

**A Collection of Essays**

This book is a compilation of more than 20 essays gathered from a writing contest held in summer 2001.

The subject by the contestants was social consciousness with a view to publishing a book filled with views on social issues, such as health care, downtown decay, hunger, discrimination and policy issues.

Writers responded from around the world, giving readers a glimpse into the concerns and issues facing women in the West and in the Middle East, a physically challenged person living in Toronto as well as Canadian seniors. Some intellectuals took us on a journey into civilizations past and what their hopes are for the future.

What this collection gives us is a map showing us where we are and where we are headed. The challenge to the reader is what is to be done?

Editor Charlie McDougall

**Social Consciousness: Voices of the Concerned**

# SOCIAL

# CONSCIOUSNESS

## Voices of the Concerned



ISBN 0-9682925-1-8

PRICE: \$14.00

Participatory Direct Democracy Association  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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**A collection of essays**

**Produced by  
Participatory Direct Democracy Association**

**Winnipeg, MB  
Edited by Charlie McDougall**

**Published December 2001**

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## CONTENTS

FOREWORD Charlie McDougal	PAGE 1
THE ESSAYS	
1. [FIRST PRIZE] NOW WE KNOW Amanda Stephanick	2
2. [SECOND PRIZE] FREEDOM TO MOVE Rob Newman	4
3. [THIRD PRIZE] TRAGEDY Jasmine F. Van Gerwen	7
4. MISSING CHILDHOOD Jennette Adams	10
5. NORTH END BUS John H. Baillie	13
6. DO HOMEMAKERS HAVE SOULS? Ethel Barton	16
7. THE JUSTICE SYSTEM Jeffrey Belyk	18
8. NICE SHOES AND SPARE CHANGE Joanna Emery	21
9. BETWEEN DOORS Anne Fairley	24
10. REALITY TV AND DEMOCRACY Andrzej Kaczmarczyk	25
11. RESPECT — STILL NOT A GLOBAL RIGHT FOR WOMAN Sue Gupta	28
12. SEEING AND HEARING Benjamin Keating	30

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FOREWORD Charlie McDougal	PAGE 1
THE ESSAYS	
1. [FIRST PRIZE] NOW WE KNOW Amanda Stephanick	2
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12. SEEING AND HEARING Benjamin Keating	30

13. MY JOURNEY TO THE TRUTH Helena Lynn Keller	33
14. RESPECT Lorena G. Moroz	36
15. SALE OF THE HOMESTEAD Bob Preston	38
16. ESSAY Laressa Russell	41
17. THE FUNDAMENTALIST SIDE OF THE GOLDEN RULE Antonio Rossin	45
18. THE MYTH OF SONG Sybil Shaw-Hamm	48
19. HOMELESS Jessica Whitby	51
20. ANTICIPATING THE INEVITABLE E. Russell Smith	53
21. TRY TO IMAGE Janice Tait	56
22. TIME TO REFLECT: CHANGES IN RURAL LIFE Peggy Fletcher	59

SUBMISSIONS NOT PUBLISHED:

A BRIEF ESSAY ON THOUGHT  
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13. MY JOURNEY TO THE TRUTH Helena Lynn Keller	33
14. RESPECT Lorena G. Moroz	36
15. SALE OF THE HOMESTEAD Bob Preston	38
16. ESSAY Laressa Russell	41
17. THE FUNDAMENTALIST SIDE OF THE GOLDEN RULE Antonio Rossin	45
18. THE MYTH OF SONG Sybil Shaw-Hamm	48
19. HOMELESS Jessica Whitby	51
20. ANTICIPATING THE INEVITABLE E. Russell Smith	53
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## Introduction

At a time when governments are restricting our rights and spending more money on defence despite the view of public opinion which wants public subsidies to bolster social programs. Instead, governments are moving ahead with laws that restrict freedoms and remove trade barriers in deals that take decision-making authority from the hands of elected officials and transfer it to unaccountable private power.

As corporate power grew, it increasingly exercised this influence in the public sphere where it could sway governments to legislate in their interest. In America where campaign contributions are made in the form of 'soft money', 98 per cent of elections are won by the candidate who spends the most money on their campaigns.

As the line between government public interest and corporate interest becomes blurred, citizens are increasingly turning to nongovernmental organizations to act politically. In nine large countries the nonprofit sector is growing at four times the rate of the economy. Employment by nongovernmental organizations also outstrips the private sector by a margin of six to one.

The essays here reflect fears and anxiety that followed Sept. 11, as well as frustration met in other areas of life as a result of cuts to social spending. Poverty, urban decay and inadequate public transit systems have left most vulnerable in society — the poor, the disabled, the young, women and minorities — with less opportunity than ever before. In response, activists have carried out the largest wave of protests since the sixties showing a surging interest in democracy as people publicly express their dissatisfaction with the performance of their elected governments.

People realize that their governments are at least potentially influenceable by their citizens, and as Andrzej Kaczmarczyk points out in his essay "Reality TV and Democracy: From the Track Toward the Information Society," the technology exists to empower the public to directly influence the decisions that affect their lives. In the wake of the war on terrorism, writers, artisans and intellectuals more than ever must ask themselves if their work should serve the interests of power and privilege or do they serve their victims.

CHARLIE MCDOUGALL is a copy editor at the Winnipeg Sun and a politics student at the University of Winnipeg. He has been a member of the Participatory Direct Democracy Association for two years.

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## Now We Know

AMANDA STEFANIUK

Up to now, I always knew world peace was nearly impossible to achieve, but now I fear it may only be an illusion. On Sept. 11, 2001, North America experienced its first taste of serious terrorist action. Two hijacked airplanes were deliberately crashed into New York's World Trade Center buildings, and another plane was used to attack the Pentagon. Canada wasn't the target, but we still felt the impact. For the first time in its history, the entire air transportation system was shut down. Television, radio, and the Internet had only one story to report. All the petty problems of the day were forgotten for a moment as we tried to comprehend the images of man-made buildings on fire, spewing smoke, then finally giving away and crumbling. Hundreds of people were injured, thousands more were killed. This may very well be my generation's Kennedy assassination, the time when our way of life was changed forever.

While my heart goes out to the hundreds of thousands of people who have been affected by this tragedy, I can't help but think that this has been some sort of morbid learning experience. The world has always been unstable with radical violence, but this is the first time it's been so close to home. We now have first-hand knowledge of what some Middle East countries experience everyday. Our cultures may be radically different, we might not understand their language or their traditions, but at least now, we know what kind of uncertainty they live in. It may be enough to bring us together, but the pessimist in me says it won't be.

Now the American government is seeking revenge on the persons responsible for this crime. While this is just, and may deter future attacks, it's primarily a negative action and it worries me. As is the case with our society, we're more keen to label that entire region as the enemy rather than just the renegade group responsible. We'll grow to hate these countries even more, when we should be sympathising with the innocent citizens who are caught in the middle of this horror every day. This type of terrorism has been going on for years, but until now it hasn't affected us. By going after the terrorists now, America seems to be saying the western way of life is more important. I don't know if

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Once this disaster has been cleared, it is my hope that our countries — America in particular — will finally lend a helping hand to those countries whose regular existence includes this brand of terrorism. There will never be understanding without acceptance, and maybe now that we've been a victim, we'll have something in common and we will more readily want to help.

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## Freedom to Move

ROBERT NEWMAN

Every city has its defining features, and many people, when they think of Toronto, think of the CN Tower or perhaps the SkyDome. For me, however, Toronto's essence is captured in its transit system, complete with red streetcars plying the rails and subway platforms decorated with murals and sculptures.

When I came to the city from rural Canada, public transit was new to me, but I quickly grew to love the speed and efficiency of Toronto's subways, streetcars and buses. The TTC let me explore the city's multicultural neighbourhoods for the price of a subway token, and let me commute without the hassle of driving my own car. Transit also let me mingle with the many different groups of people in the city. I have met many friends on late-night streetcars and on the commute to university.

Considering the rapid population growth in the Toronto area, near-gridlock conditions on the roads, and the fact that Toronto just endured its smoggiest summer ever, one would imagine all levels of government would be pushing to expand the public transit system as much as possible.

Unfortunately, the reality is very different. Toronto has the dubious distinction of being the only city of its size in the industrial world that receives no transit funding from its federal or provincial government. At a time when the much more conservative governments of the United States are funding urban transit as an economic necessity, the Toronto transit system faces a bleak future. After eighty years of building the system in conjunction with government, the TTC faces a financial train wreck.

From a social perspective, this neglect of transit in Toronto and other Ontario cities is shameful, but as I reflect on my experiences with public transit, I also must wonder about the economic ramifications of a decaying transit system. I remember crowding onto a Spadina subway line with standing room only one rainy morning — the cars packed with businesspeople and high school students. Would all of these businesspeople still work in the downtown core if they had to drive through congested roads and find parking downtown? How much would it cost the taxpayer to provide school buses for all of these stu-

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dents if the TTC was not running? How would we cope with the extra congestion and pollution? These seem to be questions governments do not want to ask.

On a very different day, the air is crisp and cold as I leave a concert and trudge through the frozen snow along Queen Street West. I catch the last train north from Osgoode station, crowding into the subway car with a sea of college students and young professionals celebrating the end of another week. If there were no late night subway service, many of these people would have called it a night much earlier, or would not have gone out at all, leaving the club district with less clientele. Worse, some of them would now be driving on the city's icy streets after a night of drinking, endangering themselves and others. What cost do we put on a vibrant nightlife that attracts the best and brightest young workers and university students who want to live in an exciting and varied urban setting? What price do we put on a safe ride home?

On a warm autumn afternoon, a group of senior citizens board the Dundas streetcar with baskets of fresh vegetables from Kensington Market. Part of a growing demographic, seniors are especially vulnerable to government cuts to public transit. For many, it is literally their connection to the world. They take transit to shop, to visit, and to reach medical services.

It is the lifeline that keeps them in their own homes and their own communities. As transit systems cut services, many seniors will have no choice but to move into institutions, greatly decreasing their quality of life and increasing the burden on the taxpayer. Like young students, many seniors simply cannot and should not be driving cars. They need to have a choice of transit options if they are to remain healthy and independent.

Why do our governments not want to provide this choice?

The future of the TTC does not look favourable. The system needs three billion dollars over the next ten years to maintain its infrastructure, and needs a further three billion to fund a badly needed expansion in order to handle Toronto's growing population. Ignored by the provincial and federal governments, the system might soon shrink. During the 2000 fiscal year, Toronto faced such a serious budget shortfall that cuts, including the closing of several transit lines were proposed, and the elimination of Sunday bus service was also considered. Many

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other cities across Canada face similar, though not quite as severe, problems.

Large cities with high-density cores are not well-served by automobile alone. An extensive and efficient transit system is a key element in attracting new workers and businesses. The boom in the technology sector in the San Francisco Bay area occurred, in part, because young professionals enjoyed the lifestyle offered by a dense urban core served by a regional transit system. New companies sought out locations along the BART lines, and even car-dependent pockets such as Stanford and Menlo Park are well served by the Caltrain network. Canadian governments at both the federal and provincial levels need to realize that their investments in transit systems have enormous social and economic paybacks. The alternative is a Canada of decaying inner cities, poor economic prospects, and poverty for those who cannot drive a car.

I kiss my lover on the subway platform, linger just a moment too long, and miss my train. The TTC figures into every aspect of my life in this city, as it does in the lives of countless others from all walks of life.

At some level, public transit is not about infrastructure and route maps.

Public transit is about the freedom to move.

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## TRAGEDY

JASMINE F. VANGERWEN

Tragedy. Tragedy is the only word I can find to sum up the thoughts and concerns I have had in recent days.

In the last 48 hours, the world has virtually stopped and waited with bated breath. Everything hinges on TV coverage of one of the worst man-made disasters of the 21st century.

No one would have ever anticipated the horror, the death and destruction that could happen to one of the busiest centres in North America.

I've had nothing in mind that touched me so poignantly to speak of, until now. The confusion and questions all of us share will never have answers. Everyone can speculate as to what happened to the victims during the last moments of their lives. No one will ever know. All I can wish is that anyone who perished in these disasters had a chance to kiss their loved ones good-bye before they left their home for the last time. I hope they had the chance to tell them, 'I love you' or any endearing term that will give their families a good memory to hang onto for the rest of their lives. Time is so precious, as is the time we spend with our sons, daughters, husbands, wives, mothers and fathers. As limited as those instances are, at least it is 'time' whether in bad moments or in good moments.

