

## The unkindest cut of all

The government of Canada could not have picked a better time to make cuts to social assistance programs. Although many Canadians are crying for Lloyd Axworthy's head, beneath the roar you can hear murmurs of "It's about time," and "Maybe those free-loaders will go get a job now."

It's an attitude that can be found everywhere. Social assistance was created so that a humane standard of living could be maintained throughout the country, yet all we hear these days are stories of how people have abused the system. Well I'd like to share a few stories of how the system has worked.

Janice was twenty she applied for social assistance. She had been living at home all her life and for the sake of her mental health she had to get out. For most people her age, going away to university was the way out; however Janice knew she wouldn't be able to focus on her studies well enough to succeed. After consulting with a counsellor she decided social assistance might be the answer.

Janice got her own apartment and a monthly allowance to cover necessities. A year later she did an intense eight-week job training course offered through social assistance and four months later she was working full-time. Janice now supports herself and is making tentative plans to further her education.

Carrie was 43 when she left her husband and turned to social assistance for help. More than twenty years of living to please someone else had left Carrie both mentally and physically ill. Once her children had grown up she wanted to go back to work so she could have some financial independence, but the idea of job hunting overwhelmed her.

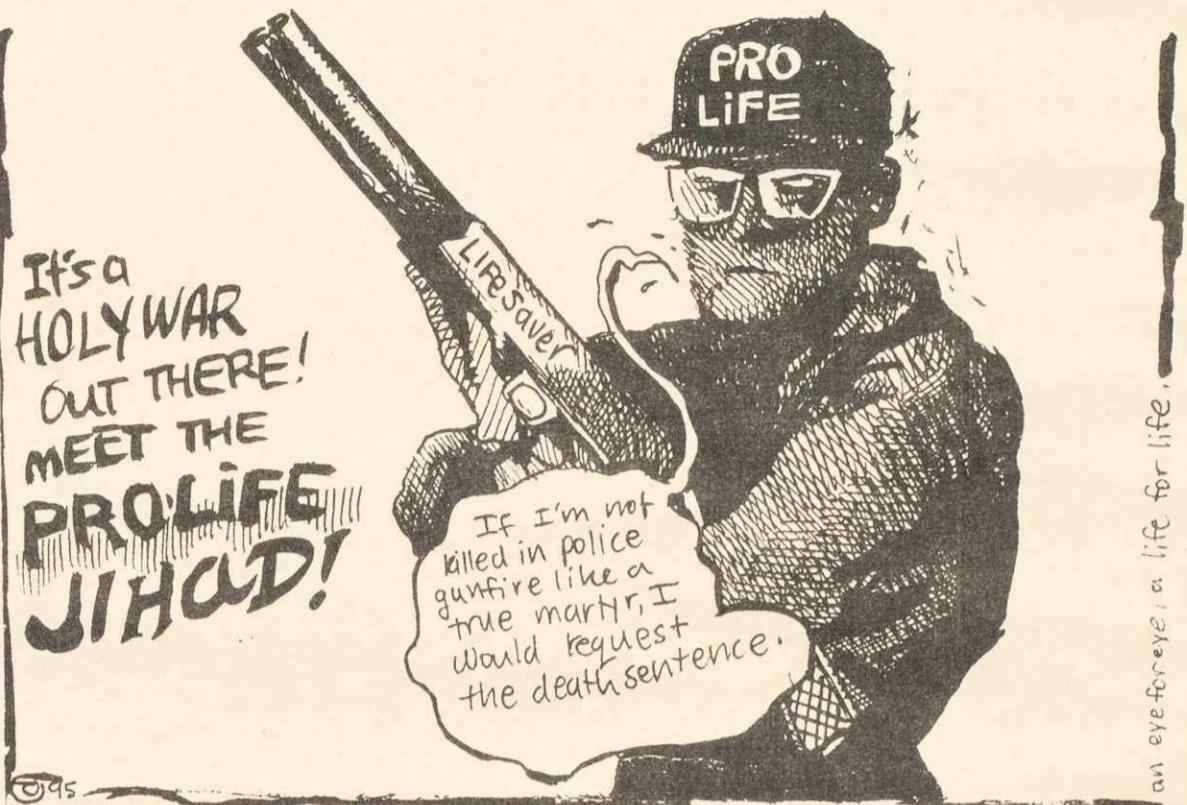
Social assistance gave her the independence and control she needed to start sorting out her own life. A year and a half later Carrie is still unsure of the career path she'd like to pursue but is confident she can make it happen. Carrie is an active member of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program and is currently looking for a job.

Yolanda was 23 when she decided to end the cycle of going to school, dropping out, moving back home and then heading back to school. Yolanda was trying to come to terms with some family problems while having to depend on her parents for financial support. Things got so bad she was even suicidal.

