



Graphic/Ubyssey

## Was she asking for it?

Recently, Harper's Weekly carried an item from the American Bar Association Journal declaring that few rapists are punished for their crimes. In a dialogue to demonstrate why most rape victims prefer not to press charges, the article asks us to imagine a robbery victim undergoing the same sort of cross-examination that a rape victim does:

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"Mr. Smith, you were held up at gunpoint on the corner of First & Main?"

"Yes."

"Did you struggle with the robber?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He was armed."

"Then you made a conscious decision to comply with his demands rather than resist?"

"Yes."

"Did you scream? Cry out?"

"No. I was afraid."

"I see. Have you ever been held up before?"

"No."

"Have you ever given money away?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you did so willingly?"

"What are you getting at?"

"Well, let's put it like this, Mr. Smith. You've given away money in the past. In fact you have quite a reputation for philanthropy. How can we be sure you weren't *contriving* to have your money taken by force?"

"Listen, if I wanted—"

"Never mind. What time did the holdup take place?"

"About 11 p.m."

"You were out on the street at 11 p.m.? Doing what?"

"Just walking."

"Just walking? You know that it's dangerous being out on the street that late at night. Weren't you aware that you could've been held up?"

"I hadn't thought about it."

"What were you wearing?"

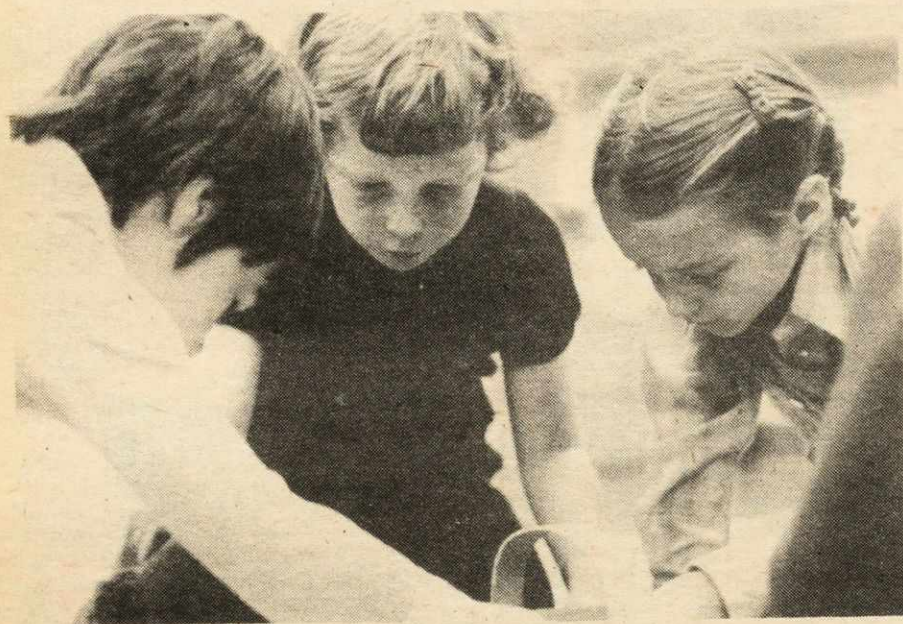
"Let's see—a suit. Yes, a suit."

"An *expensive* suit?"

"Well, yes. I'm a successful lawyer, you know."

"In other words, Mr. Smith, you were walking around the street late at night in a suit that practically advertised the fact that you might be a good target for some easy money, isn't that so? I mean, if we didn't know better, Mr. Smith, we might even think that you were *asking* for this to happen, mightn't we?"

## Child sexual abuse hidden problem



by Ricki Garrett.

Social problems have an uncanny ability to survive most attempts to remedy them. Their first line of defense is to hide from public awareness and then later to spring into the scene as full-blown crises. As a result, everyone wonders why a problem wasn't recognized until it reached crisis proportions. Child abuse is not a rare occurrence. It occurs in all social classes and the abusers are not just the poor and the mentally ill.

In 1982 there were approximately 65 cases of child abuse in Nova Scotia. Many of these confidential reports deal with physically abused children, severely neglected children and sexually abused child-

ren. Although it is estimated that if 65 cases are reported there are at least 100 more cases unreported. People are still fearful to report abuse, unwilling to "become involved."

Sexual abuse is reported less often than physical or emotional abuse. Both male and female children may be brutally raped, and most often by persons well known to the children and to the families.

The actual incidence of incest is unknown, but it is thought to be far more common than statistically indicated. Eight-five per cent of the reported incestual cases deal with sexual relations between fathers and daughters. The relationship often occurs for a long period before it is reported. People do not talk

easily about sexual behavior, especially when it involves children.

One of the reasons we fail to wipe out child abuse is that we deal with symptoms and rarely attack the root causes embedded in our society. We deal with child abuse after it happens, but do little preventive work. We fail to protect our children in that we have no national reporting system for cases of child sexual abuse.

We should establish a single toll free hot line for the reporting of suspected child abuse and sexual abuse cases to the appropriate authorities. Also, we should provide an emergency crisis number for children—taught to all Nova Scotia school children. This would be a 24-hour service where children in desperate trouble, suffering from abuse, incestual relationships, etc. could bawl for help and advice.

There is a need for a broad public education program of child sexual abuse. Public awareness and discussion of the problem must be promoted, beginning with the education of the public on the use of a hot line and the need to report cases of child sexual abuse. The largest single obstacle to doing something about child sexual abuse is the public's attitude of secrecy. It prevents victims and families from seeking and obtaining help. Child sexual abuse will not magically disappear if we do not talk about it. Rather, child sexual abuse thrives on secrecy.

A public educational program should also include information about the nature and incidence of child sexual abuse, and the community resources available to help children, parents, and offenders. As part of the program specific information about the needs of children and how to parent

adequately should be made available. Courses in parenting and child care should be an essential part of the public school curriculum.

Children should be taught that no one has the right to touch any part of their body without their consent. If all babies were taught "yes", "no", "stop", and "mine" there is the possibility that crime could be diminished.

The sad and tragic toll of wasted children's lives goes on each day. It is going on even now. Nova Scotia, what are you doing to support adequately our children, the vital fabric of our society?

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