

ALBERTA Street News

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Now that's an ugly sweater!

Editor Linda Dumont with her son, Shaun Giroux, modeling their Christmas sweaters.

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ALBERTA STREET NEWS

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**Linda Dumont and Shaun
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Three Christmas Bells

By Sharon Austin

The three Christmas bells sat side by side on the top shelf of the crowded china cabinet. Every few days Grandma would open the china cabinet doors and say, "Hello, my pretties," as she touched the baby doll's lace bonnet or gently moved the ornaments. A little girl stared in through the glass, longing to play with the small pretty bells but heeding her grandma's words: "Look all you like, but don't touch." The bells were Christmas ornaments and on the shelf they looked like three tiny carollers but when they were hung on the tree their little feet could swing back and forth forming the knockers of the bells. The little girl named the bells and imagined all the things that they would say and do if they could get out of the cabinet. The red bell she named Ruby for her bright red robe was trimmed with white and in her hands she held a white fur muff. The green bell she named Holly for her deep green robe was frosted with snow and in her hands she held a holly wreath. The bell with the yellow robe she christened Joy for she looked so happy holding a black and white puppy in her hands. Suddenly the big window, black with the night sky, began to shimmer with a soft purple glow and fluttering dots of stardust floated in the air. "Grandma, come quick," the little girl called but by the time Grandma shuffled into the room all the stardust was gone. "What an imagination you have," Grandma laughed as the child tried to tell her about the purple stardust. Far out in the night sky a tiny comet with a nebulous purple tail was streaking across the sky as it followed its chosen orbit. This, however, was no ordinary comet and somehow the stardust brought subtle changes to the things that its magic touched.

The Three Christmas bells did not know at what moment awareness came upon them. At first it was just the fresh scent of pine wafting through the air, then the sound of Christmas music and voices singing carols. They listened as Grandma read the Christmas story and their tiny hearts filled with joy to know that the Savior had been born so long ago in Bethlehem. The bells watched as the big Christmas tree was brought into the parlour and decorated with lights and garlands of red and gold and beautiful ornaments. How they longed to be taken from the china cabinet and hung upon the tree so they too could really be part of Christmas. "I am so pretty that I should be put up on the highest bow of the tree, right below the angel," Ruby dreamed as she fluffed her short brown curls. Holly, the green bell, was adventurous and inquisitive. "I would like to meet all the ornaments and find out where they've come from. What stories the old Father Christmas will be able to tell! Perhaps I will ride the big Christmas carol," she mused. Joy, the yellow bell, looked longingly at the dog and kitten ornaments and wished she could get to know them all. Soon the house was filled with the delicious smell of turkey and apple pies and the tree was surrounded by gifts wrapped in bright paper and the stockings were stuffed to overflowing. Then the whole family burst upon the scene and there was laughter and feasting and the whole house was filled with the joy and goodwill of Christmas.

A week after Christmas the bells went back to being pretty porcelain ornaments on the shelf until awareness would drift upon them a few weeks before Christmas each year. Year after year they watched as the chosen tree became a glorious Christmas tree sparkling with lights and tinsel and year after year they longed to be put upon the tree. As the years rolled by they saw the changes too; the little girl was all grown up and she didn't gaze in at the bells anymore. There were fewer guests, and Grandma seemed to have grown very old and slow and even the tree was smaller with less decorations. One year the bells became aware they could hardly see out from behind the dusty glass. "Grandma really needs to do some dusting," Ruby complained. Just then Grandma wheeled over to the china cabinet in her wheelchair but she did not even open the doors. She lay her pale forehead against the dusty glass as her faded blue eyes peered in. "Hello my pretties," she whispered softly. "You are all so special to me." Then she wheeled slowly back to the warmth of the kitchen. That year there was only a tiny tree with a few small presents and the girl came to pick Grandma up and take her out for Christmas dinner. Still, the bells knew it was Christmas and they found joy in reminiscing about all the wonderful Christmases they had seen. The next year when they awoke, the house was cold and strangely quiet. There was no sound of Grandma's TV, no voices, no patter of feet; the only sound was the hollow tick tock of the big clock. Suddenly the cabinet doors opened and the girl, now grown, stared in at the bells. "Grandma loved you so much," she said with a tear in her eye, "I'm going to take you home and put you on my Christmas tree." How wonderful it was for the bells to at last be placed on the Christmas tree; their dreams had all come true. "How pretty these bells are," guests would exclaim as they admired the beautiful tree. At night, when the house was asleep Ruby would chatter with the princess dolls and Holly would ride the Christmas carol with the pretty horses, and Joy would meet with all the animals. She especially loved to be near the manger scene and share in the glory of the Savior's birth.

