

Latimer deserves to stay in jail

Here's a question: if Robert Latimer really believes he did nothing wrong when he locked his disabled 12-year-old daughter Tracy in the family car and gassed her death, why did he try to cover it up when he did it?

Indeed, after he killed her, Latimer put her in her bed and claimed she died of natural causes, only to admit the truth, i.e. that he'd murdered her, after medical officials saw through his ruse.

And many people see him as a hero.

Worse, if he really does have no remorse, as he claimed last week when his bid for parole was denied by the National Parole Board, then he belongs in jail as long as it's legally possible. And then some.

It is frightening to this writer - and even rather surprising - that so many Canadians - including the editorial writers of most major newspapers - are buying into the convenient Latimer-as-hero and/or Latimer-has-suffered-enough scenarios, viewing him as a "victim" in this sorry saga without any acknowledgment that there is only one real victim here, Tracy.

People say it's easy for those of us who have healthy children to criticize Latimer for murdering his severely handicapped daughter in what he claims was a "mercy" killing.

Whose "mercy", one wonders? Certainly not Tracy's. A young girl who, although terribly handicapped after a series of mistakes by a hospital starved her brain of oxygen, Tracy attended a special school and it was obvious to those who knew her that she liked music and, in the words of the co-ordinator of the program Tracy attended, she "experienced joy".

She couldn't speak, but she could communicate. And there was never a shred of evidence that she wanted to die, that she wanted to be "freed" from her condition.

Latimer claims he killed her to relieve her of her constant pain and to avoid yet another in a series of operations. Here again, it was Latimer's view that her pain was uncontrollable, not a legitimate medical view. And there was more provincial assistance available if caring for Tracy had become unbearable but again, there is no evidence that Latimer sought out all the options before deciding to play God.

There are thousands of Tracys in Canada - and that's not even counting the hundreds of thousands of aged and feeble persons - who likely would not subscribe to Latimer's view which, in effect, decrees that their lives are not worth living, are not as valuable as the lives of those who enjoy a "normal" existence.

But who gave Latimer - or anybody else - the right to decide on somebody else's behalf, even his own daughter, whether her life is less valuable than his?

If we accept Latimer's argument - a position supported by many, many Canadians - we could certainly save ourselves a lot of money and trouble by simply culling out all those persons who don't fit some sort of acceptable physical and mental standard.

In its editorial on the subject, the Globe and Mail attacked the parole board for its "terrible decision" on Latimer, arguing that because he killed "out of compassion" and feels no remorse for it, "he retains the freedom to assert that he did right. His opinion harms no one. Let him go."

Au contraire. His opinion, i.e. that Tracy didn't measure up to his criteria to allow her to continue living, if accepted by society would harm thousands of Canadians who are in similar circumstances.

That is why Latimer was convicted of second-degree murder in the first place. It is precisely why we as a society should never, ever accept Latimer's notion - a view echoed by promoters of euthanasia - that those who fail the test of "personhood" can be dispatched as long as it's done with compassion.

To free Latimer before the end of his term would be to signal to society that we really don't think his crime was as serious as the Supreme Court thought it was when they ultimately upheld his conviction.

And while it's true that Latimer isn't likely to leave prison and begin gassing other children who suffer from severe disabilities, it's also true that - and you can take this to the bank - he'll quickly become the poster boy for those who believe society should have the right to kill in this way.

As the Globe complained, if the parole board's logic "is correct, Robert Latimer will probably have to be kept behind bars forever."

Not a bad idea, actually.



National Affairs

Claire Hoy

Faith must be up to the individual

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anyone who would argue that to the contrary.

I do not regard myself as a religious man. I put that line into print a couple of years ago, and a member of the clergy of my acquaintance sent me an e-mail not long after, challenging me on that statement. We sort of compromised that I'm spiritual. But as I later reflected, I really have very little idea what it means to be religious, or even spiritual. And in the great scheme of things, that lack of understanding doesn't have much impact on my ability to get through the day.