Most importantly, we have learned whatever time you have left is precious time, regardless. I can't imagine a world where you no longer feel safe. There are enough challenges in life, whether they are diseases, accidents, poverty, or loss of any kind. Now we all are faced with this shocking tragedy and it doesn't matter what corner of the world you live in, we are all equally mortified.

There was a time when we had a sense of security from knowing the world we live in. This is no longer the case. The waves of consequences that now wash over the world, like a ripple of water, will seem insurmountable. The repercussions that follow were once considered non-existent. Sickening, as it is to fathom what course will follow, a war is only a last resort. This is a conclusion I hope all international leaders come to as well. We could wake up tomorrow in the midst of the Third World War. The human race as a whole depends on the rational and respon-

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sible decisions of our leaders.

People in general, regardless of race, creed or colour have come to accept each another and live in this world with a controllable level of animosity. Now, the course has changed. It is hard enough to imagine the genocide conducted in other countries. But now North Americans face the reality of terrorism in their own backyard.

There will be no appropriate way to explain this to future generations. It is a period in history that may breed only contempt and hatred. But it is up to our children to decide what path to follow. If a Third World War is realized, I can only pray that our children's path doesn't end abruptly.

Innocent children who have witnessed the recent carnage will be scarred for the rest of their lives. The violence and aftermath that will surround them is unthinkable. Every moment of every day to come will be scrutinized. Freedom, as we have known it, will cease to exist. From now on, any attempts made to retaliate will hopefully not endanger the entire human race. With respect to controlling terrorism, my only prayers are that this attempt is not in vain; at the cost of millions of lives as opposed to the thousands we have tragically lost so far.

It is my concern that any future attempt to retaliate isn't done as an act to save face for a nation that declares itself as the best nation in the free world. At this time, nothing remains free.

The grief by the minute, the hour, the days after, will be a horrendous burden for anyone to withstand. For those fortunate to survive, they will recover physically. However, the psychological damage will never heal. I recall the aftermath that faces the citizens of the United States. The horrible vision I imagined Sept. 11 was confirmed by media accounts in the newspaper the next day.

Watching TV with the rest of the world was surreal. Something of this magnitude could never have been projected in a movie. I had a sense of hope, as if I was watching a sporting event. I would repeat silently to myself, and at times out loud: "They have to get out, they have to get out."

Hoping that the precious one hour after the first crash would be enough time for most of the people in and around the buildings to somehow escape. This was followed by a lingering hope for the people trapped in the buildings. Though, as the days wear

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## Missing Childhood

JEANNETTE ADAMS

Every year when the back-to-school frenzy begins I am reminded of the growing commercialism, the pressures to achieve and the growing divide between the wealthy and the poor. As the media bombards us with ads about the latest trend in clothing and school supplies, which after-school activities to enroll your child in and surveys detailing the amount of money a family can expect to spend, the stress and quilt levels of parents rise. Is this any way to begin a new year?

Ever since the school uniform was discontinued, there has been a growing struggle between parents, educators and students as to what is appropriate clothing for school. At one time it meant clothing that was comfortable, washable and affordable. There was always a degree of pressure to have at least one item that reflected the latest fad and allowed the student to feel that they fit in. However, there has been an ever-increasing trend toward having the right “label” stamped on your clothes and carry the latest “cool-approved” binder or face inevitable ridicule. Parents are pressured into purchasing clothing and school supplies that they may find inappropriate, impractical and unaffordable. Some schools have resorted to imposing dress codes which has caused controversy not only from the students, but from parents who feel children have the right to freedom of expression. Is it freedom for seven-year-old girls to be bouncing around in midriff revealing T-shirts, wearing eye-shadow and spouting suggestive lyrics by the latest “designer” pop stars?

In 1981, Dr. David Elkind published “The Hurried Child”, which outlined the dangers of rushing children on the road to adulthood. Despite of growing evidence that children are suffering from stress-related ailments similar to adults, that violent behaviour among children and adolescents is increasing, and that millions of children are being medicated to make them “more manageable”, the pressures on children to grow up quickly have increased. A 1998 study by the University of Michigan revealed that the amount of “free time” enjoyed by children after sleeping, eating, personal care and school or day-care had decreased from 40 per cent to 25 per cent of the child’s

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day. Educators and physicians have expressed concerns about children being sleep deprived and having difficulty staying awake in class. Parents complain about hectic schedules of having to drive their children to all their activities. Books and workshops are now being offered on how to arrange “quality family time.” Is this an environment that is conducive to healthy, creative and well-adjusted citizens of the future?

In some segments of our society the number of extra-curricular activities children are enrolled in has become a status symbol for the parents. In less affluent segments, parents must plead and pressure community clubs to stretch meager budgets to provide programs where children can go to get away from the negative influence of the streets. In both these instances, the needs of the children are often overlooked. Whose childhood is it, the parents’, the governments’ or the child’s?

It is time for today’s parents to pay less attention to what advertising and corporations are saying and more attention to what people who work with children are saying. It is also time for parents to realize that they are the parent, it is their job to be a guide and role model for their child and not necessarily a cool buddy.

Surveys are being conducted regularly on the buying power of the “tweens” or “echo” generation. Numbers in the billions of dollars are being tossed about. Industry can’t work fast enough to produce more “stuff” to try and convince children, parents and grandparents that their products are essential on the road to success and popularity. Think about it: does more “stuff” really bring lasting happiness? Do toys that imitate the sounds and smells of nature provide the same stimulation as a walk in the park? Does a particular brand of running shoe make the child a better athlete?

Keeping children busy has always been a method of keeping them out of trouble. There are even religious quotes that scorn idleness, but where does being busy end and being overextended begin? Children should be encouraged to pursue interests outside of school. These interests should reflect the child’s abilities and fit into a manageable schedule for the family. If parents find themselves rushing to the school to pick up their child, eating their meals in their vehicle and dragging themselves home every evening, they need to re-evaluate the number and value of the activities that they are enrolled in. Giving children

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the opportunity to create their own activities and manage their own time provides a valuable learning experience. Where are the writers and inventors of tomorrow to come from if children are not given the opportunity to daydream and experiment?

Governments, industry and society as a whole need to invest in the future by providing a wholesome, nurturing environment for children. We need to bridge the growing gap between the segments of society. Do we do this by adding more money to the growing problem or do we encourage adults to take more responsibility for their actions and consider how those actions effect their family? We must remember that children learn by example. Do we continue to create new services or do we provide more support for the ones with a proven success rate?

We need to re-evaluate some of our philosophies and policies. Does money spent on the latest equipment provide as many benefits as hiring qualified, caring people to can spend time listening to the children and encouraging them? Does providing young people with more information always give them more knowledge or can it confuse them? How can we make all children feel that they can achieve their dreams? Let's strive to provide them with opportunities for positive experiences and allow them to have a childhood. Let's try to make the start of a new school year something to look forward to and not an endurance test.

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## On the North End Bus

JOHN H. BAILLIE

Ride the bus. See the world. At least overhear it.

I rode the North End bus many times in the 1990's. As a child in the 1960's, I never rode the bus to school in suburban, south-west Winnipeg. I also never saw one other person who was not white, or who spoke a different language than English.

Take the North End bus home, any given middle of the day. If you have the ear for it, you will distinguish five, maybe six different languages being spoken. Tagalog. Other Asian dialects. Ukrainian.

Yiddish. Some English, in varying degrees of grammatical inaccuracy.

Follow your ear, look around, and see that no one skin colour predominates in the people sitting about you. There are many shades of tan and brown. Other shades inaccurately defined as red and yellow. Degrees of white, from pale, to pink, to grey.

When I moved to the North End, someone who had never been there commented "How wonderful. Such an ethnic melting pot. I imagine all of you sitting together on your porches sharing regional foods." The reality? A week after I moved in, I was able to locate an address mentioned in the newspaper as being two blocks away where a white racist had beaten a native woman to death. Yes, the bus is an ethnic melting pot, where people from different backgrounds do come together willingly.

But no, the different groups do not mix. Each group sits by itself, speaking its own language only to itself.

Teenagers do mix, speaking the same non-expressive language no matter their background. Giggling. Swearing. Inarticulate expressions of confused, simple concepts. A black girl gave a speech once, in which the only item she stated with certainty was that a friend's behaviour in some previous incident definitely constituted "Betrayal." Capital B intentionally implied. Disturbing as the message was, there was a strangely appealing dramatic urgency to the authority with which she spoke the line: "And that's Betrayal."

Other teenage conversations are comprehensible enough, but the thinking that motivates them is not. Two girls, perhaps fourteen, talking very gently, very seriously, late one evening: "I know I'm going to get pregnant, I just don't know when." A mes-

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sage emphasized by the fact that no matter what time of day or night you look out the windows of the bus, you see single, very young women on the sidewalks, pushing babies in every sort of carriage.

Another time, coming home from work, going to the North End. Two different conversations on the same bus. A nineteen... maybe twenty-year-old boy behind me, very matter of fact: "I got really drunk, and didn't show up for work; so I got fired, but f- it, there's always another job. I dunno."

Two girls — seventeen? eighteen? — sitting across from me. The older-looking, sadder one cannot find work. Quietly laments the circumstances obstructing her. Poor education. Little skill. She wants to better herself. Then cheers up considerably talking about how she beat up another girl at a party.

"I just sat on her and punched her in the face."

Travelling to work, going away from the North End, the crowd is different. Mostly white. Generally silent. Except for the occasion when two native boys came aboard, carrying an after-aura of recently enjoyed joints. They happily bantered with each other at the top of their lungs all the way to Portage Avenue. The regulars had a hard time pretending they were not aware of what was happening.

Weed-happy, although noisy, is cheerful. In earlier years, I used to ride the bus west, down Portage Avenue. I discovered then, on more than one occasion, that a drunk on the bus is no fun at all. In all truthfulness, I must admit I have yet to encounter a drunk on a North End bus.

Solvent abusers are another matter. Previous experience tells me drunks come out at night. The pot smokers were there first thing in the morning. The glue sniffers I have encountered on North End buses all ride sometime between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

They are not noisy. After practising their habit in the supposed solitude and security of a public transit seat, speech is difficult. But the ensuing reek of glue renders at least half the bus uninhabitable for other riders not so inclined.

In that situation, I always ask myself the same question: should I let the bus driver know? Always, on reflection, I have to answer: How can the bus driver not know?

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Always there, rarely active, other than to ensure we move from point A to point B and all stops between, on time. But not without personality.

A North End bus driver says “Hello” and “Good night” to you. To everyone.

I wish I could be as impartial, as non-judgmental as the men and women who drive the North End buses. Is it mean spirited of me to record only negative recollections of bus riding? I have witnessed just as many incidents that were pleasant, even delightful, while riding a North End bus.

It is my own human nature that inclines me to focus on the incidents that disturb, annoy, anger, and sadden me. This act speaks of me, just as the incidents I relate speak of the dysfunctional aspects of a “lower class” neighbourhood in a contemporary North American urban setting. The alienation, the lack of social integration of disparate factions living so close together, the barriers that seemingly cannot be overcome, the despair and emptiness lying in the future of too many of our youth, and even the inherent violence, are all there.

But I believe the lesson I must come away from all this with is exactly that of the bus driver. I must be non-judgmental. I should not deny, or even try to hide how I feel. But neither should I condemn what motivates those feelings. If I admit what moves me, I am aware of what those motivations are. Awareness is to be embraced just as condemnation should be rejected.

There is much to be gained from riding a bus with open eyes, open ears, and especially an open mind. Insight that comes as a bargain — at any fare.

Knowingly dependent upon the good will of his readers, John H. Baillie is a Winnipeg writer who likes to think of himself as an independent scholar.

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## Do Homemakers Have Souls?

ETHEL BARTON

I'm a roving reporter. I cover the latest social issues and trends. Lately I've become interested in a group of people who are known as homemakers.

I've been told that they actually stay home, keep the home fires burning and look after their children. Now here's the clincher. They don't get paid.

Imagine that.

These people must truly be nobodies. I decided it was time to interview some of these beings to see if they possessed souls?

