

OPINION

Justice system

You may have read recently that Ontario's system of justice is in trouble. Too many criminals, not enough courtrooms, too many lawyers, not enough judges, crown attorneys, etc., etc., etc.

Readers who have served on a jury know how the system works. It starts with a notice that your name is in a pool which may, or may not, select you to sit at the Spring or Fall Assizes. Later you get another letter notifying you that your name has been picked from the lottery to appear in court on a selected date along with dozens of others from Halton Region. Juries are selected from the hundred or so people who appear. Those who don't show up without adequate reason are prone to a visit from the sheriff.

You're registered and given travel expenses, which can amount to an appreciable sum when you take in distances from all over the region. Then you file into a courtroom for an indeterminable wait until a judge arrives.

On the first Monday I was required to appear, it was unsure whether there would be any jury cases that week. So a recess was called until the judge found out. More waiting. Surprise! None of the cases called were eligible. Or had been postponed until the fall. So the select dozens of jurors could go home for the week, making sure they came back the following Monday.

Next week we followed the same routine but we were apprised that a sexual assault case was to be tried and the names of jurors would be selected. As luck would have it, my name was the second drawn. With no plausible reason to be excused, the last escape route closed when the defendant and his lawyer approved me as a juror, along with 11 others. When I heard the lame excuses several others used to escape jury duty I mentally determined that in future I would be better prepared.

The case? It took three days with a no-nonsense judge presiding. Without delving into the character references of the plaintiff or the defendant, the fact the case ever got to court to me was a travesty on the system. It unfolded something like this:

A man and woman lived common-law in a Milton apartment. She has accused him of sexually assaulting her after a late night episode in her bedroom. He says the sex was consensual. Sound like Saturday night live in downtown Hooterville? The question naturally occurred to me: Should a 12 person jury, a judge, courtroom, officers of the court, witnesses be bottled up for three days over a matter that even Solomon couldn't solve?

The lady laying the charges, a witness testified, had been out drinking in a Brampton strip bar the night of the alleged assault. She had indicated to her companion, who was also the witness, that she was feeling lecherous after several bottles of beer.

The action then switches to the plaintiff's bedroom where she alleged a romantic interlude led to a sexual assault. He said she had asked to share a cigarette on the bed and it led to you know what.

Well, whatever happened that night, the plaintiff went to the police the next morning to have a restraining order put on the defendant. Shuttled between the police and a Justice of the Peace, she was convinced by a Crown attorney that sexual assault charges would be more appropriate than a restraining order.

Voila! It was done - in the fall of 1994.

Meanwhile, after a year and a half had elapsed the defendant married someone else, the plaintiff had moved north and a witness testified her efforts to patch things up with him had been rebuffed.

The jury was hopelessly deadlocked. Hours of discussion failed to arrive at a verdict.

A discerning man, the judge must have understood this case would likely never be resolved. He declared a mistrial, freeing us from further useless discussion.

Clearly, many of the jury thought the case was a colossal waste of time and money to have got this far in the judicial system. We dispersed, shaking our heads over the experience, the first for all.

As I left the court, counsel for the accused met my eye. "Interesting," was his only comment as he shut his briefcase.



Your LETTERS

Church youth group says 'thank you for helping ...'

To the Editor,
The Youth Group of Holy Cross Parish would like to thank The Gemini for the front page coverage of our Aug. 31 Giant Garage Sale and Silent Auction. It was wonderful to have you share in our fundraising kick-off.

The youth would like to extend their sincere thanks to those who helped to make our garage sale such

a success. Special thanks to Father Hundt and Father Duffy for their help and support, along with the Catholic Women's League and the Knights of Columbus for their efforts and input. A great thank you goes out to Georgetown Loblaw's and their donation of food and drink and to Discount for the use of their truck.

Finally, we would like to thank the Holy Cross Parish community and the community at large, without whose support this fund-raiser could not have happened.

The proceeds from this event gets us a step closer to our financial target, which will enable us to spend World Youth Day with Pope John Paul II next year in Paris, France.

God Bless.

*Youth Group of Holy Cross,
Maple Avenue*

We lose with closing of Ag museum

To the Editor,
Sometimes we have to nearly lose something before we miss it. I'm concerned that may be the case with the Ontario Agricultural Museum, which is located in the centre of Halton Region in Milton.

The museum's regular season ended Sept. 2. No provincial funding will be available to open it next season. Funding ends Mar. 31, 1997.

On Sept. 14, Ontario's Rural Heritage Preservation Committee, which is committed to preventing the permanent closure of the museum, is holding a fundraising Fall Festival. The group is trying to raise \$1 million to keep the museum op-

erating.

The Festival has been supported by volunteers intent on revitalizing the museum. It will need the attendance and financial support of many from this area and across the province.

This museum in our midst has more than 30 historic buildings, 15,000 artifacts, 90 cu. m. of archival material and over 7,000 rare and reference books. It is regarded as one of the best and most extensive collections in North America.

It is the largest public museum in Canada to face closure.

I urge all those who can, to be a part of the Fall Festival Sept. 14 at the Ontario Agricultural Museum.

*Jim Dills
Milton*

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While the above guidelines should be followed for consideration, **The Gemini** will respect the anonymity of an author if specifically requested.

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THE GEORGETOWN GEMINI is published weekly on Wednesdays by Wicklow Hills Publishing Co. Inc. Mailing address: P.O. Box 145, Georgetown, Ont., L7G 4T1. Phone: (905) 877-1113. Fax: (519) 853-5040. Georgetown administrative office: Personal Secretarial Services, Unit 47, 360 Guelph St., L7G 4B5. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. Ideas expressed herein are those of the author only.

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