While I don't have any strong religious affiliations, I

do respect people who do, as I respect their right to practise their individual faiths, and I would defend that right. For example, I have no problem with same-sex marriages, but I would have a problem if a member of the clergy was forced to go against his or her conscience and perform such a marriage if that person's faith didn't allow them.

As a kid, my mother dragged me to Sunday school until I became too big to drag. The truth is all I remember about that experience was drawing refrigerators with crayons (for some reason, I had this thing as a little kid for drawing refrigerators in Sunday school). I've always fond it a little

interesting that most of what I know about God and religion I learned not in church, but in the public school. These were in the days before society got too secular to allow such things. The religious indoctrination ran a whole range, depending on who my teacher was in a given year. For some years, the class recited the Lord's Prayer, and that was it. One teacher read directly from the Bible. I had one religious fanatic for a teacher who would spend about half an hour every morning literally preaching to us.

So my current religious position, at this stage of my life, doesn't surprise or upset me. It is part of what I am, one part of me with which

I'm reasonably content. But I still reserve the right to issue letters of my own Upstairs at some point.

Perhaps this is a bit of an opening into the fact this is the last column I will be writing before the holidays. The last couple of weeks have seen a bit of confusion and upheaval for me, in terms of work and family and coping with the weather. Yet, here I am ready for a bit of celebration. I have even managed to get most of my Christmas shopping done, and what little remains should be easy (I hope).

So from me and mine, the best of the season to you and yours.

And let's hope the weather improves.

Our Readers Write

Overwhelmed by generosity

This time of year, we are all so bombarded with gift giving and planning events, making sure all expectations are met of our families and friends, that we hardly have time to enjoy things our-

selves.

Last Wednesday night, we had our annual Christmas dinner for the Bolton and District Childcare Providers Network, where we (the caregivers) get together and

have a great meal and exchange gifts. We try not to talk shop, as this is supposed to be a night off, but we couldn't all help but talk about the generosity that the families we provide care for have shown.

You see, each year our group, with the help of the chaplain at Robert F. Hall, sponsors a local family in need. One of the things we do is place boxes in our homes, whereby the parents of the children we watch can donate whatever they see fit. Well, this year, as in previous years, all the families we provide care for have been so generous and risen to the occasion. I am always overjoyed that people genuinely care and want to help others in need. We truly are a great community.

The giving for this family came not only locally, but from people in Toronto and even as far away as New Zealand. We have had local

companies donate hair care, a manicure, \$100 restaurant gift card, two weeks private physical trainer services, to name a few. All in the name of helping a local family in need.

Therefore, the Bolton and District Childcare Providers Network would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who participated in bringing joy to the family we are sponsoring this year. We could not have done any of this without each and every-one who donated.

Blessings to you all and have a very Merry Christmas.

There are families and individuals in need right here in Caledon, so please contact a local church (of any denomination) for information on how you can donate locally.

Kathleen Baggio,
Bolton and District
Childcare Providers
Network

MP Tilson was a help on budget problem

Thanks to Dufferin — Caledon MP David Tilson.

According to the 2007 federal budget, beginning this year an RRSP must mature before the end of the year in which the annuitant turns 71 years of age (previously 69 years of age). Last year, I turned 69 and converted my RRSPs into RRIFs.

Nothing was said in the budget with regard to the required annual minimum withdrawal payment in a RRIF.

I sent a letter to Tilson, who forwarded a copy of it to the Minister of Finance.

Result: a publication from Revenue Canada, dated Nov. 15, 2007, stating the minimum RRIF withdrawal requirement will be waived in 2007 for RRIF annuitants turning 70 or 71 in 2007, and in 2008, for those turning 71 in 2008.

If you have already received in 2007 RRIF withdrawal payments, you may return them to a RIFF or a new RRSP up to the minimum withdrawal amount for 2007.

By the way, my husband Ren is a retired tax lawyer.

Lenny Dykstra,
Bolton

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