Where to stock such a creature? The supermarket seemed like a good place to start as they must need to stock up on food between soap operas or whatever mundane activities they are involved in.

I spotted my first target walking aimlessly through the bakery section. She was a trifle overweight and her eyes looked rather tired, perhaps due to watching too much television. She was moving disinterestedly, giving a package here and there, an unsuspecting pinch. Surely this was one of my prey. I advanced timidly and summoned the courage to ask the degrading question. "Madame are you a homemaker?"

"What did you say?" She asked as she pinched a loaf of raisin bread.

I tried to speak louder. "Are you a homemaker?"

"No, I'm a lawyer and I'm on my lunch break."

She reached out and squeezed a package of cinnamon buns.

"You just can't get freshly baked goods anymore," she lamented.

I apologized for mistaking her for a homemaker.

"Oh, don't feel bad. My mother's a homemaker." She said brightly as she continued her round of the bakery section.

I decided that I would have to be more discerning in choosing my next victim.

She was walking by the canned goods area when I accosted her. She looked very ordinary, except the hair at the back of her head was matted. Surely, this must be one of them.

This time I advanced confidently. "Madam, are you a homemaker?" I asked.

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This time I advanced confidently. "Madam, are you a homemaker?" I asked.

"Most certainly not," was the tart reply. "I would never be a homemaker, it's too boring."

"What do you do then, for a living? I mean."

"I work for a soft drink company. I check the bottles to make sure there're no surprises in them," she said forthrightly.

"We're having sole for dinner."

"Sounds exciting," I replied.

"Yeah, it is and I get paid for it."

That was the end of it for me. I was as mystified as when I started. I decided to shelve the homemaker topic and do something on a more

She then strapped her kids into their child-seats and sped out of the parking lot.

After this episode, I felt defeated. Where were these elusive creatures?

Just then I noticed a smart looking woman pushing her shopping cart toward an exit. I thought perhaps she could help me. After my first two faulty attempts I was afraid to get right to the point so we chatted on a few other topics first. She answered my question intelligently and then I hit her with the big one.

"Do you know any homemakers and do you think they have souls?"

She laughed and just then two children ran from a bubblegum machine by the door and grabbed her around the knees. Suddenly, her image changed in front of me. Her eyes became duller and her speech less articulate.

"You're one of them, aren't you? I stammered.

"Yes I am," she said quietly.

"Do you have a soul?" I demanded.

"Sometimes I do, especially at night after the kids are all tucked into bed," was her bland reply. She then pushed her cart out the door with the children still clinging to her knees.

I ran after her. "Madam, what does that mean? Do you or do you not possess a soul?

She laughed wickedly and answered. "Socially relevant topic — the severe shortage of affordable daycare."

Ethel Barton writes mostly fiction and she's had two short stories published in magazines. She wrote this piece several years ago after an outing where some people she met seemed incredulous that she stayed home and hadn't died of boredom.

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## The Justice System

JEFFREY BELYK

When I read the paper or watch the news I believe there is a social concern that every Canadian should give attention to. Of course many people have differing views and individual concerns pertinent to their needs or desires for our future, but one always stands out. The great justice system that has allowed our country to expand its borders to harbour the criminals of other countries. Mafiosos, drug lords, murderers any and all criminals from near and far are welcome here. Sure, there is a possibility they will be brought up on charges here, in Canada, but the chance that their sentence will match the crime is slim.

How did this happen? Where is there any vacant room in this country for intolerance? One might ask himself, or herself, how these criminals were dealt with before the courts became compassionate for the criminals? Well, we had sentences that matched the crime. You killed someone and you were hung or shot. If the courts failed to find justice then your family would carry out the sentence. An eye for an eye. Would the public today regard a vigilante as a criminal. I wouldn't. Actually, I would embrace someone who would take justice into his or her own hands because clearly the judges of today are far too lenient. At times I feel as if the judges are acting criminally by allowing criminals, convicted criminals of horrendous crimes, to walk away with such unfitting sentences. Who is to blame for this? I would blame the government and our elected officials for their approach to this dilemma and their priorities. These officials should be allotting more time and attention to the justice problem and aggressively search for a resolution.

Compared to countries that do not tolerate crimes and their criminals we are a Mecca for these individuals. I don't want them here. Take down the Welcome Criminals signs that are on our shores and at our airports. The standards that are operating in the courtrooms, in reference to judges primarily, should be set at a new level to begin a campaign that will deter criminals. What an idea! Start displaying the harsh realities that will meet criminals at the courtroom door. The Crown should not be plea-

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bargaining when the crimes are so serious and life-altering to so many people, including the victim. People are not understanding that a murder charge can be plea-bargained to manslaughter that will carry a maximum sentence of five years! I will have anyone know that if, heaven forbid, some scumbag killed a loved one of mine — I would dedicate my life to providing that person with extreme suffering, both mentally and physically, that I would have them endure for the rest of their life. I would not want them to breathe easy ever again and I would give up my life to fulfill that commitment. I would not for a second leave the possibility of the courts bringing that criminal to justice as a possibility. I have no faith in the justice system. It is a joke, and that is exactly what the criminals know.

Lobby your local politician. Most politicians make the vague attempt to convince you that they will do what they can to address the issue. Rather than address the issue, define it. Come to the conclusion that there is a problem — a big problem. Solve it. Pass a bill that will historically change our non-existent justice system and create a system that will deport immigrant criminals seeking refuge. Surely they are coming here to avoid persecution from their crime, but make them accountable for what they did. Establish a justice system that will demand respect and attention from other countries. By that I surely do not wish to kill convicted murderers, rapists, child molesters or pedophiles. Send them to jail for the rest of their lives. Take away their rights. They gave up those rights when they decided to fulfill their sick, twisted desires and commit atrocious acts. Take away televisions and any luxuries they once bathed in. Let them relish in their evil doings. People might question where we will keep the criminals but if we ever introduced such a system, crime would decline, guaranteed.

When I discuss our relic justice system that caters to criminals, we must also scrutinize the failed Young Offenders Act. If you do the crime, you do the time. Absolutely true. With this statement it is detrimental that we assess the youth crimes on an individual basis. Facts show that young offenders are more likely to repeat their crimes and the rate of aggression rises substantially. Give them one chance, after that throw the book at them regardless of age or gender. Being a realist, I am com-

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passionate toward youths from broken homes who have been beaten, raped or neglected commit crimes. We should be providing workshops and rehabilitation to these kids, after all they might need just one opportunity to succeed, one chance to change their lives. That said, we cannot wander from the goal of tackling crime and criminals so once that chance has been given, we must strictly adhere to the regulations and vow that every case be regarded in the same fashion. It is their life to live, their life to lose if they choose to become career criminals. Life is a privilege and if you don't treat it that way, you don't belong. Sorry.

My social concern is that criminals have more rights and freedom than I do. If some thief breaks into my home and I protect my family and home by whatever means necessary or needed, I could be charged, convicted and jailed. Welcome to Canada.

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## NICE SHOES AND SPARE CHANGE

JOANNA EMERY

“Nice shoes.”

The receptionist winked at Frank. No response.

“Are they new?” She was obviously undaunted by Frank’s attitude.

“Yes, thank you,” muttered Frank.

So what if she thought he was a sourpuss. Frank didn’t care. He never really seemed to care about anything. At least, that’s what anyone who worked with Frank thought. Frank Bedows — the middle-aged, balding, robotic, workaholic epitome of the twentieth-century man who didn’t care.

He was a rock in the world’s hard places.

The most beautiful model in the world could walk up to Frank and plant a moist, luscious kiss on his lips. Frank wouldn’t bat an eye. Every computer screen in the office could flash warnings about an impending meteor about to hit the earth and obliterate all forms of life. Frank might let out a sigh but that would be it.

Frank turned the corner and pressed the elevator button. He cast his eyes downward and almost smiled. Almost, but not quite. Yeah, they were nice shoes. Three hundred and fifty bucks worth of good-looking, made-in-Italy leather. For two weeks they had been propped up in the display window on Bloor Street. Frank eyed them every morning on his seven minute walk from the subway to the thirty-two floor high-rise where he worked. He had even decided to go in last Thursday and try them on. That was, until the local vagrant intercepted him.

“Spare change, mister?”

It was that vagrant again. Frank bit his lip and tried to remember the old guy’s name. Ruby, Rupert, Robbie. Yeah, Robbie the Rubbie. That guy was a fixture outside Frank’s office building. Wearing a tattered sheepskin coat and dirt-black running shoes, Robbie always asked the same thing. Same words. Same pitch. A forthright tone, direct, if not rather pleasant.

Robbie lived at the corner. Everyday he asked for change and everyday Frank shook his head and walked on.

But that time, Robbie was in the way. Frank huffed as loud as

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a steam train and abandoned the shoe store. The next day, Frank was prepared. He bolted for the shoe store and pushed Robbie aside before the poor guy could utter a syllable. Frank slid in like a pro. Two minutes later, the shoes were his.

Frank got into his cubicle and turned on the computer. He was admiring his shoes when the boss came in and sat on the edge of Frank's desk.

"Morning, Frank," He didn't let Frank answer but went straight into conversation.

"Cold out isn't it? Well, that's winter for you. Say, Frank. Oh, new shoes?" Before Frank could respond the boss continued. "You're a good employee, Frank, but I'm concerned. Your stats aren't up to par. We're losing clients. They say you don't have that same enthusiasm."

Enthusiasm? Frank stared at his shoes. Who had enthusiasm anymore?

Maybe the boss was right. The only enthusiasm Frank had felt in the last few years was buying these shoes. Okay, the London Fog trench coat he purchased last month came close. Those things made Frank happy. If not happy, then at least pleased. If he cared even the tiniest bit about something, that would be the new shoes and the trench coat. Right?

The boss went on for several minutes about how Frank was lucky to have a job in these stressful days. Maybe Frank just needed a long weekend or short vacation. Take a break, said the boss. Come back, refreshed, ready to face the world and the work you do so well. Only this time you'll feel more human. But Frank wasn't listening. He was still thinking about the enthusiasm part.

When the boss left, Frank stared at his computer screen. Minutes went by.

An hour. Two. Frank wrote one sentence. He printed it off and put it on the boss' desk. No one saw Frank do it. No one except the mail boy. He threw a stack of envelopes right on top of the "I resign" note. He didn't care. Neither did Frank, who was by this time walking straight out of the building.

"Mister?"

Frank knew the voice. It was Robbie.

"Spare change, Mister?"

Frank didn't think twice. He fished through his wallet and held out a handful of bills.

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"I've got fifty, no, sorry, make that sixty. It's yours if I can have your coat."

Robbie's blue eyes widened and his mouth hung open.

"Your coat?" repeated Frank. "Do we have a deal?"

He thrust the bills into Robbie's face. "Here, take it."

Robbie blinked in confusion and snorted. That turned into a chuckle, then a laugh that roared so hard his whole rail-thin body shook. Robbie wasn't stupid. This must be some kind of a joke. People played jokes on vagrants like him all the time. Kids teased him daily. Adults commented rudely. Someone put foreign money in his hat. To Robbie, funny money was worthless.

Others weren't so subtle. Like the time a guy pretended he'd been attacked and called the cops over to arrest Robbie. Not that a night in the slammer would have bothered him. That was like a hotel room with room service compared to the street.

"Cold, ain't it?" mumbled Robbie.

"Yes," answered Frank quickly. He took off his flawless London Fog trench coat and held it out. "Silly of me. Here, take this." Frank shoved the bills in the trench coat pocket. Robbie blinked.

Frank was proud of his new coat. He found his own corner a few blocks away and started the job. No one gave him much money, though. Then he realized. The problem was at his feet.

Frank was still wearing his three hundred and fifty dollar shoes.

"Damn, things," muttered Frank.

Never mind, he thought. The leftover coffee wasn't too hard to fish out the garbage. It poured nicely over the black leather, like mother's milk.

The shoes were perfect. Frank knew it. It felt good.

So good, it made him smile.

Joanna Emery was born in England and raised in Ottawa. She received a Humanities degree from McMaster University in 1989 and has been published in various magazines as well as the anthology, "Animal Blessings." Her first children's picture book, "Melville Smellville" will be released this fall. Joanna lives in Dundas, Ontario with her husband, three children and three Siamese cats. She has never been able to afford \$350 shoes.

