

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Accused sex offender must receive fairness

By MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY

The jail sentence recently handed down to a Rockwood man for exposing himself to a young girl may bring her parents some sense of justice. What remains to be seen is whether it will provide any future deterrent for the man and thereby safeguard the community?

Defense counsel tried to get the offender a minimal sentence because he pleaded guilty, thereby saving his young victim from the ordeal of testifying in court.

The judge didn't buy his argument since the man is a repeat offender. She gave him five months in jail. The law only allows for a six month sentence.

The court heard about the signs posted around Acton accusing the man of pedophilia. Nothing was entered in evidence to suggest this is true. While the victims in both incidents were children, that might only have been coincidence. Only after specific testing by a psychiatrist could the offender be labeled as a pedophile, police say.

Sexual offences cause such intense community response it is sometimes difficult to realize there are two victims, the one offended and the one offending. The first victim's pain is easily understood. The pain of circumstances which created the offender is more difficult to accept and extremely difficult to correct.

Yet another victim surfaced in this case - the offender's employer.

He received a barrage of e-mails from as far away as Texas condemning his involvement with a pedophile. His business was also the target of a sign campaign and his employees were upset over the secrecy surrounding the offender's identity.

Again, there is no evidence he is a pedophile. More importantly, employers can't fire employees accused of a crime without risking a suit for unlawful dismissal. Nor can they disclose the situation to other employees without infringing on the rights of an accused.

If we would not presume the guilt of an accused thief or murderer, we must offer an accused sex offender the same benefit of doubt.

Likewise, we must recognize sex offences vary in severity as do other crimes. Some are crimes of opportunity. Other perpetrators hunt down their victims and cause physical as well as emotional injury.

The distinctions between sexual offenders in general and pedophiles in particular aren't always apparent on the surface, especially not to family and friends emotionally involved with victims. At the same time, action like the posting of signs can jeopardize the fairness of a trial and the severity of a sentence resulting from a guilty verdict or plea.

Seem unfair? Only if you ignore the possibility the accused is innocent.

This time he wasn't. What about the next time?



WHERE'S THE PUTTY TAT? One look at the hat and Tweety just had to get a picture with New Tanner reporter Maggie Petrushevsky on her recent trip to Nassau aboard the cruise ship Oceanic.

Cruise made for a great vacation

By MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY
The New Tanner

Look out Sylvester. You've got competition! Now that I've discovered what fun can be had on a cruise I'm looking at a change in careers.

I mean, if Tweety and Sylvester can hit the high life, why not Granie?

And yes, I had a great time while I was gone, thank you.

Seriously, I've threatened to try cruising for several years now and always chickened out for one reason or another. This time I was offered company, spare drivers so I could sit back while others did the work and experienced travellers to sort out the details of reservations. It was just too good an opportunity to resist, so I didn't.

The Oceanic, referred to as The Big Red Boat from its days as The Disney flagship, is operated by Premier Cruise Lines and sailed from Port Canaveral for Nassau. It was only a four-day stint but you'd have to participate to understand how much can be packed into that time.

First, we had our cabins upgraded from water level to premier deck. Apparently free upgrades are available at the last minute for passengers who have sailed with the line previously but the degree of upgrade surprised us all.

Maybe it had something to do with the fact the ship was designed to hold 1,600 to 1,800 passengers while we were carrying only 400 or less. With all that free space they didn't have to worry about finding good spots for their dedicated customers.

We barely had time to drop our bags in our cabin when we encountered Tweety and Daffy Duck. Since the gang had discovered this won-

derful Tweety hat for me, you know who had to pose with me for the picture. Actually, it isn't half as bad as I expected it to be. I may keep this one for posterity since I managed to lose the hat. The last time I went to Florida someone got me hugging Shamu the whale at Seaworld! That was the picture the kids kept.

The highlight of our trip turned out to be a pair of little girls from Maine who adopted us. Kim was 5 and Ashley was 8. Both are blond, petite and bright as new pennies. Ashley had a problem with sea sickness so we had a big discussion about roller coasters and ferris wheels while we toured a reef in a glass-bottomed boat. So long as she pretended to be on a ride, the motion didn't bother her. The moment she remembered she was on a boat, she'd start to go glassy-eyed and gulp.

Kim wanted to feed the fish so we will long remember this little thing not

high enough to peep over the ship's rail calling "here fishy, fishy" doling out pellets one at a time for the parrot fish. When we persuaded her to toss out a handful, a school of two or three dozen would surface to squabble over the treats.

A second treat was our waiter. Peter was Slovenian and made a point of pulling a prank on everyone at our table. The first night one of the men said he was so full he couldn't have dessert. Peter wouldn't accept that. When he pressed, Bob repeated he wanted nothing.

We all received our orders and then Peter arrived with this dinner plate for Bob. On it, written in flowing red icing, was the word "Nothing" garnished with sprigs of mint. And so it went until he'd caught each of us.

Another treat was the wooden horse race on a plastic track on the third night. This is one of those events that sounds so phony you almost go just to see how bad it can be. It's hard to believe a bunch of adults can get that excited as the announcer rolls dice to decide the placement for each animal.

One of our table partners bought a horse for the race, then conned one of the other men into writing up the beast's pedigree while the wife of yet another partner offered to be the jockey. Since jockeys wear silks, Shirley dug out her silk housecoat, put Leigh's cap on backwards and maneuvered her wooden beast to the second place in a very close race. She did manage to pick up the audience nod for the best-dressed combo and then held the winning ticket for the daily double.

What the heck. It was such a great trip that now I've got my eye on the cruise to Alaska.



There are so many strikes being reported they're now on the sports page under bowling..



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