

Don't believe all you see

Guilty. Because I saw it on TV.

It happens every time you turn on the TV lately. Either Michael Jackson is pleading for the public to treat him with respect, or Loreena Bobbit is being flashed at us, or we're hearing more about how the whole Nancy Kerrigan/Tonya Harding story is worthy of a movie of the week.

People have always been willing to believe the worst, regardless of whether there's any real evidence to support it or not. The problem is that people hear some bad rumour or news story about a famous person, and they instantly believe what they want to, before any real evidence is even presented. How many of you thought to yourselves, "Yup, he's guilty," the moment they heard a boy was suing Michael Jackson? Remember when you, or your friend, or whoever, all 'knew' the old moonwalker was guilty? And how his settling out of court for untold millions of dollars 'proves' it? And then remember the examination he underwent at police orders? The one where they took all kinds of photos of his genitals, to compare to the descriptions given by the boy suing him? It turns out that the results of that examination support Michael's side of things after all, NOT the boy's.

Is he innocent then? Or is he guilty after all? Well, you can stop that answer before you think it, because we don't know. And we won't, until the final decision comes down from whichever court hears the criminal case against him. That is, if there is going to be a case. As far as I know, no charges have even been brought against him yet. The only court time he was looking at was a lawsuit being brought by the boy who alleged that he was molested, and that in and of itself doesn't mean a whole lot.

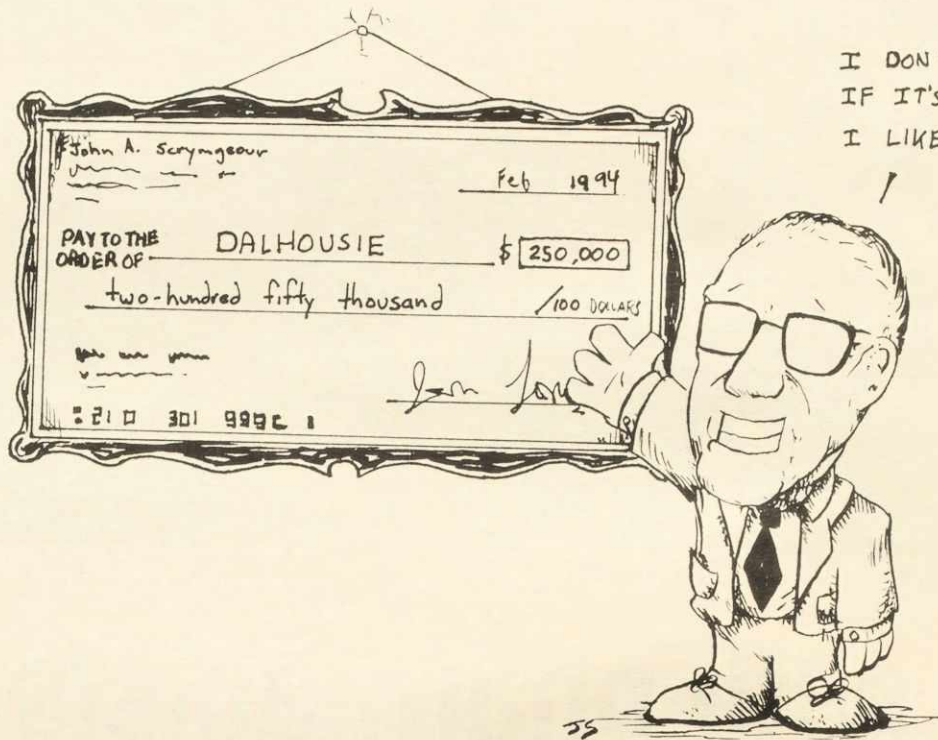
Now think back to the time you first heard about that figure skater who got whacked in the knee by some guy. OK, probably some crazed fan or something, right? Nope. The guy was Tonya Harding's body-guard.

So now all hell breaks loose because everyone 'knows' it was Tonya Harding who ordered the hit. Because he works for her. Because...

Oh wait, there's no other evidence. At least there wasn't at the time, when everyone and their dog saw visions of Tonya Harding's guilt. Now, of course, things are looking more bleak for Ms. Harding, but the whole point is that we should all learn to restrain our judgement until we know more about any particular issue than the kinds of rumours fed to us by mass media. Television is far too powerful as a tool of persuasion for any of us to take it at face value.