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## BETWEEN DOORS

ANNE L. FAIRLEY

"Pardon me. What did you say?"

"Have you some change?" the teenager whispers, his head lowered, averting her eyes.

"What for? Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Let's go inside the mall."

He follows her through the revolving door. They walk toward the fast food outlet.

"What would you like?" she asks him as they reach the counter.

"Anything."

"Well, choose something, a meal, drink, salad?"

"Fries, chicken sandwich, large milk, salad," he says then adds "another large milk. If that's okay?"

"And you?" the server asks.

"Nothing, thanks, I've already eaten," the woman replies.

"Thanks," the teen says as she pays the bill.

"Why are you standing between the entrance doors?"

"Don't know, nervous I guess."

"You seem well-dressed, prepared for the weather."

"Yeah. From up North."

"Are you trying to find work?"

"Need more training. Couldn't find anything in our town. Mom sent me to Winnipeg to stay with Auntie."

"Why?"

"Learn computers. Can't get jobs if you don't."

"Didn't living with your aunt work out?"

"I have a place to sleep. On a mattress. But she has too many others to feed."

He picks up his meal and they walk to a booth.

"You're tidy. Look okay for an interview. Promise me you'll try to find work or a training program."

"I'm trying. I'll keep on," he says after draining one carton of milk and opening the salad pack.

She senses it's time, so she wishes him well.

As she walks away she thinks of her grandson in college and hopes she'll never see the young man standing between the entrance doors again.

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## Reality TV and Democracy: From the Track Toward the Information Society

ANDRZEJ KACZMARCZYK

In my native country of Poland, a new phenomenon has appeared: TV reality shows. First, we had a Polish edition of the famous Big Brother on one channel, then other competing shows called Two Worlds, Amazons and Gladiators. More and more shows turned up on other channels.

Reality TV has its aficionados and adversaries, arousing emotion and discussion. Some people call it innocent entertainment. Others deem reality TV a vehicle that carries a load of trashy manners, threatening deeply held values. Polemics in the public media, as well as a letter signed by a dozen high-profile men argued reality shows are a menace for high culture dissemination, and that it lowers cultural standards of the whole community. Similar arguments probably are presented in polemics all over the world. In France, adversaries of reality TV additionally protested against restriction of personal freedom of the reality show participants locked in the Big Brother's house for the whole period of the show.

Reality shows pose a component of arising culture of the information society and it's worth to have a look at the subject in this aspect.

It's neither possible to reject arguments of reality shows adversaries, nor one may defend a thesis about perfection of the information society culture. At least, let's notice in defense of the reality shows, that always, not only in conditions of information society, popular culture existed beside the high one. And furthermore, with time some phenomena of popular culture, boorish and bawdy — for example the figure of Till Eulenspiegel, Guignol and other characters of puppet and popular theatre — underwent refinements and have gotten into the high culture. As for the restriction of personal freedom by reality show participants during the taping of the shows, they take part in it voluntarily.

But what is more significant in the birth the information society than reality TV is the democratic paradigm of this new culture. It's obvious that new paradigm will be well-fitted to the nature of the global information society, which is charged with

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But what is more significant in the birth the information society than reality TV is the democratic paradigm of this new culture. It's obvious that new paradigm will be well-fitted to the nature of the global information society, which is charged with

information commonly available in electronic form, and which uses it in all kinds of public (as well as private) activities. In these conditions, the information society will undoubtedly be an open, participatory community, putting into practice fundamental democratic principles.

Surely, new democratic paradigm of the information society will be based on the use of versatile e-tools, and on democratic procedures that will be performed mostly in the cyberspace — creating a modern incarnation of the Athens agora. Now, access to the Internet is not limited to only PC-users. Now mobile telephone owners are dialing onto the information highway at a rate that will probably equal the number of stationary computer Web surfers by 2002. In Poland, there are 8 million mobile phones in use, which amounts to every one in five Poles chatting on wireless phones. With more and more people informed on public matters they are better prepared to participate in debate. We can already see how the Internet is inevitably widen the democratic paradigm to include voting procedures.

A dozen binding Internet elections have been performed within two last years. The most significant event involved an electorate of 849,000 voters during the 2000 Arizona Democratic Party's presidential preference primary. As Internet voting becomes a hot subject, task forces, workshops and projects have been struck to explore this new field. Recently, the European Commission (with participation of a number of European companies and organisations) has funded the CyberVote research and development program, which is exploring the viability of electronic voting systems for Internet terminals and mobile phones. The prototype is set to be demonstrated and evaluated during three trial applications in 2003.

Internet voting will find its application not only in elections, but also in referenda. There will be a trend toward growing citizens participation in the information society. This trend would see the end of an era of “thin democracy”, in which ordinary citizens — perceived as uninterested in politics and qualified to participate in politics only to elect their representatives. In its place would emerge “strong democracy” — with its interactive deliberation processes in an electronic forum. The highest level of political participation can be achieved through decision-making in an electronic direct democracy. This evolution of democracy will see the transformation of not only political

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forms and institutions, but will also bring about a change in citizens attitudes and abilities.

Herein lies a link between democracy and reality TV.

Drawing millions of viewers, reality shows are popular in Poland. Reality TV offers an interaction with the public, who submit ballots, nominations, etc., which helps to determine the show's outcome. Here an example of electronic democracy involving the participation of millions of citizens.

Another democratic characteristic of reality shows is that viewers see men-on-the-street in the role of TV idols. Until now, ordinary people have been cast in secondary roles — subject to the interviewer or show host who dealt them the cards. In reality TV, participants are autonomous, at the most as actors of *commedia dell'arte*. In this way, reality TV contributes to openness of the society and encourages people to participate directly in democracy.

Andrzej Dariusz Kaczmarczyk is an information technology educator; b. Siedlce, Poland, Dec. 19, 1934; s. Wladyslaw and Aleksandra (Mlynarczyk) K.; m. Anna Krystyna Jastrzebska, Apr. 2, 1955; children: Katarzyna, Jaroslaw. MSME, Warsaw U. Tech., 1956, PhD in Tech., 1966. Engr. Inst. of Fine Mechs., Warsaw, 1955–64; dept. mgr. Ctrl. Lab. Measuring Instruments and Optics, Warsaw 1964–65; vice dir., dept. mgr. Indsl. Inst. Automation and Measurements, Warsaw, 1965–84; prof. Guanajuato U., Salamanca, Mex., 1984–86; dept. head. Bialystok (Poland) U., 1989–95; sci. sec., dept. mgr. Inst. Math. Machines, Warsaw, 1987–89, 95–; lectr. Wroclaw (Poland) U. Tech. 1981, Warsaw U. Tech., 1982–84. Author: *Technology Around You*, 1966, *Industrial Robots of Eighties*, 1984; co-author: *Elements of Modern Technology, Robots, Factory of the Future*, 1987; contrb. articles to profl. journs. Mem. IEEE (sr.), Polish Soc. Informatics, Polish Soc. Measurements, Automation and Robotics. Avocations: gardening, hiking, bicycling, electronic classical music.

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Andrzej Dariusz Kaczmarczyk is an information technology educator; b. Siedlce, Poland, Dec. 19, 1934; s. Wladyslaw and Aleksandra (Mlynarczyk) K.; m. Anna Krystyna Jastrzebska, Apr. 2, 1955; children: Katarzyna, Jaroslaw. MSME, Warsaw U. Tech., 1956, PhD in Tech., 1966. Engr. Inst. of Fine Mechs., Warsaw, 1955–64; dept. mgr. Ctrl. Lab. Measuring Instruments and Optics, Warsaw 1964–65; vice dir., dept. mgr. Indsl. Inst. Automation and Measurements, Warsaw, 1965–84; prof. Guanajuato U., Salamanca, Mex., 1984–86; dept. head. Bialystok (Poland) U., 1989–95; sci. sec., dept. mgr. Inst. Math. Machines, Warsaw, 1987–89, 95–; lectr. Wroclaw (Poland) U. Tech. 1981, Warsaw U. Tech., 1982–84. Author: *Technology Around You*, 1966, *Industrial Robots of Eighties*, 1984; co-author: *Elements of Modern Technology, Robots, Factory of the Future*, 1987; contrb. articles to profl. journs. Mem. IEEE (sr.), Polish Soc. Informatics, Polish Soc. Measurements, Automation and Robotics. Avocations: gardening, hiking, bicycling, electronic classical music.

## Respect – Still Not a Global Right For Women

SUE GUPTA

Women in the western world now have freedom to go where they please, strive for careers, choose their husbands and make numerous choices in life. In many parts of the developing world, a baby born a female is a lesser human than a male. Before birth to the end of her life, she is treated as an inferior. A male, on the other hand, is valued.

He provides respect and labour for his family and when his parents are old he is counted on as a form of pension. In India, where the society perceives girls as a social and financial liability to the family, girls have little value. A dowry has to be given to the in-laws and when the girl leaves home she is gone. Even before the birth of a child, family members keep this in mind. Technology, such as amniocentesis and ultrasound, are often used to detect the sex of the fetus. Almost always the female is aborted.

In other instances when a baby girl is born, the child is drowned. This often takes place when parents already have one daughter and another one adds to the burden. Not only is this form of infanticide prevalent in India, it is in China, too, where because of a one-child policy, each family is allowed only one child. In order to conceive a son, girls are often drowned or sent to orphanages.

In areas of Africa and the Middle East, women healers or midwives remove a part or all of female genitalia on young girls. Usually the genitalia is cut and sometimes sewn back. Even though it is painful, causes physical and psychological harm and sometimes can lead to death, it is continuously done for cultural reasons.

Throughout Africa, Asia, Middle East and South America young girls — compared to their brothers to do most of the household chores — have to leave school if more help is needed at home or if there isn't enough money for all to attend school. In Afghanistan under the Taliban regime girls are forbidden to even attend school. Girls are also the ones who are given poorer health care and sometimes married off early.

After marriage, there is no certainty that their lives will be better. Since women are powerless they are victimized, too.

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Bride burning is prevalent in India and Pakistan. In India, most marriages are arranged and the bride's parents give a dowry to the groom and his family. During the marriage if the groom's family becomes greedy and demands more money or consumer items and the bride's parents do not come up with the order there are repercussions on the wife. Articles crop up in India's newspapers reporting tragedies where the husband and his parents threw kerosene oil on the new wife and when she is dead, the family claims it was a self-inflicted accident.

In Pakistan, females can be killed by their own relatives such as father, brother or son if they are believed to commit any illegal sexual activity. Instead of punishing the relative, the community regards him as a hero.

In old age, many women in these parts of the world end up poor and with few resources, usually depending on their sons for their needs.

Great advances in the status of women have taken place in the Western world during the last century.

Women activists such as Canadian Nellie McClung fought for equality. Education through the media has helped, too. Although women have come a long way they still have some steps to attain full equality.

Women still earn less than men. Young women continue to be desired mostly for their bodies as is evidenced on TV, magazines and newspapers.

However, in the developing world a huge potential is lost. Only through the help of the media and activists to change laws, education and consequently transformation in men and women's belief system which have been imbedded through their culture will changes occur in the lives of the majority of the world's women.

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## SEEING AND HEARING

BENJAMIN KEATING

I had to wear my bicycle helmet today. I always wear it when I might hit my head on something. It's a blue helmet, the same colour as the one I was wearing the day I was hit by the bus. That one had cracks in it so I threw it away and replaced it by this new one. After putting on a paint-soiled pair of pants and a smelly Florida T-shirt, I went looking for the ladder. Last year, I dressed the same way, but I did not get around to getting up into the attic. My wife had been saying all summer that she wanted that thingamajig out of the attic so that she could bring it to her father. Today I climbed up the ladder and on pushing my hand against the trap door, it gave way. I stepped up another rung and poked my head through the opening.

Rafters and trusses hold up the roof. Sawdust fills up between the joists of the attic floor. Greyish wooden planks criss-cross over the roughly hewed beams. After 45 years, only a few streaks of daylight shine through cracks and openings in the boards that cover the trusses. In the far corner, a tiny speck of light glitters. As I squatwalk on the planks, my helmet glides through the upside-down V space. I'm lucky. I feel the top of my helmet brushing against the first of the horizontal beams but I miss the other four. I reach the light and grab the handles of the thingamajig. Dragging it to the opening, I drop it down into my wife's waiting hands. I take it outside with rags and cleaner and soap and a pan of hot water. I rub it and scrub it and dry it. The sun pokes through the clouds, its rays bouncing off the handle. "That's a nice bicycle you have there!" shouts a neighbour from the distance.