Two days ago Yolanda went to a counsellor for help. Today she will have her first appointment with welfare Canada and will fill out an application for social assistance. Her plan is to work on a portfolio and apply to a couple of art schools. Yolanda may not be ready to go back to school in September, but chances are when she does go back to school it'll be because she's ready and not because it's her only way out.

None of these three stories is complete but I call them successes nonetheless. Before my eyes I have seen desperation give way to hope. Thanks to our social assistance program, three people have found a way to more productive lives.

For the sake of their privacy, I'm not using Janice's, Carrie's or Yolanda's real names. I won't be using my name either, but if Lloyd Axworthy ever needs testimony from someone who has seen social assistance in action, he can leave a message with *the Gazette*. I'd be proud to share these success stories of my mother, my sister and my friend and I'd bet if Lloyd Axworthy looked hard enough, he would find thousands more.



## 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.

### Straight not wanted

To the editor,

At a recent meeting of the gay/lesbian/bisexual youth group, the issue of bisexuality was discussed. I don't normally attend these meetings because I've had a lot of support from friends while I've "come out" as a bisexual. However, this meeting interested me because the speakers were a bi-couple (male and female) who among other things, were going to talk about their relationship. Specifically, I hoped to learn from them how their relationship worked, and how I might adopt some of their ways into my own relationship.

My boyfriend, sister, and girlfriend came along for my support and their education. For my boyfriend particularly, this was his first real opportunity to meet a couple similar to us — not the average-straight-monogamous pair. He too had hoped to learn from their relationship and reflect on ours.

Unfortunately, our learning experience was cut short because we were asked to leave. My boyfriend is straight, and despite his association with me, straight people aren't allowed in youth group meetings.

We left the meeting and ran to a bar. I needed a drink to deal with all of my emotions! A thousand thoughts and feelings hit me: Why is life so unfair? I wanted to understand! I wanted to belong! Where do I belong?! How do I integrate both my worlds?! Why discuss bisexuality if the opposite sex component isn't allowed?! That was just wrong!!

After thinking about everything for a while, I realised that all I had wanted was validation that my bisexuality and my relationship with my boyfriend was "normal." I've accepted that linking my opposite-sex relationship with my same-sex ones is not easy at the best of times. The youth group made it harder

than I ever thought possible by not including my boyfriend! I had just managed to break down a few walls and now I'm back where I started. How can I live out my bisexuality when neither straight nor the gay communities accept my partners more than 50% of the time?!

I know a few gays and lesbians who have had positive experiences with the youth group, but based on my experience with them, I recommend to everyone who is bisexual that you NOT attend the gay/lesbian/bisexual youth group. They will tell you that being bisexual is OK, but you will have to leave your opposite-sex partner at the door.

What does this message tell you?

Acceptance is few and far between.

Kirsten M. Schmidt

### Theft at the Killam

To the editor,

I was in the Killam library on Tuesday, and observed that the security features serve absolutely no function. In the space of ten minutes, three people overcame the "high-tech" security array.

Two people set off the buzzer when they walked through the detectors (actually, the buzzer is about as loud as the "beep" on a PC), and one went out through the "in" gate, where there is no detection equipment! When the buzzer goes off, the gates lock up, and apparently cause only a slight inconvenience to the "thieves" or would-be thieves.

These people must have been highly-trained agents from SMU (this is of course hypothetical — SMU can't highly train anything) sent to infiltrate the impenetrable shield that is library security.

I'm just sort of wondering: what the hell is the point of spending our tuition money on something as effective as deterring theft as a bowl of soggy

Cinnamon Toast Crunch? Assuming each person had a book — and the average cost of a book, at the very least, is \$20 — that was \$60 in ten minutes, \$360 in an hour, or \$4000 per day! I realize this is very high, but is it? The figures are based on the assumption that each person had only one book each, but what if a number of people decided to relieve the library of several books at a time? Nothing seems to be stopping them.

A stolen book is virtually unrecoverable, at the detriment to those who would want to use that book (or books) in the future.

Mark Potter

### Living in glass house?

To the editor,

I just had to write in an say something about the article written by Adam Block [Nov. 10/94]. I do agree that Kristallnacht is something that the whole world should remember, but where does Mr. Block get off yelling at the rest of us when he hasn't done anything in the way of some sort of remembrance display or such. Isn't he Vice-Chair of the APJSF (Atlantic Provinces Jewish Students' Federation)?

And where exactly was the APJSF [that] week? I really think they should have set up some sort of display in the lobby. Most of the students at this university could have used a lesson of that sort.

Samuel Wolf

All submissions to the *Gazette* (including letters) must include a real contact person and a real phone number. Thanks!

# the Gazette

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