One day it was time for the girl to take down the tree and she gently wrapped each ornament in tissue paper. Suddenly, the branch moved and Joy cascaded down the tree to smash upon the floor. "Oh no," the girl cried as she bent to pick up the broken yellow shards. There was no fixing the bell as it was smashed beyond repair and she swept it sadly into the dustpan. "Yikes" the

Continued on page

And now 2018 is coming to an end

By Joanne Bengier

1. December 2 is Advent Sunday, which begins the season of repentance leading up to Christmas. An advent wreath often has four blue candles and one pink one. The pink adds a cheering promise to come after the four sombre Sundays of Advent.
2. December 3 is the first day of Hanukkah which actually begins at sun down December 2. it will last until December 10 and each night an additional menorah candle is lit for the eight days. Gifts are exchanged.
3. December 4 is national Cookie Day. Buy them, eat them, share them. The super-organized will bake and freeze their Christmas cookies today.
4. December 5 is International Volunteer Day. This is a great time to volunteer to help some group celebrate the holidays.
5. December 6 is the National Day of remembrance of Violence Against Women. Light a candle for women who are no longer with us this Christmas season.
6. December 7 is Pearl Harbour Day. It was the only attack on this continent in WW2
7. December 8 is National Brownie Day. Chow down on the skinny chocolate cake that makes us fat. In Guatemala they burn the devil on December 8 to chase away evil spirits as they prepare for the holidays.
8. December 12 is Poinsettia Day. Use this bloom to celebrate another borrowed year. Remember when we were told the earth would end December 12, 2012?
9. December 13 is National Coca Day. Order hot chocolate for cold people who must be outside today.
10. December 14 is Monkey Day. "I'd sooner see one than be one."

11. December 14 is the second Friday in December so it is Ugly Christmas Sweater Day. Wear one everywhere today for work and play. If you are like me you'll just keep on wearing Christmas sweaters from now until the end of the year.

12. December 17 is Wright Brothers' Day. Fly a paper airplane.

13. December 21 is the pagan holiday of Yule, celebrated on the longest night of the year. It is our first day of winter. Celebrate with a chocolate Yule log.

14. December 25 is Christmas Day. Charles Dickens called fruitcake "Geological home-made cake". Enjoy some today.

15. December 26 is Boxing Day in Canada, St. Stephen's Day in Ireland and Kwanza in the U.S. for those of African heritage.

16. December 30 is Bacon Day. Take a break from all that left over turkey.

17. December ends with December 31, New Year's Eve. Write out your resolutions and at midnight, sweep 2018 out the back door, then welcome 2019 through the front door. Happy New Year.



Preparing for Christmas

By Joanne Bengier

1. My Christmas list keeps growing as my cash reserves keep shrinking.
2. Christmas comes in the month when the heating bills are highest and everyone needs new warmer winter clothes.
3. What's that? Two more for Christmas. What will I get them. Chocolates are one size fits all, but they don't fit my budget.
4. Cash is the best gift but I haven't figured out how to make a five dollar bill look like its cost \$20.
5. It was a perfect Christmas. The tree, the wrapped gifts, the festive food. Then the TV program ended and reality set in.
6. The nice thing about Santa Claus is he doesn't expect a gift of the same value in return.
7. I just found out she's already bought one for herself so now I have to get something else for her.
8. Oh dear, I just realized this S is a logo not a size. I will insult her. Um, there's the one I didn't buy because the color was wrong. I'll dash out and see if it's still there.
9. I can't find the tape. How do you wrap without tape?
10. Sure, I know home made bows are best, but all I can manage is to put a stick on in the right place.
11. This last minute shopping is the pits. The parking lot is so icy I need cleats but you can't wear them in stores
12. Store clerks are in t-shirts and I came in my heavy coat. Do I wear it or carry it?
13. Ah, the smells of Christmas – over heated shoppers are steaming away.
14. Just as I am counting my change the clerk asks for my postal code and email address.
15. Cyber orders are taken in an instant but most are delivered by snail mail. Gifts don't pop out of the computer. They arrive after Christmas.
16. I hid the presents I bought on sale last summer but I can't for the life of me remember where.
17. Is it cheaper to get a turkey for 69 cents a pound if you have to spend \$100 or is it cheaper to buy a \$2.49 cents a pound turkey all by itself?
18. They say it's unlucky if you don't wear new clothes for both Christmas and New years. So second hand clothes count as new?
19. Why do ovens always stop working in December?
20. You can never have too much eggnog. I use it as a coffee whitener and as milk for my cereal. Use your noggin.
21. Gravy and cranberry sauce come in cans so everyone can do. Why can't we have canned roast turkey?
22. We must always set an extra plate for the unexpected guest. It's OK to hope he never arrives.
23. The clean up always takes ten times as long as the preparation which takes five times as long as the actual feast.
24. They're not stains. They are reminders of Christmas past. Enjoy your memories.

