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**Bill's  
Bulletin  
Board**

By Bill Rea

Over the years, I think I have done a pretty good job of recording my opposition to capital punishment.

I have a number of reasons for opposing the death penalty; reasons which approach the issue from a variety of angles.

One of the reasons for my opposition can be summed up in just six words: "What if he (or she) didn't do it?"

Thanks to last week's developments, that reason can be condensed to just two words: "Steven Truscott."

After some 48 years of protesting his innocence for the murder of Lynne Harper, Truscott was acquitted. Good news, as far as I'm concerned.

I have lived far too long to still have a powerful and abiding faith in the infallibility of our judicial system. There have been many cases that I have followed in which people have been sent away who I believed in my guts were innocent. For some time, I have tended to question any guilty ver-

dict I hear or read about, and wonder if the system maybe got the wrong person, again. Granted, there are certain people that I have no trouble with them being convicted, such as Paul Bernardo. But even in his case, I find myself wondering if I was really sold on the mass of evidence against him, or if I was swept along with the tide of public opinion that agreed he should be locked away for life.

In Truscott's case, he was going to be executed. A learned judge had sentenced him to hang, and at the time, from what I've read, public opinion was going along with the idea of putting a 14-year-old boy to death.

I read last week that the late Pierre Berton wrote a poem at the time, lamenting the sentence, and that was met with a hostile response, including people expressing the hope that his daughter would be raped. I've put some words in print over the years that have made people (including some of you) mad at me, but I have

never encountered anyone who would advocate something like that. And all because a man expressed an opinion that was out of step with the prevailing view. Weren't a couple of World Wars fought in order to make such opinions tolerable, if not acceptable?

In the case of Truscott, had the prevailing mood got its way, he would have been in his grave before he was old enough to drive a car. I wonder how many of those people in 1959

stopped to ask themselves, "What if he didn't do it?"

And Truscott isn't the only one. There have been the David Milgaards, Guy Paul Morins and Donald Marshalls who have been wrongly convicted of murder, although it is true none of them faced the death penalty. But before any of you capital punishment proponents out there get too uppity and smugly accuse me of cherry-picking, let me remind you that the examples I have cited are cases we have found out about. How many innocent people in Canada alone have been executed or lived out their days in prison, answering for murders they didn't commit?

In February 1869, Patrick James Whelan was hanged, vigorously protesting his innocence of the murder of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, one of the Fathers of Confederation. What if Patrick James Whelan didn't do it?

It's pointless to try and

apologize to a grave.

And in case any of you feel like shrugging these points off, you or I could be the next wrongly-convicted murderer.

Truscott's story is tragic on a number of levels. They include the fact that a young man was robbed of his youth and young manhood, forced to sit in prison when he should have been starting to drive, going on dates and learning how to cope with a hangover. What if he didn't do it? He was told by a judicial system that considered itself (and still considers itself) fair that he was to be put to death. What if he didn't do it? He has spent almost half a century, almost the entire period that I have lived, with the handle "convicted murderer" applied to him with impunity. What if he didn't do it?

Lynne Harper died before making it to her teens. If Truscott didn't do it, then the person who did got away clean.

Now tell me how good our judicial system really is.

I know I sound like I'm knocking the way we deal with convicted criminals in our society, although I also have to temper my comments with a realization that there are few better systems elsewhere in the world, and things have improved here too. For example, things seem to be done more slowly and carefully than they were years ago. Lynne Harper's body

was found June 11, 1959. Truscott was convicted Sept. 30. That was a little more than three months. It took about a year longer than that to get O.J. Simpson's trial out of the way, and people at the time were impressed with the speed at which it was run (that was about the only impressive thing regarding the whole affair). There's no way anyone would be shoved through the system so fast these days, especially not a 14-year-old kid.

I certainly don't advocate that we stop putting criminals in prison, out of fear we might have the wrong guy. Our society has to be protected, to the extent that's possible, but we, as members of that society, have to be prepared to deal with things when mistakes like this happen.

There has been talk about compensating Truscott for the 48-year ordeal he has endured. I agree there should be something, but it will take more learned people than I to work out those details. And while that is going on, the rest of us can ponder.

An innocent 12-year-old girl was murdered, and our society responded by deciding that a 14-year-old boy, who has subsequently been acquitted, should die as a consequence. Fortunately we caught this mistake while it was still possible to make some form of amends.

We might not catch the next mistake in time.

**Editorial**

**Watch out for school kids when driving**

This is a reminder that the vast majority of you probably don't need, but a little bit of prevention never hurt anyone.

Kids are back to school this week, meaning we have to look out for them, especially for the first couple of days.

Think back to when you were a kid. The week after Labour Day was one of excitement, as we engaged in the novelty of breaking in new teachers and getting use to new classmates while getting back together with friends we hadn't seen in a couple of months. Of course, those positives were contrasted with a kind of down-in-the-dumps mood a lot of us had, as we saw the end of two whole months of freedom from pencils, books and teachers' dirty looks.

The point is basic safety may not be on the front burner for a lot of these kids. Oh sure, any parent worth his or her salt will have reminded the kids to be mindful of cars and other traffic when getting on or off a school bus, to look

both ways when crossing the street, etc.

But any kid who is truly a kid might be inclined to forget such lectures once they're uttered. The reason for that is, of course, simple. They are kids and they are likely going to act accordingly, just as we adults did at that age. Kids never change.

So we adults have to be aware of that, and be ready to compensate for the lapses of the young. That means being especially careful when driving past schools, and that also means being on the lookout for the school buses.

Us working folks who use the roads just before and just after school have had it pretty good for the last two months. We haven't had to stop for those flashing red lights.

Well folks, they are back, and so is our obligation to stop for them. Forget the fact that you face a stiff fine and the reality of demerit points if you fail to do so. Remember that the reason you stop for a school bus is

it's the right thing to do, no matter how frustrating it might be when you're trying to get to work.

Kids might forget their

**Letter to the Editor**

**Fairness needed in school funding**

Regarding "Funding for faith-based schools is inevitable" (Sentinel editorial, Aug. 1):

Thank you for your insightful editorial on Ontario's current debate on the funding of faith-based schools. I received a faith-based education in Quebec, which subsidizes all non-public schools and am now the mother of four children who are enrolled in non-funded faith-based schools. As an optometrist, I am left to wonder why my Catholic colleagues are able to benefit from their education taxes should they choose a faith-base education for their children while I am not.

The British North American Act of 1867 did not intend to create, nor did it create, an education sys-

tem that supported only one denomination in Ontario. Rather, the intent was to protect the persecuted religious minority of the day, Catholics, while ensuring education funding for the protestant schools. The Catholic schools have maintained their autonomy, while the protestant schools welcomed all faiths and eventually forced to morph into our present-day secular public school system.

While Catholic school board chairs have publicly supported John Tory's plan to include all faiths in our public school system, Premier Dalton McGuinty, whose family benefited from publicly-funded Catholic education, insists on excluding non-Catholic faith-based schools.

The newspapers continue

because adults are adults and are expected to act accordingly.

Not too much for anyone to ask, is it?

to be flooded with letters from taxpayers across this province calling for two scenarios: including all faiths in our public school system or the end to Catholic school funding. There has been no significant support for the Liberal platform — continuing with a school system that even the United Nations Human Rights Committee has ruled is unfair.

Since all three major political parties are unwilling to address our Constitution in order to eliminate guaranteed Catholic funding — and we all support fairness — we must move to make our school system welcoming for all religious communities.

Dr. Gila Gladstone-Martow,  
Thornhill