Soon, many of the cottagers had gathered around to see what was shining so brightly. There were as many spectators assembled as on the foggy windy evening that my friend played the bagpipes with his back to the strong southwest wind that was swooping down the Saint Lawrence River.

And then a sadness spread over the faces of my friends.

Collette, who had just retired from a high-stress city job, said that she hoped she would not have to use one someday. Pierre, who spends his two week vacation cycling, shook his head, saying that it was so sad to think that people have to get old. Jean,

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who cuts my grass during the summer, blurted out that it was too bad that people had to die.

My wife phoned the secretary of the residence where my father-in-law is staying to tell her that she had a marchette. She said it was just in case her father might need it this winter. The secretary told her that there was a dark room in the basement where they put marchettes. "Bring it over any time," the secretary said. My wife was happy with this arrangement. She had been worried about her father lately.

He had become a little frail during the summer and would shake a lot when he was walking. He could have a bad fall so we asked him to use the cane that I had inherited from my uncle. But he wouldn't use a cane; he might trip on it. At least, this was his excuse.

He doesn't go to funerals anymore. Besides, he is ninety-two and there are not too many of his friends dying these days. His television spits out images of the horrors of this world but he can't talk back to it; and he turns it on so loud that the swishing, crackling, rumbling noise of a 110-storey tower collapsing to the ground rattles the walls of his room. My wife and I tried to convince him that a hearing aid might be a good idea, however, he went to the emergency section of the hospital and asked them to clean the wax out of his ears instead.

On the day we left our cottage to go back to the city, we stopped at the residence to say goodbye to the ninety-two-year-old man. Since it was time to eat, he stuck out his chest and marched through a row of dining tables to his assigned eating spot near the window. He didn't *need* a cane or a walker! He sat down and drank a glass of bottled water, but he pushed the bowl of soup away. Two white fluffy heaps of mashed potatoes loomed up from the bottom of the plate in front of him. He picked up a spoon and scooped away the glassy brown liquid that lay on top of the lumps of stew meat. With a shaking right hand, he drew the blade of a knife across one of the lumps.

We waved goodbye to him and he waved back with a smile. Other residents with walkers next to their tables glanced up from their plates and smiled back at us. We went out the door, knowing we had done our duty. If the 92-year-old man needs a walker this winter, a model with brakes and wheels waits for him in a dark room in the basement.

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## My Journey To The Truth

HELENA LYNN KELLER

*"Intolerance in falsehood lies ..." Moses ben Maimon*

"How did we get here, Bubbie?" I asked. We had reached the top of a hill after much arduous climbing. Sara, my grandmother, and I paused at the crest, looking down at meadows ravishing in delightful blossoms, lillies, daisies, wild mustard, coriander and dill. The sun was beginning to set, having fallen from its perch high above us. We still had some distance to cover. I could see no evidence of a village, a house or anything, just miles of fields, hills and valleys, trees of olives, dates, and almonds, spotted everywhere.

"It's not much farther," she said, knowingly. "Your zaida took me here once, long ago, and I know it is somewhere up ahead."

We continued on. Sara was nearly sixty-five and I was ten, neither of us was especially fit for this long walk. Yet, we had to find it, to retrace the shepherds' walk, the wisemen's clairvoyant path, all converging at a small square in a lonely village high in the hills. *'Bate Le Haim'*. The House of Life.

"How did *they* find it, Bubbie?" I asked, inquisitively. "And in the dark as well?"

"Perhaps, Helena, dear, that is God's little secret," she said, pulling me along. We had started in daylight, the warm sun beaming, and were not prepared for cool evening breezes that had already begun. She took her shawl and placed it around me, worried I would catch cold.

We hiked onward, as the sun departed. A crescent moon arose, yielding some light. Ahead we could now see a fire burning in the distance. Almost there. "Will there be food, when we arrive?" I said innocently.

"You *shall* have all you desire," she said, her words appearing trance-like. We were joined by others, shepherds, and elderly folk, as finally we approached the square.

So we arrived. No hoopla. Just a small square in a village. A huge fire burning there. Harvest was over. Villagers were gathered round. No baby. No mother. Bubbie had said there would be. Was this the wrong place?

"Bubbie," I said impatiently, "where are they?"

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to dance their horas, beginning in small groups, then joining together encircling the fire. We had come so far, travelling back to this special time, to witness the beginning of it all. To bear live witness, unlike journalists of that era, who wrote only from other people's memories, years after the fact.

"You wanted, Helena, to come back with me," Bubbie said, "so that you too could *believe*. And so I thought, honey, what better place than His birth. And here we are."

"But ... but ...," I stumbled for words, "there is no great star or manger or wisemen here, Bubbie."

"No, sweetie, there never was. Just a village, in the middle of nowhere. His father's home, his relatives filling the house, so they had to stay over there." She pointed. We began to walk. The dancers pulled us in. We joined hands and danced a hora around the fire, kicking up our feet, listening to the chants of the people as we circled the fire. Noise, excitement. A time of plenty. The harvest. And tucked away, in a corner, a child. We left the dancing and continued to the straw that lay beside the small inn in the square. There she was. She held a small baby. Miriam, the mother of us all. Alone.

We sat with her. She let me hold the small child. It was still warm and wet from the birth. I hugged him, wanting to feel close. "Have you come from far?" she asked.

"Yes," Bubbie Sara replied, "from another time and place, to bear witness."

"I know," she said. "The old man said you would come, and you would bring his offspring. He said my son will be important to you, but never said why. I guess we will learn in good time."

"But why did you come *here*?" I asked naively.

Miriam looked at me curiously. "It is the harvest and Yosef wanted to be with his family. The baby was not due for a few weeks yet. However, the journey from Nazareth was difficult, and I got the pains, and well, here he is." She smiled. "Yosef wants to name him Yeshua. Do you think that is a *good* name?"

I could not bear all this. I started to cry. How could I, a simple child from the future, from 1984, help in the naming of the greatest man to walk the earth. I moved into Bubbie's arms, and she caressed me. Comforted, we sat with Miriam and her baby, for an hour or longer.

Then I knew it was time. I kissed Miriam and young baby Jesus. Off we went, past the fire and the dancers and the old vil-

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“Bubbie,” I said, “Why do they talk of stars and wisemen and shepherds attending in a town called Bethlehem near Jerusalem? Why, Bubbie, why?”

“Well,” she said, carefully choosing her words, “everyone has his own purposes in storytelling. You, yourself, never really believed that I travelled to the past or who Zaida was, did you? Of course not. Well the gospel writers had reasons for telling stories in their own way. A great religion was beginning. They were splitting from Judaism and needed to create intolerance and hatred for the Jews, since that is what their converts wanted to hear. Christianity began with intolerance, yet it has progressed to something good today. Not because of Zaida, my sweet Jay, but because of those who changed His words for their own religious zeal. Still, it has turned out all right.”

“Yes, I think so, Bubbie,” I said. “Finally they have come back to us. To live with us in peace. Yet I realize now, as you have always told me, that truth must be pursued. We must discover it for ourselves. We cannot trust truth to the judgment of others.”

So we walked on into the night, my tears subsided, the truth finally inside me, ready to explode one day, if I decide to tell.

Ms. Helena Lynn Keller is the author of several short stories on time travel to 1st century Palestine. She is a practising Jew, an observer and student of history and archaeology, whose life's passion is the study of 1st century Palestine, particularly the historical evidence for Jesus. She is currently at work on a novel about Jesus' early years, as part of a fantasy-reality trilogy about His life.

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## Respect

LORENA MOROZ

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. This word has only seven letters, and is pronounced with two syllables, but its grandeur is a rare commodity. My concern is regarding respect. When I want it, I can't get it. When I don't want it, I get it.

I worked really hard for Census Canada as an enumerator. There were other people working in my riding, too. A fellow worker and I became good friends. He helped redefine my personal value. We would meet sometimes in the morning for coffee before going off to work. We met at least eight times. I liked his sense of humour. Even if it was a bit off-the-wall. During the ninth cup of coffee he mumbled under his breath, that he spent so much money on me he should be banging me by now. When I told my boss, he increased my value by three dollars and told me he would buy me at least eleven cups of coffee.

My personal Dow Jones really increased that day. My friend Harry and I were walking downtown one warm summer evening. He confided in me that he didn't want to have a real relationship with a woman, but wanted to "shack up in some sleazy hotel with a cheap broad and just have sex and forget the whole world." I told my friend Bev, and she said I should set him straight about how he talks to me. My question is this: was he asking me for a date in some macho way, or recommending I change my career goals?

My friend Dean told me "jobs are like women, once you've got one, it's easy to get another one."

Reflecting on this statement, is he looking for a new one or trying to get rid of the old one?

There is no word beyond to describe the loss of respect. Or its' decline. Men I know aren't the only creatures on this earth that fall short in the respect department. I met a man who was walking down the street in front of my building who asked me where I was going. I curtly told him I was going home. According to the etiquette books, a man does not have the social right to follow a woman into a building unless he has made previous arrangements to accompany her. Watching him follow me in the reflection of the front door glass, he bent over to check out my panties, then ran up to me and slapped my bum. Maybe this guy is the pantie thief?

## Respect

LORENA MOROZ

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. This word has only seven letters, and is pronounced with two syllables, but its grandeur is a rare commodity. My concern is regarding respect. When I want it, I can't get it. When I don't want it, I get it.

I worked really hard for Census Canada as an enumerator. There were other people working in my riding, too. A fellow worker and I became good friends. He helped redefine my personal value. We would meet sometimes in the morning for coffee before going off to work. We met at least eight times. I liked his sense of humour. Even if it was a bit off-the-wall. During the ninth cup of coffee he mumbled under his breath, that he spent so much money on me he should be banging me by now. When I told my boss, he increased my value by three dollars and told me he would buy me at least eleven cups of coffee.

My personal Dow Jones really increased that day. My friend Harry and I were walking downtown one warm summer evening. He confided in me that he didn't want to have a real relationship with a woman, but wanted to "shack up in some sleazy hotel with a cheap broad and just have sex and forget the whole world." I told my friend Bev, and she said I should set him straight about how he talks to me. My question is this: was he asking me for a date in some macho way, or recommending I change my career goals?

My friend Dean told me "jobs are like women, once you've got one, it's easy to get another one."

Reflecting on this statement, is he looking for a new one or trying to get rid of the old one?

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My friend Jeremy is always tellig me to set him up with one of my girlfriends. Then, one day, I told him he should pay me, because this was hard work. He refused. My boss said it was procuring. That's against the law. But what if the deal goes sour? I need security in my old age. Everything I've got is falling apart. Just like in the song, "A kiss on the hand is just soooo continental. Diamonds are a girl's best friend ..."

This is the same guy who asked me to try him out!

He was really good in his opinion. What if she finds out we did hanky panky together? Or, maybe she might compare notes and ask me for lessons, so she could be a superior lover, too. No, no, no. This is getting morbid.

Respect has even crept into the mortuary. What goes on there where the dead are (wherever that may be) that we must speak respectfully of the dearly departed? They don't talk back. Or even say, ahem, in agreement. Well, at least, not the ones I've spoken to.

I went next door to have tea with my neighbour one evening. I was sipping tea and watching the Spice Girls on the telly. It was very peaceful. But of course, there are no purrfect lives in this world, only purrfect moments. Jade, my friend's black cat, slinked up to me, and pretending to rub against me, bit my foot.

Respect from friends is the most sincere. Tanya, who lives next to me, has her own unique way to show respect. I was explaining to her how I was having a hard time to get a job without business references.

She looked me in the eye and said "You're only average. You're not that cute. You had better take any job."

My greatest struggle is with the cute Pitney Bowes service guy. He's always polite. He never complains. I'm sure I've cost him a pretty penny or two for his parking meter. Or tickets. I met him by accident while he was at work replacing a copy machine fuser. I was brought up old-fashioned. Men have to ask the woman. Is he shy? Bent? A momma's boy?

Because he is the man, I would like him to ask me. At least that way, it wouldn't hurt so bad if I have to turn him down. What's the boy waiting for? He talks to me every time we meet. Maybe he thinks I'm a good girl. The problem is good girls are no fun. And bad girls are no good. Couldn't I be a bit of both?

