



analysis

“The principle of revenge”

It was in Vancouver during the summer of 1980. I can still remember the posters: **MISSING, SIMON PARTINGTON, age 8 . . . MISSING, DARYL JOHNSRUDE, age 15.** There were more, too. More children. More teenagers — some of them 13, the same age as I was that summer. Before the end of that year, bodies began to turn up — twisted, dismembered and mutilated bodies — in cars, in fields, in parking lots. Partington’s body was discovered just up the road from my parents’ home.

by Stephen Mitchell

That fall, the terrifying string of deaths were traced to a single man, Clifford Robert Olson. For a while, his name was on everyone’s lips. We were a province of armchair judges, trying to figure out how to deal with this dangerous, psychopathic killer.

Just entering high school, my friends and I were suddenly confronted with a puzzling moral question: Did we, or did we not, support capital punishment? Just hearing Olson’s name mentioned in conversation was enough to cloud my young, undeveloped brain and make my stomach tight. It was so natural to hate and fear him; I didn’t want him to be alive.

But did this emotional reaction justify ending his life? I sat at my desk, silent, wishing that I had the answers to everything and wanting very badly to be a little kid again, wanting to be oblivious.

Last weekend, all these emotions flooded back as I made my way south on University Avenue, heading for the Indonesian consulate. I could see the tinted windows and concrete facings of the consulate, and I could see members of York’s Amnesty International group milling about, preparing to demonstrate against the use of the death penalty in Indonesia. I knew that finally, on that clear and frigid Saturday, I’d have to drag a few demons out of my closet.

Indonesia is just one of 100 countries that Amnesty International is targeting in its campaign to abolish the death penalty. In the past three years, 19 people have been executed by firing squad in this Southeast Asian nation. Amnesty International reports show that 14 of the prisoners were linked to the Indonesian Communist Party, an organization