Three Christmas Bells

red bell cried, "But better her than me." "I shall miss her," the green bell whispered, "She was a dear friend."

As the light slowly dimmed in her eyes the yellow bell knew only joy for she had known the joy of Christmas. For a short span of time she had known what it was to be human, to experience the joy and sadness, hopes and regrets, love and forgiveness that are a part of all of us. Later that night the dark cold sky was again filled with a purple glow and stardust filled the room. The tiny comet was back after it's 25 year orbit and the subtle changes that it's magic had brought disappeared. But, if you really look at the delicate faces of the two remaining bells you will see by their animated faces and secret smiles that they have truly been a part of Christmas.

A Miraculous story for everyone's Christmas stocking

By John Zapantis

One thing I've learned in life is to never doubt the serious claims of what a person believes will happen when it involves a miraculous outcome. I arrived one winter evening at a former girlfriend's place. Her name is Edwina Jean Dorothy Wallace.

When I arrived at her basement suite, she opened the door quickly, grabbing my one hand and escorted me to her living room, hysterically breaking some startling news to me. We were seated on her couch together as she started to describe the strange vision she had the night before.

She said in a loud and excited tone of voice, "The other night while lying in my bed, I saw a vision of a bunch of white cows hanging upside down from my bedroom ceiling and it's got something to do with your writing, John."

I immediately doubted her claim and sarcastically and loudly replied, "Are you crazy or something Edwina? Now that doesn't make any sense to me at all. Really now, like what does that have to do with my writing?"

I remember when I had first started dating Edwina back in January of 1995 that she had the ability to see things in the spirit, but was also a devout believer of the Lord.

One thing assured, I had no doubt about her beliefs in the Holy Spirit, but I had not yet seen any of her visions become a reality, so I told her to quickly change the subject, so that we could deal with the present. Well six months later, her vision that came to her in

the spirit was about to become my reality.

It was one day while walking west-bound along Edmonton's Churchill Square that I noticed a sign reading The Works and the dates that this

annual art show was showcasing the many artisans, who had their art on display at various facilities along the downtown core.

One of those facilities was the Commerce Place Mall on 101 Street and Jasper Avenue so I was encouraged to continue my walk to view the art at that facility.

The Works was notably an annual art show that gave aspiring and established artisans the opportunity of meeting the public and displaying their established works. The first artisan that I encountered while walking in from the east entrance of Commerce Place was social political artist Alex Tsang.

I introduced myself to the artisan asking him about his art until I heard enough about his presentation on his prided works. I told him I was an occasional contributing writer for various community newspapers in Edmonton and I'd be interested in doing an interview with him and a write up on his evolution as a social political artist.

He agreed immediately to the offer. I got a little curious about the huge steel vertical box that stood at six feet in height acting as a storage closet for his art illustrations and asked him how many art posters hung in that art closet as they all stood tightly next to one another, row on row.

Alex confirmed that there were exactly 99 illustrations that he had painted to his credit. He got my curiosity going, so I asked him to pull one of his art posters out so that I could sample one of the potential works.

He then dug into a row of illustrations and pulled out an art painting of a variation of four animal skeletal remains hanging upside down on a butcher's rack, a social political statement of his art that interpreted the exploitation of animals for profit.

Right then it dawned on me as I reflected on Edwina's vision in the spirit, about those cows hanging upside down from her bedroom ceiling and then telling me that the cows had something to do with my writing.

Edwina was right about one thing, those cows that hung upside down were now symbolic of those upside down skinned animals that hung upside down in that butcher's rack, but the various animals depicted in Tsang's art poster were

a variety of animals that differed from those cows that hung upside down from Edwina's bedroom ceiling.