Maybe its not infatuation, but just cultured Pitney Bowes charm. Like I said before, when I want it I can't get it. When I don't want it, I get it.

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## Sale of the Homestead

BOB PRESTON

Stooped and wizen, she shuffled toward the entrance. With great effort she forced open the door and jiggled her walker into the entrance. Slowly the pneumatic door closer hissed as it closed ensnaring the walker. Too late! Her frail frame heaved and pulled. Trapped! Fear filled her eyes. Silently she kicked at her transparent prison.

"Here, let me help you," said a friendly female voice. "Come in and rest a moment"

Eventually the ancient, gray-haired figure gain her breath, "I've come to sell my house."

"Well, you've certainly come to the right place. This is Sunrise Reality. Tim's in, I'm sure he can help."

Tim arrived almost immediately. Chatting to the octogenarian, he helped her to his office and eased her into a comfortable chair.

"Hi, I'm Tim Ball. How may I help?"

Silence. Finally with desolate gaze she turned somewhat toward Tim and blurted out, "I've come to sell my house." Her eyes welled with tears, head fell toward her hands. "I've come to sell my house."

How similar she was to his mother. He offered to take her home and appraise her house at the same time. He knew a fair lawyer. With small steps they walked to the back door of the 700-square-foot bungalow. She put her hand on his arm, a smile creased her mouth.

"Harold and his brother built our house. It's beautiful."

Two decades of sun had peeled much of the paint from the door. Her gnarled fingers held a trembling key as it searched for the lock. They laboured up two steps to the kitchen. Wheezing she lowered herself on a tattered chrome chair.

"Hot water. This was my first kitchen with hot water. Clean, it was always spotless. Harold made those cupboards himself. They look so nice."

Tim couldn't help but notice tomato soup had spilled down the stove front, a little had reached the floor. Had cataracts superseded cleanliness?

"For Christmas I'd cook a turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes and all the trimmings. We would have candles. My family,

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Harold's too, all would come for Christmas Day. The kids brought hockey sticks, they played in the street. I would make plum pudding. They loved my sauce."

She was silent a moment, then bowed her head. "This kitchen is my life." The frail voice recalled her past room by room. The walls held the elixir of her life. "This house is all I have. Harold's pension stopped. He called this house 'our nest egg'. He often said, 'It would always be there when we need it.' I have nothing left. I need it now."

The passing weeks brought few buyers. One graying couple was memorable. He wore size 48 pants that sported a crease and polished oxfords. She was a hawkish 5-foot-11 who enjoyed looking down on people. Slamming their Chevy's doors, they entered the house with bluster.

"Bill, this tiny kitchen's impossible. I can't cook a real meal here. There's no counter space! No microwave shelf! Where would I put my bread maker and mix master?"

"Wouldn't be able to use 'em anyway. There's only two receptacles in the whole kitchen.

"My kitchen table ... it won't fit. There's no place for company, I can't even entertain.

"Seeing the Thorvaldsons is hardly entertaining. Anyway, we're used to eating off TV tables. The four of us can eat in the front room.

"Look, you don't serve crystal on TV tables! This place is a dump. If I'm going to live here, you'll need to fix it up. The roof leaks and the basement's moldy. You can start with this door.

"Oh, maybe you're right. It is a little small. I could do the repairs, but it's not really a place anyone could fall in love with.

"Bill, I'm getting out of here. I want to see that place on Clifton."

A young couple gave Tim hope. She entered the house with her posture listing to the rear; her legs moved out at an angle. Lovingly her hands caressed her swollen abdomen. Her blotchy smile radiated the future. He moved easily beside her, sliding a chair out from the table that she might sit. "Jack, this place is wonderful; it's just the right size. It needs a good cleaning and some repairs but that's easily done."

"You know Amy, it wouldn't take much to paint this kitchen and our small enamel table would fit in perfectly." "Wouldn't that tiny bedroom would look great with alphabet wallpaper?"

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“Do you think we could put it on the ceiling? She would see it best from there?” “Hey? What do you mean she? I think it’s a he.” “Jack, I love this place; it’s like a doll house. What do you think the bank say?”

Two days later the bank said no. The bank had identical replies to four other similar couples.

Mr. Simkew parked his Mercedes and sauntered up the walk. “Tim, this place is a dump. You’ll get no buyers. For eighty-five days, you’ve been hawking it. It’s not going to happen. For three quarters of her asking price, I’ll take it off her hands. She needs the money. Really, I’m just helping her out. Write it up, but do it soon. At the end of the week, two grand comes of my offer.”

“Simkew, you’re in the bloodsucking business.”

“Hey, you’re too hard on me. I’ll fix it up, rent it out. I help the poor. I put roofs over their heads.”

“Simkew, the only thing you fix is your pocketbook. Look at this community. You and your cronies swallow up dilapidated places then rent them to the limit. You’re the parasite that spreads urban decay. This place needs a refit or the wrecker’s ball. You’ll supply neither.

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## Essay

LARESSA RUSSELL

McChicken is on sale this week. \$2.49 per person, super-sized with two types of sauce. Five thousand people died in New York, Sept. 11. I found myself watching a lot of TV lately. Something I haven't done for about a year now. I originally started watching it because of the New York tragedy. One thing led to another and now I find myself watching flashing visuals, selling me hair products, automotive parts and powders that cure that irritating itchiness.

Never once did I glance up at the clock on the wall, telling me I need to be on a bus to look for jobs in four hours. It's a funny story actually. The reason why I am writing this essay. I'm a timid writer, really. Not your average salem Kafka totin' monologue guru. It was the Weekly World News magazine that set the beacon in my foggy existence. Great little magazine, don't you think? It tells you everything you need to know. There it was, right besides the article about how to tell if your guardian angel is gay. Scribbled in chicken scratch on the margin with red ink.

*Social Consciousness – \$50 Call: 285-8834*

Sounds great. And cheap, too.

Consciousness is hard enough to acquire, never mind social conscience. So I called the number.

The man who answered was an uptight, hen-pecked husband. God, he sounded like a bike courier. And useless to the degree of frustration. Not only did he deny any knowledge of any social consciousness, he ridiculed me for any pretense I ever could've had to suggest such a thing — as if searching for a connection was a bad thing.

"You know, people like you are the disease of the society," he said to me."

Always trying to mess with the system that brought you up. Why don't you just accept the facts and grow up."

"Sounds like you're pretty grown up," I said "Abusing and insulting someone you don't even know just because you are so preoccupied with your views and your life that you can't open

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Always trying to mess with the system that brought you up. Why don't you just accept the facts and grow up."

"Sounds like you're pretty grown up," I said "Abusing and insulting someone you don't even know just because you are so preoccupied with your views and your life that you can't open

up to other people.”

Then he lectured me about his job, his house, his wife, his kids and his three-door garage. It was all I could do to keep from smashing the phone into a 100 pieces. So much for that. I don't have time to talk to psychos.

I guess if I were to find social consciousness, I'd have to look somewhere else. But in the meantime, I had to look for a job.

On a downtown bus, when I glimpse a young woman standing on the boulevard with a big cardboard sign:

### 16, COLD AND HUNGRY

Simple words. Raw honesty. I passed the girl quickly and barely got to see her face. Later, I walked out the doors of the Pharmasave I applied at and overheard a conversation between two girls. They were complaining about panhandlers — the look of them. The smell. Unshaven, unkempt rejects of society.

They joked and laughed with polished faces and Pantene hair as they walked to their SUV.

Am I wrong to hate these people? Or is it in society's rulebook to be ignorant and prejudice toward lifestyles unknown?

I thought it was in some charter of rights that all humans are equal no matter the sex, race or class.

Did I sleep through some really important meeting? As I watched them drive away, I was bombarded by some more dialogue. Some guy was bragging to his buddy about the woman he slept with last night after he went out to dinner with his girlfriend. When she wouldn't put out for their one-year anniversary, he decided to fulfill his carnal urges elsewhere.

“Man, this girl was so freaky, man,” he told his drooling buddy. “She was a nasty little number but she did her job.”

As a wave of nausea washed over me, I wrapped headphones over my ears to drown out the vicious banter on my way to my next destination — a gay bar more in the downtown core. It had a waitress job that I was interested in. It was a pretty good crowd with decent pay plus tips.

Social consciousness was eluding me as I walked into that bar. How could I ever find social consciousness if everybody is so preoccupied and indifferent to other people's thoughts and

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feelings? Has society become this ball of hate and fear and guilt so deep within people that you can barely see it behind their job, family and three-door garage?

I walked up to the bar where a transvestite was lazily lounging, smoking a cigarette. She perked up a bit when I approached her. "Hey, honey, what can I do for you?" she said, eyeing me up and giving me that attitude only a transvestite can do properly.

"Well, you can give me a job, then you can tell me what the world is coming to."

"Oh girl. You sound like another one lost." she said, taking my resume and glancing at it briefly.

"All day I've been looking for social consciousness" I told her. "And all day all I've seen and heard is fear and hate. Social consciousness is dead."

"It's not dead, sweetie." She put her hand on my shoulder. "It's just busy."

On that note, her boss strutted up to the bar and told her to do something. She dismissed him with flair, gave him my resume and they both took off in different directions. Leaving me alone to contemplate the series of events in my day. But time is not my ally right now. It was nearly noon and I still had four more places to apply for. Next destination: Eaton Place

When I entered the mall, I got this wave of stressful feelings. I took off my headphones and started to notice again the people around me. There was a couple excitedly talking, a woman huddled with her friends, upset. Two men on payphones looking shocked, and about 50 or so people crowded around the mall television. What is this? I wondered. And then I saw it.

Two planes crashing into the World Trade Center in New York. One plane crashing into the Pentagon. And one more just crashing. All hijacked by terrorists. The newscasters were speaking rapidly with a kind of dumbfounded look on their face.

*HORROR. TERROR. FIVE THOUSAND DEAD.*

I could barely comprehend it all when a woman beside me suddenly broke into tears and took off.

"What is the world coming to?" a man said repeating my previous statement.

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"A damn shame." another woman said I continued to stare at the TV screen, hypnotized, when all the killing and death became so overbearing that I had to leave.

I went to the food court to get a burger at McDonald's. Still a little numb from the tragic news. There was a young man at the counter. Friendly mannered but looking a little dazed.

"Hi! How can I help you?"

"A McChicken sandwich, please."

"McChicken is on sale this week — \$2.49 per person super-sized with two types of sauces."

"Great."

"Would you like a brochure for Canadian Blood Services? If you give blood right now, you can help out the tragedy in New York."

I stared at him. "OK."

I sat down in the food court with my McChicken and my Canadian Blood Services brochure and just ate like a brain dead zombie. Taking it all in. I noticed a Uptown Magazine at my table and leafed through it, too distracted to actually read anything. When something caught my eye. Last page in the What's Up section.

*Social Consciousness Essay. First prize — \$50. Mail to ...*

And so this is what I've come up with. social consciousness is in everybody. Everybody has it to some degree. That was proved to me by the agony in all the faces of the people who watched the New York Tragedy. But some people get too preoccupied in themselves and their own lives that they forget about others. Depending on how flexible and pain-free your life is, opens a vortex of how easily you can care for others. And only a tragedy can hit you so hard that you forget about your own problems and grieve for the people who are worse off than you. Don't get me wrong, grieving for others is a noble act and totally appropriate for times like these. I just wish it didn't take a tragedy to find social conscience.

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I went to the food court to get a burger at McDonald's. Still a little numb from the tragic news. There was a young man at the counter. Friendly mannered but looking a little dazed.

"Hi! How can I help you?"

"A McChicken sandwich, please."

"McChicken is on sale this week — \$2.49 per person super-sized with two types of sauces."

"Great."

"Would you like a brochure for Canadian Blood Services? If you give blood right now, you can help out the tragedy in New York."

I stared at him. "OK."

I sat down in the food court with my McChicken and my Canadian Blood Services brochure and just ate like a brain dead zombie. Taking it all in. I noticed a Uptown Magazine at my table and leafed through it, too distracted to actually read anything. When something caught my eye. Last page in the What's Up section.

