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Sometimes, both sides of the story can't be told

The opinion page in a newspaper is, as the name suggests, the place where people's opinions are printed. It's the part of the newspaper where normal rules of objectivity don't apply. And it's not necessarily my opinion being expressed — whomever appears on the page is free to express whatever viewpoint they may have, and are bounded only by libel laws and commonly accepted community standards.

An example is last week's letter to the editor by the person who didn't like the way I was using editorial space. That was that person's opinion and, regardless of what I think, I have an obligation to allow it to be expressed. This paper isn't my personal property, after all. Criticism is an inherent and inevitable part of jobs like mine — and it keeps me on my toes.

But there are other cases that aren't so cut and dried, namely, last week's Principal's Perspective. That Lake Superior High School Principal Balan Menon is entitled to express his opinions is not in question. If he, or anyone else, is willing to put their name to an article, and if that article is not libellous or extreme, chances are it'll be printed.

But what happens when the object of criticism is unable to speak in their own defense?

I ran into the same problem in a Dec. 3 story, which was about the decision not to make Mr. Menon's contract permanent. Mr. Menon was willing to speak about what happened, as were the parents who supported him. But the local trustees, as well as other officials of the Lake Superior Board of Education, were bound by confidentiality rules and couldn't comment.

There are two sides to every story, and both should and were given an opportunity to speak. But in cases where only one side is permitted to say anything, a judgement has to be made: are you doing reader's a greater disservice by running the one side of the story you can get, or is the disservice greater by not running the story at all. In this case, I, in consultation with others, decided that the story was too important to ignore.

And in the case of the *Principal's Perspective* article, since elected officials know when they run for office they'll be the target of criticism, fair or otherwise, I ran that as well.

It's not my job to take a stand on the case, particularly since I, like a lot of people, don't know all the facts. But the problem is the board can't come to its own defense, so I can only tell — and print — one side of the story. And as a journalist that's unsettling.

There's no easy or definite answer, nor is there a set of ethical rules that tell journalists what to do in hard cases like these. But at least people should be aware that, for reasons beyond anybody's control, they've only heard one side of the story.

And I hope now they do.



A tiny morsel of magic

In Toronto, the unexpected doesn't happen. The city is safe and reliable, and utterly predictable.

Stephen Brook

Mostly, Mr. Brook is right. Toronto is one of the most relentlessly sensible cities on the planet. Toronto streets, laid out by a 19th century British military man, march resolutely north and south and east and west, just like a blueprint. The city's concrete buildings spring ramrod erect at rigid right angles to an ocean of pavement; its torrents of treated sewage rush quietly, unseen, through subterranean viaducts straight into Lake Ontario. The people scurry obediently to their appointed tasks on subways, street cars and buses, their eyes buried in *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun*s.

For the most part, Toronto is the urban planner's dream, the accountants Nirvana. A metropolitan Holiday Inn: no surprises.

But there is one feature of Toronto that both surprises and delights. The most peaceful, unindustrialized, least Yuppified swatch of real estate within the city limits.

It's called the Toronto Islands.

The Toronto Islands are not much more than a glorified sandbar, really. A few hundred acres of trees and lagoons and cottages splayed across Toronto harbour no more than a longish canoe ride from the downtown core. The islands are linked to the city by a fleet of squat ferries that scuttle like lady bugs from mainland to island docks and back several times a day. The ferries transport hikers, bikers and picnickers. You cannot take your car or truck or any other motorized vehicular horror to the Toronto Islands.

They carry one other commodity, those island ferries - they carry island residents. Some 650 Torontonians occupy 250 island homes on about 33 acres of the Toronto Islands. The homes are not two story Whistler-style condos or sandblasted red brick townhouses. They are, for the most part, tiny cottages on tiny lots. Some of the cottages are rustic; some are downright

are not what you'd call up-scale, carriage-trade types. They have no arenas, no malls, no movie theatres or taverns. They must lug their groceries by hand or on their back from the ferry docks. They are at the mercy of the last ferry which chugs back to the city before midnight.

I think they are the luckiest people in Toronto.

Others think so too. For years there's been a dog-in-the-manger movement to kick the "squatters" as the anti-islanders call them, off the Islands.

The anti-islanders want to bulldoze the cottages and turn the communities into parkland. Which in Toronto, means sod, geometrically correct geranium planters and municipally-approved, strategically situated hot dog stands.

