all anymore;
What really counts is what's held in store.

Venus, she had nothing on me.
She was, and so am I, pleasingly plump, and little rounded at the knee.
Woman am I, and adequate in every respect;
Especially amicable, which is shown when put to the test.

Cleopatra had beauty; this I've heard said.
She ruled her lovers with her scheming head.
Eve draped in fig leaves and such,
Ruined poor Adam when he dared to touch.

Unforgettable, matters not which course you take.
So put your arms around me and to you this promise I make:
To embrace, admire and love you all I can,
All your wishes and more keep; for remember, Woman I am.

B.J.H.

A HELPING HAND FOR EX-CONS

It's a grotty little Bleecker St. office with a sign outside that says HELP.

It's also "the last house on the block" for many men and women who have spent years behind prison bars, doing provincial and federal "bits".

Every ex-offender who has ever tried to turn over a new leaf knows the only way to get ahead in this world is to work. But when you're fresh from prison with no more skills than it takes to wash a car, it's difficult to get established.

HELP - which is affiliated with Toronto's Frontier College, the oldest adult education institution in Canada, and funded by various bodies, including Correctional Services of Canada - is a job placement program run by and for ex-offenders.

Its Toronto office is nothing more than a renovated garage filled with cigarette butts and dilapidated furniture, but within those walls HELP offers hope to ex-offenders trying to go straight.

One look at 50 year old John Wilson's craggy face is enough to prove he's been around. "They're tired of bureaucracies" Wilson says of the ex-offenders who come to HELP directly from penitentiary and from half-way houses, flop houses or off the street. "They've either taken part of their money or they've put them through what we call bull----. When they come here, it's pretty cut and dry. It's right up front. We put it on the table: 'If you're ready to go to work, we'll endeavor to do our utmost to find you employment.'"

Every week, more than 100 ex-offenders, seeking casual, part-time and full-time jobs, drift into HELP. Three HELP field workers, ex-offenders themselves, who make from 25 to 30 calls a day to employers to see whether they need workers, try to match the client with the job.

"We are coming up with some good paying jobs," says Wilson, noting that his office has a 94 per cent success rate in placing people. "Basically, most of the jobs run from \$5 to \$7 an hour, but we are getting jobs where they're paying \$12. We just placed a fellow a month ago as the foreman in a paint shop. He's making \$12 or \$13 an hour."

Needless to say, some employers turn off when they hear about HELP, but that's all the more reason for someone like Wilson to keep after them.

"You do run into rejection," he admits. "You must be considerate of the fact that you may knock on an employer's door and someone in his family has either been robbed or had some kind of harm done to them by an ex-offender. Naturally, they have a bad taste in their mouth.

"That's the type of person that we go back to a second or third time."

HELP was founded in Kingston nine years ago by Tony McGilvary, who had spent more than 20 years behind bars.

A Helping Hand for Ex-Cons cont'd.

Word got out through the grapevine that he'd found an ex-offender a job at a Kingston bus terminal, and soon he was flooded with other requests for help.

During the first year, McGilvary literally ran the program from the trunk of his car, while holding down a full-time job to support his family.

In 1979, HELP became affiliated with Frontier College, and since then the program has grown. There are now offices in Brockville, Cornwall, Erinsville, Etobicoke, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

Al Adams, a thoughtful and articulate 26-year-old who used to dabble in break and enters, runs the Etobicoke office.

He's had a clean record for the past three years, but he'll never forget the scary feeling of being released from jail with only a few bucks in his pocket and no job prospects.

"HELP program helped me a lot," he says. "When I first got out, they ran with me. They got me some casual work - car washes and general labour stuff.... A few casuals later, they found me a full-time job in a factory.

"Ex-offenders are not only proving something to the world, they're proving something to themselves," he suggests. "You get that little bit of extra drive out of them."

Jack Pearpoint, president of Frontier College, which oversees the administration and management of HELP and provides tutoring for illiterate ex-offenders, says there are lots of job placement programs geared to helping them, but HELP is unique because staff members are, in effect, clients, too.

"Their qualifications are that they have spent time on the inside," he says. "They're credible with their fellow ex-offenders in a way that none of us straight Johns can ever be."