*Social Consciousness Essay. First prize — \$50. Mail to ...*

And so this is what I've come up with. social consciousness is in everybody. Everybody has it to some degree. That was proved to me by the agony in all the faces of the people who watched the New York Tragedy. But some people get too preoccupied in themselves and their own lives that they forget about others. Depending on how flexible and pain-free your life is, opens a vortex of how easily you can care for others. And only a tragedy can hit you so hard that you forget about your own problems and grieve for the people who are worse off than you. Don't get me wrong, grieving for others is a noble act and totally appropriate for times like these. I just wish it didn't take a tragedy to find social conscience.

## The Fundamentalist Side of the Golden Rule

ANTONIO ROSSIN

I always knew about Fundamentalism, but didn't yet know about institutionalised Fundamentalism — wherein an institution is so permeated with Fundamentalism that people are not even aware that what they say or do is fundamentalist. I question: is Fundamentalism the trait of a few extremist religion-based communities, or is it a hidden but pervasive component of human mind, really a meme?

What concerned me was the widespread practise of authoritarianism in parenting, through the application of the “No-Contradiction Principle” in family dialogues and parents doing “their best” for the child, but in doing so encroaching the latter's right of initiative and self-awareness. From family onward, this authoritarian attitude characterizes most social relationships, up to the state being managed “top-down” by an elite who pretend only they know what is best for, and should be done to, the people — regardless of the latter's right to any “bottom-up” participatory sharing in collective policy-making.

This concern brought me to become a founding member of the World-wide Direct Democracy Movement and to hold discussions about Democracy Founding Documents, General Rules and Global Ethic issues. Throughout these discussions, I always criticized anyone's proclivity toward foisting top-down policies on a people whose right of self-expression in the form of bottom-up proposals and participatory initiatives had been oppressed by the “No Contradiction Principle”; a principle practised all through their family education model to the point of becoming common habit. Education toward aware, autonomous participation since the earliest family patterning was a key priority, I guessed, to building bottom-up democratic communities.

I've met resistance to this bottom-up approach everywhere, by fundamentalist-like people wanting to perform their own Principles top-down on the people. I realised soon, most of my opponents legitimated their right to do the best for the people from a “positive” spelling of the Golden Rule:

“Do onto others what you want to be done onto you”

I can't agree. My basic reasoning is, if we wanted to do “what's good for the people”, no Golden Rule could allow us to decide top-down what this “good” should be. Only the people them-

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selves could make such a decision. Only by decisions being made “bottom-up” by directly-interested people could qualify as the participatory social arrangement that democracy stands for. Really, too many people claim to implement policies “for the people’s good” by pretending to be empowered to decide what the people’s good should be — thanks to the Golden Rule — but thereby encroach in a very fascist manner on the people’s direct decision-making autonomy, responsibility and participatory rights.

Wanting to avoid such evil misunderstandings, I’ve searched for the Golden Rule’s correct “spelling”. I’ve found this excerpt from Leonard Swidler’s “Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic” at:

<http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/Center/intro.htm>

A glimpse of just how pervasive the “Golden Rule” is, albeit in various forms and expressions, in the world’s religions and ideologies, great and small, can be garnered from this partial listing:

1) Perhaps the oldest recorded version — which is cast in a positive form — stems from Zoroaster (628–551 B.C.E.): “That which is good for all and any one, for whomsoever—that is good for me . . . what I hold good for self, I should for all. Only Law Universal is true Law” (Gathas, 43.1).

5) In the third century B.C.E. Mahabharata expresses its “Golden Rule” in both positive and negative form by summarizing all Hindu teaching: “Do not to others what you do not wish done to yourself; and wish for others too what you desire and long for yourself — this is the whole of Dharma; heed it well” (Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8).

6) The deuterocanonical biblical Tobit was written around 200 B.C.E. and contains a negative version — as most are — of the Golden Rule: “Never do to anyone else anything that you would not want someone to do to you” (Tobit 4:15).

7) The major founder of Rabbinic Judaism, Hillel, who lived about a generation before Jesus, though he may also have been his teacher, taught that the Golden Rule — his version being both positive and negative — was the heart of the Torah; “all the rest was commentary”: “Do not do to others what you would not have done to yourself” (Btalmud, Shabbath 31a).

A comment immediately transpires: No substantial difference between positive and negative “spellings” of the Golden

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Rule has ever come to light. Fundamentalism, meaning one's self-legitimation to do what one dogmatically judges to be the best for others, seems to be the literal consequence of its "positive spelling": "Do unto the others."

Indeed, what if "the others" who are subjected to the "Golden Rule" as expressed in the initiatives and related policy-making of a power-holder disagree with the latter's top-down judgement of *what* is to be done? What if 'the others', for some reason of their own which the power-holder couldn't know, or neglected to know, were to feel that the top-down policy was really hurting them?

This is why I suggest we eradicate the exclusive recourse to the "positive spelling" of the Golden Rule from any Founding Document of our Participatory Democracy: for it allows the power-holders to feel self-legitimated to "Do unto the people" whatever "No-contradiction Principle"-based policies they feel inclined to execute. And this at any level of society, from the parent/child relationship to the State, independently of any agreement of the recipients of such policies. Conversely, its "negative spelling", "do not do", implies that one's wish "to do" is insufficient in itself for doing things "unto others", as the latter's participatory agreement then becomes mandatory.

Hence a more democratic concept becomes ethically necessary in order to "do" any policy unto others: viz., the others' permission, or conscious asking for, before carrying out any "doing": which elucidates a relevant difference. That is, the "positive" spelling of the Golden Rule makes us judge "unto others"; whereas its "negative spelling" makes us become the servants of a necessarily aware people, our neighbour, or indeed our children. Let us therefore put this difference into a greater evidence in any Founding Document of Democracy.

Antonio Rossin, 65, Italian family practitioner, searched for the connection between language learning and mind self-framing in children. Thenceforth either rigid conservative or autonomous flexible behaviours follow in people. Focusing on flexibility, Rossin's educative model prevents addictions, thereby from Fundamentalism. Most of Rossin's writings are free at <http://www.mripermedia.com/Rossin/>

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## The Myth of Song

SYBIL SHAW-HAMM

Once upon a time just beyond today, numerous Canadian men, fine and young, stood out in the world on various podiums, on various fields, in various halls and various auditoriums, their arms pinned to their sides, their eyes gazing straight ahead, their minds burning with patriotic fire while nearby, flags flipped in an artificial breeze and tubas and violins and organs or some form of virtual music burst into their song.

*O Canada ...*

Their backs stretched.

*our home ...*

Their chins lifted.

*and native land.*

The corners of their eyes prickled.

*True patriot love ...*

They began to hum.

*in all ...*

They burst into song.

*our daughters command.*

Their singing stopped. The young men said, "Hey just a minute. What's going on here? What's this daughter business? Where am I in this? Where are the sons? How can almost half the population of the country be left out of a national song?"

Later, arriving home and stepping to Canadian soil, each son approached his father and said, "Dad, sing O Canada for me." The fathers pinned their arms to their sides, straightened their

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Later, arriving home and stepping to Canadian soil, each son approached his father and said, "Dad, sing O Canada for me." The fathers pinned their arms to their sides, straightened their

backs, lifted their chins and began to sing.

*O Canada  
Our home and native land  
True patriot love  
In all our daughters' command*

Their singing stopped. The fathers looked at themselves. They looked at their sons. They said, "Hey just a minute. What's going on here? What's this daughter business? Where am I in this? Where are my sons? How can almost half the population of the country be left out of a national song?"

The fathers then went to the grandfathers and said, "Dad, sing Oh Canada for me." The grandfathers pinned their arms to their sides, straightened their backs, lifted their chins and began to sing.

*O Canada  
Our home and native land  
True patriot love  
In all our daughters' command*

Their singing stopped. The grandfathers looked at themselves. They looked at their sons. They looked at their grandsons. They said, "Hey just a minute. What's going on here? What's this daughter business? Where am I in this? Where are my sons? Where are their sons? How can almost half the population of the country be left out of a national song?"

Grandfathers and fathers and sons decided this exclusion nonsense had to stop.

In Newfoundland and Alberta men began to dial phones. In British Columbia and Nova Scotia they began to type up e-mails. In Nunavut and Quebec they began to dash off faxes. In Saskatchewan some old fellow drew out an ancient pen and wrote threads of words on a piece of paper. All the messages said the same thing: "Change that song. Change that word. Include us."

The messages ended up down East, in the Place of Power where the Power Women scowled and scratched their heads. They snickered and cleared their throats. They said, "What's the fuss? What does one word matter? You guys know the word

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‘daughter’ includes you.”

But the sons and fathers and grandfathers of the land insisted they felt left out. After a lengthy fuss and a grand to-do a committee was struck; a commission was organized; a hearing was called.

Since that first hearing, twenty years have passed. This is the change the men said they wanted made.

*O Canada  
Our home and native land  
True patriot love  
in all our hearts command*

Seems simple enough to the men. Seems easy enough to them.  
And ... in some corners of the land ... hope still runs high.

Sybill Shaw-Hamm writes that she is privileged to walk and write in the peace of the bush south of Winnipeg. She has published in such literary magazines as Other Voices, Zygote, Free Fall, Room of One's Own, NeWest Review.

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## Homeless

JESSICA WHITBY

Eerie music floats through the downtown evening air as I round the street corner with my family. An unrecognizable smell invades my nose, making me feel slightly faint and light-headed. The music appears closer now as I wonder where it is coming from. My parents stand in a large crowded line, waiting anxiously to purchase hot dogs from a vendor as I find the source of this sweet, eerie music. This music leaves imprints in my mind as the soft thumping melody gets intensifies then dies down. I assume this music is supposed to cheer a person up, yet it stirs a feeling of melancholy in me. My eyes are drawn to an old man sitting slouched in a wheelchair playing an xylophone.

As quickly as the music started, it quickly stops. The man's gaunt face does not reveal any trace of emotion, yet in his eyes I see a flicker of sadness. I watch him curiously at first, wondering why he would want to be on this crowded street. Looking closer, I realize he is homeless and blind. He sits in his wheelchair without much feeling, his face cracked and worn-looking like someone who fallen asleep in the sun for too long. He is wrapped in worn, shabby-looking clothing — probably bought from a Salvation Army. He plays his instrument with a rhythm which seems familiar to him, his large, dirty cracked hands move smoothly over the bright, pastel keys.

My mother cuts through my thoughts as she mumbles something about wanting a hot dog to eat. I say no, and she tells me my brother is going to have three. I drift away. People walk by in the dozens, trying to reach their own destination. They pass this man and do not look back, cringing their noses in disgust as the smell of something stale hits them. A fragile looking women walks past briskly, folding her jeweled arms against her soft grey, cashmere sweater. Her face is nicely rouged with blush, her hair tied back neatly.

She glances quickly at the man sitting in his wheelchair and scoffs loudly, leaving me left with only the fragrance of expensive perfume.

Reaching into my small black purse, my fingers trace the outline of the cool surface of some change. It jingles in my ear as I

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start heading toward him. My legs wobble yet I am not so sure why. I look him square in the eyes.

“This is for you,” I say handing him the money.

“God bless you,” he replies softly.

He looks on and starts to play that sweet, eerie music. I can vaguely hear my mom in the background calling me back. I look him over one last time before heading off. He sighs deeply, inhaling the night air.

I think I see sadness flicker through his eyes, yet there seems to be something more. Looking harder, I realize there is a heavy look in his eyes that must have been there a long time, though I never noticed until now.

It is deep and dull with something like disappointment. Perhaps it is loneliness.

Jessica Whitby currently writes for her local newspaper, The Liberal, where she publishes articles on those with great accomplishments. Before writing, she was a co-op student at TVOKids, where she gained experience in the broadcasting field. Jessica plans to pursue a career in journalism at Ryerson University.

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## Anticipating the Inevitable

E. RUSSELL SMITH

Organisms evolve not merely to survive in, but often to require the environment they encounter. Thus *Epifagus virginiana*, with brown flowers and no leaves, commonly known as beech drops, may have developed its tolerance of dense shade at the cost of total dependence on beech roots in the soil beneath it. A classic example of such essential commensalism in the animal world is found in the relationship between the termite and the wood-splitting organisms that inhabit its gut.