Well, now I got the whole picture and was riding with Edwina's prediction while embracing the reality that she was right all along. I was determined in my destiny in covering this interesting assignment. Thanks to Edwina's spiritual guidance I was determined to persist in closing this deal with my discovery of Alex and his art.

Alex then suggested to me that for the write up we could use the painting that he pulled out from his art file, called, 'Fur', an acrylic painting of those four various animal carcasses, hanging upside down from a rack, after having their furs removed and prepared for the fur industry's consumer market.

Holly Cow! What a one in a million! What were the odds of that vision becoming my reality, only God knows!

Well about a week later I had done an interview with Alex Tsang. Then months later I found two newspapers to sell my story on the artist to - Vue Weekly, a weekly arts and entertainment magazine and Our Voice The Spare Change Magazine, a former street newspaper that employed people on the margins, who supplemented their incomes while selling the paper for donations, and writing about their personal issues.

Our Voice went belly up in January of 2010 and years later, in November 2018 of this year, Vue Weekly also went belly up, because of the paper's struggle to financially sustain its operations due to a lack of advertising revenues.

Vue Weekly published my story in issue 66 January 2 - January 8, 1997 on page 15, headlined E-town artist thrives on controversy, while Our Voice The Spare Change Magazine took an entirely different approach, discarding my story and only using three of Alex Tsang's paintings as a coloured photo collage on that back page of the Our Voice Spare Change Magazine in the February 1997 issue.

Well, just goes to show you that when someone tells you something that's beyond your understanding, don't deny them on their claims, especially when their vision could end up advancing you to the next great stage in life.

If you do, it's quite possible that you may never realize your dream, like I may not have, had I completely turned my back on Edwina. I'm more than content and thankful that I never did, while I waiting patiently for that so called disclaimer that later became my miracle. It couldn't have come at a better time. I have also been given the opportunity of sharing this little short story for every ASN reader's Christmas stocking!



Alberta Street News Media Relations Coordinator/
Reporter John Zapantis
Photo by Theresa Walsh Cooke

Collecting clothing for those in need

By Joanne Bengert

In the October issue of Alberta Street news there was a request for clothing donations. Thank you to those who donated warm winter clothing and blankets. The response was encouraging. Donations came from many different sources. A woman dropped off a carload of black garbage bags at the ASN office, seniors from Linda Dumont's chair yoga class came to class with bags of clothing, and the North East Seniors Centre donated the contents of their lost and found. Joanne Bengert's friend, Doreen Klause, was the biggest donor. She was downsizing from a house at the lake to a seniors apartment and donated a truck load of bedding and clothes.

Alberta Street News does not distribute clothing because there is only a home office so the clothing was taken to The Mission House, two blocks away, to be distributed to people in need. Linda Dumont and Richard Farr, who lives at The Mission house, looked through the donations. Clothing that was not suitable for the people, who come to The Mission House, such as children's clothing, sheets, table cloths and curtains, was taken to The Mustard Seed to be distributed from their Pack store, where people can shop for free, filling up a garbage bag with articles. Richard used his shopping cart to trundle everything else over to The Mission House where he is the volunteer in charge of clothing. There he filled a room with full black garbage bags.

Then came the sorting. Richard had help from several women, themselves in need of clothing. Each got to take home what she wanted. The coats were hung on a coat rack and other clothing put in boxes for distributing during the hours when the mission is open. Some things were placed on the give away table for people to help themselves. People who need a blanket, coat or other item are escorted to the back room by Richard, who, like a clerk in a high end clothing store, helps them to find something that fits. Richard also allows people to come in and select a bag of clothing as needed.

Rod Smith, who lives and works at The Mission House, gives out clothing, when Richard is not there to do it. He said that in one evening he gave away eight coats. Many of the people coming in to The Mission House are homeless, and while most go to the shelters in extreme weather, some are sleeping rough either by choice or because they have been barred from the shelters, even when the temperatures drop below minus 20 degrees centigrade.

Warm blankets and sleeping bags, winter coats, hoodies, sweaters, snow pants, boots, mitts, socks, and toques are in demand. Edmonton is the most northern capital city in the world, and every winter we have people freezing



Richard Farr at the Mission House with a rack of coats to distribute to those in need. Photo by Linda Dumont

to death on the street, or losing fingers and toes, or even noses, due to frost bite. At the last homeless memorial 137 people, who died due to homelessness in 2017, were honoured.