Too often, we all just take a passive role and sit in front of the television and blindly follow whatever comes out at us. It's time for us to re-learn the ability to question what we see, go out and actively discuss it and think about it, and not be swayed by the anchorman of the week.

Steve Tonner



LETTERS

The Dalhousie *Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday 4 pm before publication. Letters may be e-mailed or submitted on MacIntosh or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Vernon scary

To the editor:

In response to Steve Vernon's letter in the *Gazette* (January 20) concerning women's "irresponsible search for a scapegoat": scary to think I, as a woman, must be wary and suspicious of all my male friends, because they may all try to rape me in a fit of frustration. Does this mean I can't visit them in their dorms, dear Steve, for fear of their "nudge of seduction" in the middle of a game of backgammon crossing that "fine line" you mentioned and causing me to become another victimized innocent?

But it appears that, in your world, by agreeing to play backgammon in the first place, I was asking for it. Hope I don't meet you in a dark alley! Stop trying to blame the victim. No woman asks to be raped.

Name withheld by request

Vernon correct

To the editor:

This is to respond to the letter "Unearthly" in the January 27 edition of the *Gazette*. Ms. Chisolm missed the point of Steve Vernon's letter. She read it and automatically jumped to the conclusion that he was saying that women should take the blame for rape. This mind set is very common in many women today. They will read an article written by a man on the topic of rape and they are automatically ready to lynch him.

I agree with Mr. Vernon's view. We are all aware that rape occurs and what a horrible crime it is, but if we continue to keep our heads in the clouds we will not be able to prevent it. We all would

like to live in an ideal world where women are able to walk at night, or pick up someone downtown (just like a man can), but let's be real. This is an illusion and as long as radical feminists continue to advocate this illusion we are all in trouble and society will never change.

Women don't seem to get the picture. If you go home with a guy you just met, you should be aware of the consequences. We all have a brain and free will to use it, so why do women keep putting themselves in dangerous situations? I agree that 'no' means 'no', but who's kidding who? What I believe Mr. Vernon was saying is that women have to be realistic about what is out there and what results our actions may have. He was not saying that women should take complete blame for a rape occurring, but that they are responsible for not being realistic and thinking about their actions.

We do not live in an ideal world. We live in a world where crime is evident, stereotypes exist, and prejudice exists. We must be constantly aware of our surroundings and of how to protect ourselves and our possessions. So then, why do women continue to ignore the precautions that could prevent the crime to begin with? I say 'could' because there is no 100 per cent way to prevent rape, but there are simple things you can do. It's time to start looking at preventing rape before it happens, not looking back and saying, "Well, I guess I shouldn't have walked home by myself at 3:00 am".

We all must take responsibility for our actions and be aware of what consequences our actions may have. I believe this is the point Mr. Vernon was trying to get across to readers. After all, if a sign says 'Danger - Electric fence - Do not touch - Will cause death', we wouldn't touch it, right? So why not take control of your lives as women, wake up, smell the coffee, and be realistic. Think of every situation as a 'Danger' sign and proceed with great caution.

Elanne Mikale McDonald

Vernon illogical

To the editor:

I am writing to respond, in accompaniment of a flurry of such letters I am sure, to Steve Vernon's letter "Who's to blame" (*Gazette*, January 20). Perhaps not content with the airing of this issue on the UNB campus, Vernon wishes to stir up the hornets' nest again? Mercifully he is neither university professor nor trial judge, but his views are nonetheless troubling.

On rape he writes "to criticize the irresponsible search for a scapegoat", but his comments seem to serve this very end by making women the scapegoats! Vernon asserts that victims of sexual crimes are as blameworthy for date rape as the rapist, on account of their naiveté. First of all Mr. Vernon, naiveté (definition: being childlike, unsophisticated) is not a crime, just as your demonstrated ignorance of this issue is not. Your logic is seriously flawed on a number of other points, all attempting to lessen the responsibility of the rapist for his choice to hurt someone. By Vernon's line of thinking ("Women, to be equal, must bear equal share of the blame", followed by, "Rape is a crime and punishment by castration is not going too far"), women share blame because they should know men are unable to control their sexual urges. If they should share equal blame, Mr. Vernon, then should they consequently share punishment? So rapists should be castrated and victims sewn up to avoid falling further victim to their naiveté? The implications of Vernon's views are far-reaching and illogical.

No, surely the blame is not equal. One person is forced to suffer as the result of a conscious decision on the part of the rapist, pure and simple. Say-

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