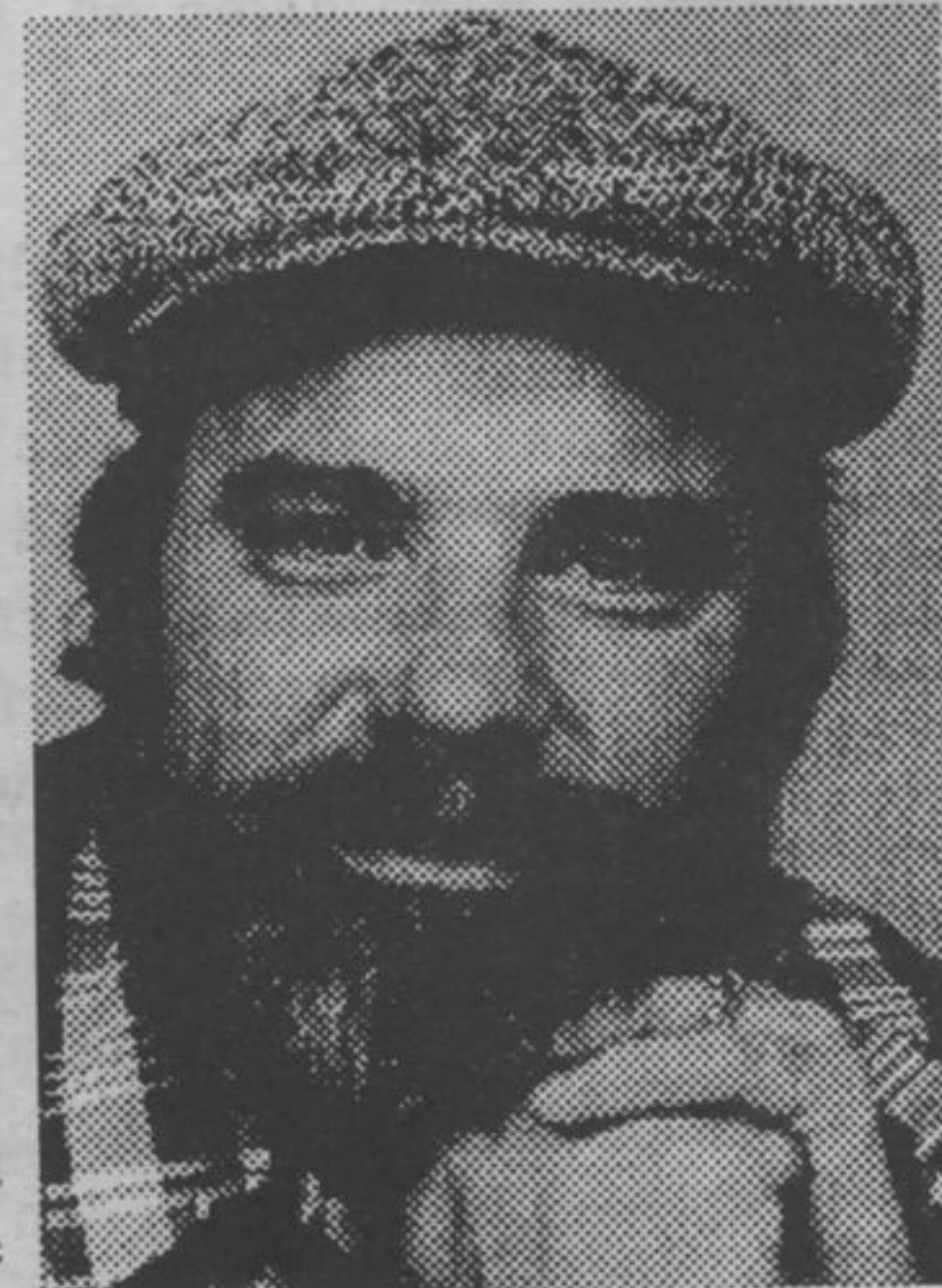
But it's not going to happen. Not for a century, anyway. Last month, the provincial government announced it would lease the land the homes stand on for prices ranging from \$36,000 to \$46,000.

Sounds pricey, but the leases run for 99 years.

I've never lived on the Toronto Islands but I did spend one warm summer night there, in the home of a friend. In the morning, we got up and had breakfast in her postage-stamp front yard. I remember the sun filtering down through the willows, delicious blueberries drenched in cream, the chatter of birds, the sonorous hoot of the ferry whistle...and once in a while, in the intervals of silence, the angry buzz of the city just across the harbour. It sounded like a huge, hornets nest that had just been kicked.

I had to work in the city that day and I remember boarding the ferry for the ten-minute ride, humming and smiling to myself. Most of the other passengers were un-Torontonianly relaxed too, and they met my eyes and smiled easily.

Nice to think that right in the concrete bosom of Toronto a tiny morsel of magic will live on for



Arthur Black

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