If you have clothing or blankets to donate, call Richard Farr at 780 246-1662, call Alberta Street News at 780-428-0805 or simply drop off clothing at the Alberta Street News office at 10548-96 Street.

Vendor profile : Frank Pierrot

By Frank Pierrot, photo by Linda Dumont



My name is Frank Perriot, aka Bunka. I started selling the Alberta Street News about 14 years ago. The late Glen Dumont told me about the paper and helped me to sell it. He was also my friend. I would sell the paper on an off over the

years. I worked as a drywall, then would end up on the streets again due to drugs and alcohol. My girl friend, Sail Boat Sally, and I sold the paper together and when we weren't selling the paper we would pick bottles or do odd jobs for people such as shovelling side walks or yard work or helping people move anything to keep us drinking or smoking drugs. But a lot of times he paper would help us eat. We sold the paper to get us coffee and food and a room

where we could shower and rest for a few days.

I wanted to write and thank the many people who helped us out over the past 14 years. Sail Boat Sally and I are no longer a couple but we had a lot of fun picking bottles and selling the street newspaper together. We were together for 15 years. I still miss her but we can no longer be a couple. We lost a lot of friends who were on the street with us due to drinking and overdose, also violence, some from sickness. We helped a lot of street people over the years with food or money we made from selling the paper or looking out for other street people. Street people help each other a lot, but as things go, we all have to care about each other no matter who it is. We get to look out for each other. Even if you're not on the streets you must look out for your fellow human beings and treat people how you want to be treated, like in September I was selling Alberta Street news by Claireview Superstore, giving people the peace sign, smiling and telling everyone that went in "Happy Monday". This one lady gave me a good donation and a card that said

'Happy Monday'. Inside the card were gift cards for various places like Superstore, Marks Work Warehouse, Tim Horton's, MacDonald, Dairy Queen and a few others which I forgot as with age the memory is not as good. I cannot work any more because of a bad back, arthritis in my knees, wrists and shoulders and also the last couple of months I began fainting. I lost one tooth due to fainting. The doctor told me I had a mild stroke which really got me into writing this so I can thank Alexandra for helping me out a lot on September 10, 2018. Here's what she wrote, "Dear Sir; thank you for the wonderful smile and greetings. I was feeling down on myself for getting angry with my young children. God Bless, In spirit. Alexandra."

I read it a few times and started to cry tears of joy that began to run down my face, which made me feel good about myself for cheering up this wonderful lady. Also like to thank the many people who gave me cards which I used to eat and treat fellow homeless people. Thank you fellow Edmontonians.

Don't ask what's wrong; ask what happened



By Allan Sheppard

Don't ask what's wrong; ask what happened
It isn't easy being young.

At the beginning of life's journey, everything is new. A child's only task is to learn: at first by observing and experiencing; gradually gathering, absorbing, refining; building a library of knowledge and, in the ideal long term, wisdom. It's an evolutionary process. What one knows today—and consequently how one thinks and behaves—arises directly from what one knew and experienced yesterday; what one knows and will do tomorrow flows directly from today's experiences and the effect they have on yesterday's knowledge.

Some experiences are good; some are bad; some are neutral. That's true as well of the effects experiences can have. Knowledge gained from experiences can be good, bad, or indifferent, as can behaviours resulting from such learnings. What seem to be good experiences can have objectively bad results; seemingly bad experiences can have objectively good results. It's complicated; nothing is certain. Outrageous fortune commands an unlimited supply of slings and arrows.

It's not a completely evolutionary process. There are random and intentional insults and acts of violence. But there are also random and intentional acts of kindness and affirmation. Parents, communities, institutions, societies all work to minimize the former and maximize the latter—for the good of the child as they see it, individually and collectively. They do their best, as they understand it, to protect and guide children in ways that enable them ultimately to take responsibility for themselves.

But there are no guarantees. Life is conditional and contingent. Stuff happens.

Two of my grandsons celebrated birthdays in the same week recently. The eldest turned ten; the youngest turned five. The day after the five-year-old's birthday, I took them both to the downtown library for a visit to the Makerspace,

where they would play computer and virtual-reality games. It's a regular treat we all enjoy and look forward to.

We travelled by transit, as we always do, this time taking the bus, instead of the LRT. We got off at the stop just north of Jasper Avenue on 101 Street. As we paused to orient ourselves, a woman accosted the five-year-old, who stood at the front of our little group. She bent down and, standing almost nose-to-tiny nose with my grandson, shouted, "YOU SHOULD BE DEAD!" then moved on, waving her arms and shouting as she went.