The difference between *Homo sapiens* and other organisms is our capacity to be aware of the problems presented by the limits of our environment. Humankind is learning that we are approaching the apparent capacity of the terrestrial biosphere to support us. Out of the exigencies of food and shelter have arisen struggles to control territory on one hand and the growth of population on the other. An underlying contributor to the initial success of the Third Reich was the restricted *Lebensraum* (living space) left to the German people by the Treaty of Versailles. The land claims of some of the world's surviving aboriginal peoples are continually at odds with the need for the most efficient exploitation of a resource of unforgiving finitude.

The social survival of our species depends on institutionalized norms of status and behaviour which — and this is what we often fail to recognize — are also imposed by environmental pressures. The most successful modes of conduct have evolved out of countless trials, to the extent that deviant behaviour evokes an automatic negative reaction from the social matrix. Abortion, pollution, and political malfeasance are three instances where moral hackles are raised by perceived social misbehaviour — these from a long list that could be generated by reading the letters to the editor. This is environmental selection at work.

On a larger scale, the course of history has been altered by the response of populations to the inappropriate actions of their rulers. In the past four centuries Europe has seen many instances of revolts against unenlightened autocracies. The Second World War was a massive and concerted reaction to the evil totalitarianism of a few. Later, we witnessed an overdue

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response to the stultifying and repressive aspects of the old Bolshevism. All over the world, so-called “brush-fire” conflicts continually break out where perceived injustice has gone unrectified beyond the tolerance of the people.

Occasionally, like a favourable mutation, a deviant behaviour becomes the norm. In the past century, we witnessed many experiments in sexual liberation and family structure which met with mixed reactions. Some of these innovations have supplemented or replaced hypocritical, obsolescent and irrelevant patterns left over from the Victorian era.

The initiator of social progress is the novel circumstance in which no preconceived wisdom applies. Many such have arisen as a result of the shrinkage of the planet, often because technology has been substituted for good sense. One such situation is the huge environmental deficit in nonrenewable resources and photosynthetic capacity which is being run up by our urban civilization. Huge quantities of unrecycled wastes are accumulating, from plastics to carbon dioxide. We cannot be permitted the luxury of dumping our detritus, whether downstream, downwind or into rural landfill sites.

A second technological advance to be watched is the development and proliferation of genetically altered life forms that may or may not bring with them unforeseen consequences. A third is the realization of stem cell applications that promise to postpone aging and death.

Mediaeval kings of England progressed through the countryside with a considerable following, receiving the hospitality of one castle after another. It was time to move on when the stink of the moat, overburdened with the wastes of the royal party, became unbearable. Today it is the commercial and industrial rulers and their retinues who render their habitations uninhabitable. The generators of wealth who exacerbate the environmental problems of urban agglomerations must pay to solve those problems. If they cannot or will not accept this burden, they will try to improve their status by moving on.

There will be resistance. Radical changes in the natural environment have virtually extinguished formerly successful life forms, sometimes leaving behind a few vestigial species. We may anticipate the extinction of some of today's social dinosaurs as well. W.S. Gilbert's Koko had “a little list” of individual types within the Victorian framework “who never would

response to the stultifying and repressive aspects of the old Bolshevism. All over the world, so-called “brush-fire” conflicts continually break out where perceived injustice has gone unrectified beyond the tolerance of the people.

Occasionally, like a favourable mutation, a deviant behaviour becomes the norm. In the past century, we witnessed many experiments in sexual liberation and family structure which met with mixed reactions. Some of these innovations have supplemented or replaced hypocritical, obsolescent and irrelevant patterns left over from the Victorian era.

The initiator of social progress is the novel circumstance in which no preconceived wisdom applies. Many such have arisen as a result of the shrinkage of the planet, often because technology has been substituted for good sense. One such situation is the huge environmental deficit in nonrenewable resources and photosynthetic capacity which is being run up by our urban civilization. Huge quantities of unrecycled wastes are accumulating, from plastics to carbon dioxide. We cannot be permitted the luxury of dumping our detritus, whether downstream, downwind or into rural landfill sites.

A second technological advance to be watched is the development and proliferation of genetically altered life forms that may or may not bring with them unforeseen consequences. A third is the realization of stem cell applications that promise to postpone aging and death.

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be missed." We are concerned now not only with individuals but with whole populations whose moral philosophies are at variance with the realities of a crowded world and will therefore change or perish.

Cultural confrontations are commonplace, between individuals and between societies. But cultures are blending, and differences are less divisive. Social interdictions are no longer effective in preventing fraternization between groups which have been segregated heretofore by distance or economic condition. Society is less clearly stratified. Racial distinctions are being blurred around the edges.

Established religions have been both a stabilizing and a divisive influence throughout the history of civilization. Their declining authority today permits a steadily increasing homogeneity of populations. At the same time fanatics are isolated and forced into extremities of action that ultimately bring about their demise.

Tolerance nurtured by well-meaning liberals in the greenhouse of affirmative action will not accelerate the change. Neither will violent revolution, which serves only to substitute one dogmatism with another. The elimination of anachronistic elements takes time, but it is inevitable. The social environment they require is disappearing — through education and communication. The worst bigots will be the last to go. Impatient pessimists should take note — the survivor is the victor.

E. Russell Smith writes in Ottawa and travels the world, most recently into western China. He has published essays, short stories, and poetry across Canada and abroad. His fourth book will be a novel set in Upper and Lower Canada in 1810.

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## TRY TO IMAGINE

JANICE TAIT

Try to imagine that you use a wheelchair as a mobility aid. Say you have been in a car accident and lost the use of your legs, possibly arms as well, or even your capacity to breathe on your own. But you are a thinking, feeling, sensing being with a unique perspective derived from the experiences of your life so far.

Now, try to imagine that you have a good job. You are valued in your workplace for your contribution. You know what you have to offer, and your talents are evident, to both yourself and to your superiors. You like your work, and your colleagues. You have loving friends and family who support you and applaud your accomplishments. Life is good.

Now imagine that you are one of 24,000 people absolutely dependent on a special transportation service to get around. That is, you need a special bus or taxi with a lift permitting horizontal entry to transport you from home, to work, to medical appointments, to meetings, to school, to the movies or to church. Regrettably, since you cannot get your chair into an ordinary car, your family cannot help. Nor can you ride an ordinary bus, or use a streetcar — they have no lift to enable you to wheel into the vehicle horizontally. If you live in Toronto, that special service is called Wheel-Trans and it is run by the Toronto Transportation Commission — those folks who promise you “the better way”.

Now imagine your day: It begins at exactly 7 a.m., when you telephone the Wheel-Trans office to try to book a ride. Never mind that your attendant has arrived at the same time to help you get bathed, dressed and ready for the day. You must wait on hold for a connection that will enable you to book a trip. If you are lucky, you will get a line through to a reservationist within half-an-hour. Often, you will not be able to get through at all because Wheel-Trans does not have enough telephone lines, nor enough reservationists to accommodate the growing demand. If and when you do manage to make a connection, there may be no rides left for that day. Worse, the good folks at

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Wheel-Trans may offer you a ONE-WAY RIDE! This could drive you crazy if you think about it.

A one-way ride means that you could take a trip to your destination, but there would be no one to take you home or vice-versa.

If you are working at a regular job, you can register for what is called a pre-booking; that is, everyday, you will get a ride to and from work at a specified time. Sounds good? Well, you will be surprised. You expect to be picked up at 8 a.m. You must be ready and waiting at the door five minutes before the bus is due to arrive. But the Wheel-Trans rules allow the bus to be up to a half-hour late; that is, if it is not already running 30 minutes late, in which case, the bus will likely be an hour late to pick you up. And so you wait. If there are other people on the bus when it arrives, they may be dropped off first. You may arrive anywhere up to two hours late for work. Same going home.

Don't go to the washroom — you might miss the bus. Never mind if it's cold, or you are tired, stay right there at the door waiting. If you miss the bus or cancel your ride, you are docked like a school child — labelled a “no-show” or a “late cancellation”. Escalating penalties ensue for further infractions. For the fourth infraction, a 30-day suspension is imposed. Don't change your plans or try to socialize after a meeting. Forget about spontaneity in your life. The system has no flexibility to accommodate your needs.

Oh well, you say, I'll just get a taxi. Dream on. Although there are about 26 accessible taxis in Toronto, all of them are on contract to Wheel-Trans so there is never an accessible cab available when you need one. Accessible taxis mean freedom to change plans — but not for you.

Now try to imagine, what it is like to finish your day's work, get yourself to the door, wait and wait and wait and wait. The bus doesn't come; nor does a taxi. It is cold. Night has fallen. Have they forgotten you? You can't leave the door in case the bus shows up while you're away telephoning. You can't sit there forever — wondering if someone will come. Can you imagine what it is like to be that person in that wheelchair, waiting and waiting, not knowing if the bus or taxi will ever come? Now the time is running out and you begin to be afraid. You decide to tele-

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phone, but you can't get through. Eventually you manage to make a connection to the dispatcher. "We're running a little late tonight. The bus is on its way." Phew! The panic recedes. Soon you will be home. And another day will be over. The residue of frustration and despair lies heavy in your heart.

This is life for people with disabilities in Toronto. Not just a one-off occurrence but the day-to-day misery of total dependence on a transportation system which offers the barest minimum of service, and assumes that people with disabilities should be grateful for what they get. But it would take a flight of imagination to fully understand how this system impacts on the lives, self-esteem and psyches of its 24,000 users. And imagination is not a quality that is evident in our government officials.

But you, who are reading this, can you imagine what it is like to spend so much of your life waiting for a service which only serves a tenth of your needs? Waiting for the telephone connection; waiting for the bus which may come late or not come at all. Imagine the impression on a potential employer if you show up late, or too early for that job interview. Wondering if you can get to a play before the curtain rises.

Taking a course if you show up an hour late. And that final indignity: the offer of a one-way ride! Can you imagine?

Janice Tait is a Toronto writer and political activist. She has worked in the field of accessible transportation for people with disabilities since the early '80s and sees some progress since the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. Toronto lags behind most cities in its failure to accommodate.

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## Time to Reflect: Changes in Rural Life

PEGGY FLETCHER

Alec Bolton's General Store in Shetland, Ontario, had just about everything in it. Sitting squarely across from Elliott Brothers' Grain and Feed Mill, it featured gas pumps on the outside, and inside, a hardware, dry goods and grocery store all rolled into one. It was the Wal-Mart of its day. But more than that, it was the village gathering place. A pleasant white-haired clerk named Helen Prangle knew everyone who came through its doors. She and the customers traded news and harmless community gossip.

When something couldn't be found in the huge inventory, Alec was called down from his cubby-hole office above the main counter. Sometimes he moved a little stiffly, the result of an irksome hip replacement gone wrong. But mostly he was warm and friendly, greeting everyone by first name. He strove to meet each and every request concerning store merchandise. "Yes, there were fresh oranges coming in later today. No, he didn't have any size 13 rubber boots, but if you left your name and number, he'd call as soon as they came in."

From the mid-1940's to the mid-'80s, the storekeeper did his best to please his customers. At harvest time, when rows of hopper wagons and tractors lined up across the street, waiting farmers were glad to have him stay open extra hours. They found plenty of cold pop and juice in his cooler; fresh bakery goods to snack on and country conversation that revolved around the price of crops, the weather, farm marketing and changes in agriculture. It was these changes that gradually lessened the role of the general store.

Over the years, the number of active farmers shrank considerably. Many worked away from the village. They stopped in the city at big supermarkets to buy the bulk of their food. Alec would complain that his general store was becoming only a giant convenience shop. Gradually business dwindled and a decision was made to close the store. But there it still stands, across from a now-closed mill.

But it has that forlorn look that buildings get when they are empty for a long time. The gas pumps are gone. Its windows

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boarded up. But in its hey day, it was the hub and soul of the village itself. The store served its purpose well and then the world moved on, but not before it left an impression on everyone who had ever entered its friendly atmosphere. The big box grocery stores with their impersonal glossy aisles and never-ending line-ups will never serve their communities with the commitment and zeal of the country grocer. It was service with a smile then and a personal handshake.

Sixteen years later, the village has weathered the downturn in rural commercial ventures, but it has lost something that can never be replaced.

There is still no nearby store for its residents to shop or use as a postal outlet. People are now forced to drive long distances to the City of Chatham or Sarnia for necessary commodities. Some call this progress. I call it a shame.

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