

Book review

Inside Out is a must for youth-and-social workers

By PRISCILLA SETTEE

I was at my home reading the prison section of James Tyman's *Inside Out* when I got the phone call telling me that another sister had taken her life the night before at the Prison For Women in Kingston. It was like a kick in the stomach and yet another reminder of the realities for many of our native youth.

Inside Out (Fifth House Publishers, 226 pages, \$19.95) is a must for people who work with native youth, particularly social workers and teachers. It is also a must for anyone who has a conscience to improve the conditions for youth or just to inform oneself about the tragic situation too many native youth are faced with.

James Tyman takes the reader from his early childhood through to his current struggles of trying to make it within a racist system that doesn't make sense. Tyman's recollection of his first days in his white adoptive home will evoke memories for people who have been through the foster and adoptive home experience.

It isn't that all adoptive or foster homes deliberately set out to break the spirit of a native child. It is more an act of omission, a failure to help the child deal with where he or she is coming from and a failure to assist him in dealing with the inevitable racism the child will encounter. It is omitting to explain the underlying structural reasons for the disproportionate numbers of native children in care of social agencies and the roots of the

natural parents socio-economic and hence personal problems. And an omission of the explanation of why native people occupy the bottom end of the socio-economic ladder, with all the accompanying social ills.

In fact, Tyman's book fails to discuss these omissions in any great depth. What it does, it does well. It is one young (26 years) man's painful and anguished story of the realities of poverty, destitution and confusion with a system that has failed him.

ALIENATED

Tyman's recollection of his early days in the white school system and white communities were reminders that he never fit in. But it was worse than not fitting in. For him, it was a totally alienating experience. One that caused great confusion and ultimately near self-destruction. He could not figure why he was the brunt of racist slurs and attacks. He never received any assistance to help him understand why so many of "his people" did not fit in and lived marginalised existences. Nothing in his formal or informal training gave him the kind of understanding he needed to meld a solid identity as a young native youth. The consequence: Tyman, in his confusion, turned to the streets, a place where he at least found a twisted form of acceptance.

The streets practically destroyed him, as it does to many of our youth. There is no place for the outcasts, in any city. They become self-fulfilled prophesies.

They are viewed as a criminal and they become one. With little to no services for these children, life becomes too painful to take. They turn to drugs, booze and the street for escape.

Tyman's amazing struggle for recovery is the totally positive part

of this book. While he is committed to "going straight," there is never any guarantee that this will be the eventual outcome. Tyman represents a part of society that too many would like to ignore or pretend doesn't exist. Tyman continues to "make it," perhaps

despite, and certainly not because, of any particular societal base of support.

—Priscilla Scott is a Prince Albert, Sask., writer and teacher. She is involved in the Aboriginal Women's Community and in the anti-racism movement.

Weather Calendar 1990



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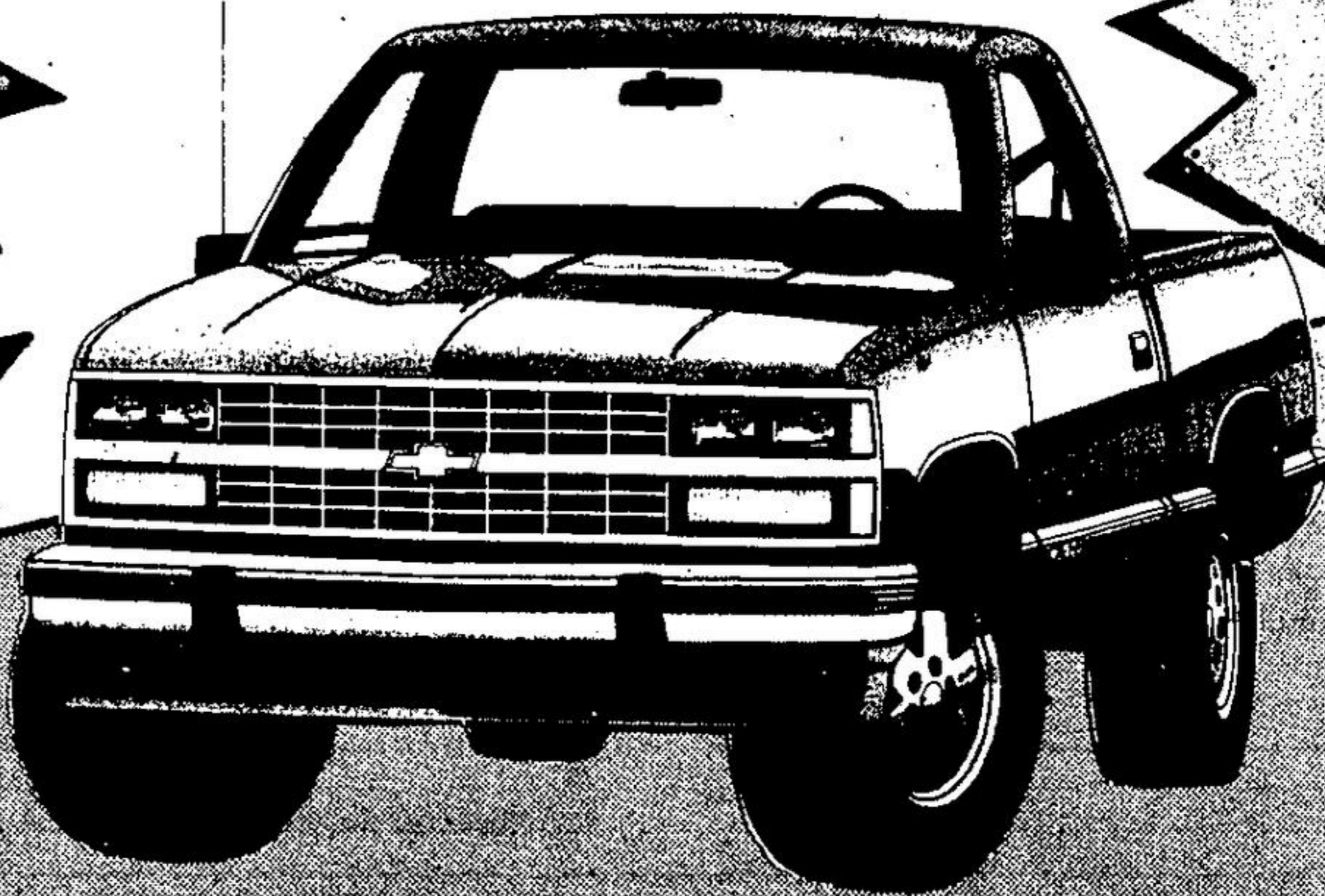
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