I was shocked. Speechless, as were passersby who saw and heard what happened. My ten-year-old grandson was the first to react. He wanted to chase after the woman and make her pay for what she had done. I directed his and my attention to his brother, who seemed stunned by what had just happened; bewildered, devastated, confused, overwhelmed. Understandably.

We did our best to comfort and reassure him. He had done nothing to provoke what had happened; he could do nothing to respond. When we got home later that afternoon, I told his mother what had happened. When she asked him how the encounter made him feel, he could only answer, "Bad."

He seemed unable to conceptualize or find words to describe what had happened to him or how it made him feel. But I wonder and worry if he has internalized the experience in a way that might be toxic because he cannot understand and articulate it.

Might he conclude that the incident was somehow his fault? It's a small step from that misguided (from an adult perspective) thought to thinking "I did something wrong" or, even more toxic, "There must be something wrong with me."

To make a mistake is one thing, not always bad; making mistakes is how we learn. It might be the best way to learn, if the environment is supportive; if it is not judgemental. But in the absence of enlightened support and encouragement, the slope between "I made a mistake" and "I am a mistake" can be steep and slippery. If one is young. Especially if one is young. Most especially if the environment in which one lives is judgemental.

In a judgemental environment, the first question parents, authorities, and would-be authorities ask when a child errs, is what's wrong with you? They turn teachable moments—Why did you do that? What can you, I, we do to fix things? How can you, I, we do better next time?—into accusations (There is no answer, certainly no healthy answer to what's wrong with you?). A healthy, stable, mature adult might be able to deflect such unfounded accusations. Surely it is unreasonable to expect or assume that a child can and will do the same.

Some children are more resilient than others. They may, by good luck or experiences have inner resources needed to resist. They may live in supportive, non-judgemental families and

environments. To repeat: it's complicated.

A new approach to child psychology, called trauma-informed therapy, diligently rejects asking a child who misbehaves what is wrong with you? Its advocates ask, instead, what happened to you? They look for answers within ten kinds of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; and a predictable set of family circumstances: mental illness, spousal abuse, substance abuse, relative in prison, divorce. Experts regard a child who experiences four ACEs as seriously at risk for a long list of negative behavioural, physical, and mental health outcomes. The risk rises as the number of exposures to ACEs rises beyond four. Which it does. In many cases, it does; with unfortunate consequences for the children and the adults they may be destined to become without sensitive intervention: intervention that asks what happened to you, not what's wrong.

But that can't be the end of things. Surely it must be only the beginning.

The woman who accosted my grandson inflicted serious emotional abuse on him that may have a negative outcome as he grows older. Time will tell, but I can't help wondering and worrying.

Yet again, it's complicated.

It might be tempting to ask of the woman what's wrong with her. To accuse and judge her. To make her pay, as my older grandson wanted. But does she not deserve, as much as anyone else including my grandson, to be asked what happened to her? Might her behaviour be a consequence of ACEs or overwhelming adult experiences? Might she benefit from a trauma-informed approach to therapy as I believe my grandson might and hope he will, if he needs it? If so, how can she get such support? What if she doesn't want it?

I don't have answers to these questions, but I believe it is important to ask them and, as a society, to work toward better answers than we have found so far.

Which leads me to a final, I hope not overwhelming, question: if it is appropriate, when children are in distress, to ask what happened to them as a first step toward healing, is it not equally important to ask ourselves, our families, our communities, our institutions, our society what happened to us that we have become in so many ways so dysfunctional?

Surely we owe that to our children. And to ourselves.

It isn't easy being old, either.

Merry Christmas from ASN

Social Impact Bonds: Profit over justice

By Timothy Wild

A few weeks ago I attended a screening of the documentary, *The Invisible Heart*, by Canadian filmmaker Nadine Pequenez, which looks at the increasing popularity of Social Impact Bonds (SIBs). Essentially SIBs are a means for the private sector to invest in selected public social service programs. If the chosen program is “successful”, in terms of meeting predetermined targets, private investors are rewarded with their money back in addition to a percentage profit. The film chronicled examples of the use of these Bonds in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, and provided a range of critiques – both pro and con – of the suitability of the concept and practice in the resolution of complex and enduring social problems.