The Toronto Star
March 4, 1986

A SHAGGY SHOTGUN STORY

St. Louis (UPI) The Missouri Court of Appeals didn't buy the story of a man who claimed his wife's lover was shot in the stomach by his poodle.

The court affirmed Lawrence Freukes' conviction of assault for shooting John Schlereth March 16, 1982, at Freukes' home. Freukes, 37, had testified the gun discharged when his large poodle caught its paw in the trigger and knocked the gun to the floor.

Freukes' wife, Bernice, testified her husband had told Schlereth: "I'm in a lot of trouble. You've got to tell them the dog did it."

Freukes had said his 'open marriage' permitted his wife to have an affair.

THE CRIMINAL LAW SHOULD REQUIRE CANADIANS TO BE
THEIR "BROTHER'S KEEPER"

Law Reform Commission of Canada recommends duty of easy rescue. The Law Reform Commission of Canada released on Thursday, December 19/85 its Working Paper 46, entitled Omissions, Negligence and Endangering recommending that the Criminal Code be amended so that the State can prosecute a person who fails to assist another whose life is imperiled, where the accused is able to do so without serious danger to himself.

On release of the Working Paper, Commission President Mr. Justice Allen M. Linden said: "Most Canadians would find it shocking that in a country as caring as ours, a person can sit and watch a baby drown in a puddle of water without lifting a finger, and not be accountable either in the civil or the criminal courts.

Our criminal law should remedy this by taking a position which underscores the laudable values of our people, who are known throughout the world for their decency and humanity.

The Commission questions the traditional focus of the criminal law on acts which cause harm while neglecting omissions which can expose persons to serious harm or indeed actually harm them.

The Commission therefore recommends: "That the Special Part provide that everyone commits a crime who fails to take reasonable steps to assist another person whom he sees in instant and overwhelming danger, unless he is incapable of doing so without serious risk to himself or another or there is some other valid reason for not giving assistance."

The Working Paper further states that: "Murder consists in killing and not in letting die; arson consists in setting fire to and not in allowing to burn; and theft consists in taking property and not in its non-restoration to its owner. The law requires me not to hurt my neighbour, rather than to love him - it does not make me my brother's keeper. Now why should not criminal law treat acting and not acting in the same way? Why should not killing and letting die both qualify as culpable homicide? Why should not setting fire to and letting burn both qualify as arson? And why should not taking property and non-restoration of it to the owner both qualify as theft?"

According to Patrick Fitzgerald, a Special Adviser to the Commission: "The Commission is overcoming this 'legal tenderness towards omissions', by pointing the law in a dramatic new direction which would allow criminal liability for omissions in exceptional circumstances where the failure to act creates an exposure to, or actually causes serious harm to others."

To protect the potential rescuer who may be concerned about incurring civil or criminal liability, the Working Paper states "To guard against this problem, there would need to be written into the criminal and civil laws a "Good Samaritan" provision exempting those attempting bona fide rescue from criminal and civil liability for negligence."

Their "Brother's Keeper" cont'd.

This Working Paper presents the tentative views of the Commission at this time. The Commission's final views will be incorporated into the new Criminal Code which is now in the process of being drafted, after the Commission has taken into account comments which have been received both before and after publication of the Working Paper.

February '86

Accord: A Mennonite Central Committee

Canada Publication for Victim Offender Ministries



The most grossly neglected energy source on Earth is human energy. You all possess greater powers than you imagine. Thought, for instance: your thoughts can heal or cripple, nourish or destroy. Wield them wisely, always remembering that the twin of power is responsibility." Myrdin



tightwire

The Tightwire serves many functions. Primarily, it offers a platform for artistic expression to the incarcerated women in Canada's only female federal penitentiary. It also informs the readers of current proposals in law reform. Included in the format are short stories, poems, artwork, quotes, puzzles and jokes. We welcome any contributions in these areas. Especially those with a women's viewpoint.

Tightwire is published four times a year. In order to meet this objective, we are asking for financial backing through donations and subscriptions. Tightwire is self-supporting and we need your help in meeting our publishing requirements.

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