After the documentary, time was allocated for a panel discussion, which I participated in as a representative of Calgary Social Workers for Social Justice. I have long been against the use of SIBs. Specifically, when I was a member of the Council of the Alberta College of Social Workers, I moved two successful motions on behalf of the profession opposing the use of these instruments in our province. Essentially, I believe that SIBs result in the commodification of misery, and provide an unsavory opportunity for private investors to benefit financially from the ongoing, socially constructed and unnecessary blight of injustice, marginalization and despair. More on this later, but it is important to put the idea of SIBs into context. SIBs originated in the United Kingdom in 2010. Prime Minister David Cameron suggested that given the implications of the global financial crisis of 2008, the United Kingdom was short of funds to deliver public programmes, and SIBs could infuse the social service sector (or selected bastions within that sector), with private capital.

Cameron’s argument, however, regarding the lack of funds, was clearly nonsense and ideologically motivated. As pointed out by a number of critics, including Alain Badiou, Britain was able to find trillions to shore up

the country’s private financial sector by a quasi-nationalization of the banking sector, without actually gaining public control or serving the longer term requirements of the common good. However, to return to the story, SIBs were first applied to a program designed to reduce subsequent re-offending rates of a select group of inmates in a prison in Peterborough, England. There were a number of shortcomings with this particular case, and the evaluation results are mixed at best. Indeed, eight years later, the jury is still out on the actual effectiveness of the approach.

As the documentary shows, despite this criticism, and concerns about the actual impact of SIBs, there is a growing private sector appetite for profiteering from the public domain. Not surprising, as it is almost a guaranteed investment. Once implemented, governments can’t actually allow SIBs to fail. And SIBs are heralded by many as a panacea for the apocryphal problems of waste and ineffectiveness in the public sector, with the suggestion being that the monetary acumen and profit motive of the financial sector will necessarily result in innovation, better outcomes and, ultimately, savings to the public purse. That’s the theory anyway, but I still can’t figure out how profit and return of initial investment can be less costly than the so-called “waste” of the public sector. Also I don’t really see much “innovation” actually happening; skimming is certainly a potential problem. Furthermore, if “innovation” was to happen, shouldn’t it be targeted at those with the highest needs? What about the “preferential option for the poor”?

We also don’t need to resort to SIBs. There are other ways to enable the private sector to participate in the funding of social programmes. Taxation readily springs to mind. There is considerable leeway for Alberta to increase corporate tax rates, while still maintaining a competitive advantage over neighbouring provinces. Capital gains tax is another untapped source that could be used to more adequately fund social provision. I suppose my main point is that western

corporations benefit economically from the security and peace promoted by social inclusion, and they should be willing to pay for that tranquility, without necessarily expecting an additional financial return.

SIBs are certainly nowhere near as effective and innovative as having a planned, professional and coordinated approach to the development of inclusive and transformative public policy and the programmatic provision of social services. This approach will undoubtedly be more effective, efficient and dignified than an ugly patchwork of initiatives reliant upon the fickle fancies of the private sector.

And ideology and finances aside, I feel that SIBs take away from the inherent dignity of people as people, and commodifies them as people as potential investment opportunities. The documentary, for example, looked at a type of head start program in the United States, which would help children, from economically marginalized areas, be kindergarten ready when they actually start elementary school. Certainly a fantastic – and, surprise surprise, an already proven – idea. But shouldn’t this be the goal of governments for all students, and not simply those who happen to live in a particular area that caught the roving eye of investors? Shouldn’t other issues such as housing, mental health and addictions support be based on individual need, not market profitability? Ultimately, the market approach, as has been proven time and time again, is not suitable in resolving social issues; indeed it has been an actual brake on the extension of justice.

Regardless of SIBs being a way to potentially provide more funds to an increasingly starved social sector, I believe that they are unethical and wrong in so many ways. We need to look at issues through the lens of addressing social need in an effective, efficient and dignified publically funded manner, rather than providing attractive opportunities for investors within the current hegemony of market capitalism. That being the case, we need to discuss increased corporate taxation. Let’s put people before profit.



Chewy

By Vivian Risby

My dog and I go and pick bottles. I have a lazy dog. When we get ready to go I have to bring a blanket, her food and water. She will walk for a while, then I have to push her cover up or she will not move or she will turn around and go back home.

I went to jail for her for one day only. I got home that day and Chewy wanted her dog treat but I did not

even give her anything until the next day. Of course she was mad. That day we were picking and then she tripped me. Now my foot is sore. She had broken my arm and leg.

No, I will not let my baby down just because she is blind. I love my dog better than a husband. Dog do not cheat. Husbands – some do.

Now I have a fine again. I was at the Farmers’ Market and I had taken Chewy to the bathroom and was talking to a friend of mine. I sat down. Next I notice a paddy wagon plus a cop car. All I had was Chewy’s water. I did not know she had a beer next to her. Plus, I got charged for open liquor and I had a warrant but it was Red Door. Let me go.

Cops told me to get in the car. I did. And Chewy got in the car first and sat with the cop. Now I have to go to court again. What next?

We can change

By Maria B.

“To believe in something, and not to live it, is dishonest.” Mahatma Gandhi

There are three steps to change our attitude:

1. Our beliefs about ourselves are the guides of our thoughts, words and actions.
2. Our thoughts are very important as they influence our words and actions.
3. Our words are results of our thoughts. Our actions are the results of what we believe, what we think, and the results are our actions.

If we perceive the world as a hostile place, it will directly influence our beliefs. Our words and how we treat ourselves and others reflect in our actions. Whatever we believe affects our actions. If we believe that a certain action is negative, we will reply in a negative form.

If, on the other hand, you believe an action to be positive, then our actions will be positive.

Taking action (or not taking action), gives you results of one sort or another. If you evaluate your results and if you don't like what you find, or if you want different results or better results, it circles right back around to what you believe.

So what do you believe? And are your beliefs standing in your way? Do your beliefs support your ability to prospect successfully? If they do not, it's time to change your beliefs.

“Faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe.” Mitch Albom,

Words have such power. They can hurt our

feelings or encourage us, they can uplift us or depress us, they can shape us or break us. As children, the words that were spoken to us have become a part of us. They are planted in our subconscious and we replay them over and over in our mind. Most of us grew up with negative messages that continue to run through our minds and they continue to affect our decisions in life.

“What have I always believed?

That on the whole, and by and large, if a man lived properly, not according to what any priests said, but according to what seemed decent and honest inside, then it would, at the end, more or less, turn out all right.” Terry Pratchett,

The best way to change our beliefs is to sit down and write down all the beliefs that come from your parents or the people that raised you. Question every belief that you have been told that you are. Make an honest observation of who you are and the one that conforms to the belief of who do you think is closer to yours.

While you are going through this, I want you to understand that when we were born we had everything within us that we need to succeed in life.

WE WERE BORN AS GIFT TO THE WORLD, WE NEVER ASKED TO BE CONCEIVED OR TO BE BORN, THIS DECISION WAS MADE FOR US.

Every child is an incredible human being that deserves to be respected and treated with respect.

I learned that in life, we teach others how to treat us and if we do not have a very good image of ourselves we are going to become the



welcome mats for people to abuse us.

When I was growing up I always felt, I did not belong in this world but you know what everyone of us has the incredible right to be in this world, do not let people decide that their definition of you is who you are no one can define who you are, you are the only one that can define yourself.

By changing your thoughts just remember that your thoughts aren't a statement of fact, but a declaration of your goal. It is not yet a fact but you are taking the first steps to manifest your dreams.

You are in charge of your own life, the way you live it, the way you deal with issues and the way you present yourself. Make better choices and the end result will be much more peaceful and more pleasurable.

Live your life with pride of who you are, have compassion and kindness for others and never forget that our Creator has an incredible plan in life for you to fulfill.



Peace on Earth, above, is a painting by Linda Dumont. This and other paintings by members of The Seeds of Hope Art Club at The Mustard Seed will be for sale at the Winter Benefit Concert and Art Sale for The Mustard Seed starting at 3 p.m. December 16 at Greenfield Community Church at 3712 -114 Street (780) 435-1060.

Love

In a world where material gain seems to be the end goal,
With relationships merely a hurdle or a mark that must be met.
Where for many the drone of the TV or cell phone is the norm.
Such notions as love and charity seem to be of a foreign language.
Where kindness is seldom if ever seen.

We must be the change.

Not in our own striving, but rather because it is our very nature to be loving and kind to all as far as we are capable.
For it is the whisper of mercy that brings the greatest change in one's heart.

Not the crashing and railings of discontentment and hate.

I wish you a merry Chistmass, and a wonderfull New Year
To you, your family and loved ones
Merry Chistmass, and a wonderful New Year!
From me, my family and loved ones.

Sincerely,

Angeliqe Branston