

'Teaches you how to stand up, get up when you fall'

Katimavik last hope for youth to gain control

by Audrey Djuwita

What's so special about the Katimavik youth program to make Liberal Senator Jacques Hebert go on a hunger strike?

Hilary Hellum, who was in the program from July 1984 to April 1985, thinks that Katimavik is a great program and well worth the strike.

"I was really angered when I heard that the government cancelled Katimavik," said Hellum. "Brian Mulroney has no right at all to do it. What Hebert is doing is beautiful, I would like to write a letter letting him know that he's got a lot of support from us."

Katimavik paid about 1,700 young people \$1 a day to do community work, such as building camps for boy scouts, clearing the underbrushes for ski trails, or working in

nursing homes. Participants who completed the program received \$1,000.

The \$20 million program was founded by Hebert ten years ago.

The Prime Minister promised to unveil new programs for young Canadians later this month.

Hebert will give up his fast only if the government restores the program or introduces a better volunteer youth corps program.

"(Katimavik) gives a lot. It prepares you to work in jobs that you don't like and to live on a small income. It also helps you to grow up emotionally and to learn what you can and cannot take. It's wonderful," said Hellum.

"One guy in our group was a total jerk in the beginning. He was 17. He was doing an awful lot of

drugs, drank a lot and didn't do his share of the work. Finally, we got fed up and told him that we would like him to leave the program. He got down on his knees and asked us to let him stay. He said that we were the only friends he had and he promised to shape up. So, we made a contract with him. No drugs, no booze, and he also may not touch one of the girls in our group he had a crush on. It was really hard on him, but he got his act together. At the end of the program, he had really grown up," recalled Hellum.

Shona Cameron agrees with Hellum that the program helps Canadian youth in many ways.

"I learned more in Katimavik than two years in university. Living in cramped quarters really builds

up your tolerance."

"Oh yes, we fought a lot," said Hellum. "But we always worked the differences out. We would sit down and say, 'Look, we've got to do something about it'. When the whole group turns against you, it's not a good feeling; you know that you really have to change even though it hurts at the time."

"The learning experience is fantastic. We had to make our own bed, renovate the house we lived in, we had to make everything ourselves," Cameron explained.

Both Cameron and Hellum were 18 when they joined the program.

"None of us could cook in the beginning, but we made do in the end. In fact, we all gained weight," said Cameron.

"The guys in our group cooked

up some pretty weird concoctions. One time, when one of the guys made the bread, he mistook the salt for the sugar and he made seven loaves of bread that time, and guess what? We had to eat them all," Hellum laughingly described her experience.

"We actually experienced the English and French barrier," said Cameron. "How do you tell a French speaking member that the rice is boiling over when he doesn't really understand English and your French is just as bad?"

Hellum's experience with the barrier, while she was working in St. Justin (Children) Hospital in Montreal during the program, left her disillusioned for a while.

"I hated my work there. There was a big fight between the French and the English. Even though the people in the hospital knew me, they wouldn't say good morning or goodbye... just because I am a westerner. I spoke French all the time there. I talked to the man who wrote Bill 101, he was really shocked when he learned that I was a westerner and I supported him. After Katimavik, I stayed on for some time in Montreal and worked there. The people were very nice and there was no problem between the French and the English."

Both Hellum and Cameron said that their French improved a lot by the end of the program.

"It's hard to decide what I enjoyed most about Katimavik," said Cameron. "I loved meeting all the people and I enjoyed working with the disabled when I was doing my rotation in Fort Frances, Ontario. In fact, it helped me to decide to take adapted physical education at university."

"Learning about Canada was really interesting. So many different ideas, backgrounds, and languages, yet we are all Canadians. Our group became very close, sort of like a family. Saying goodbye was the toughest part," said Hellum.

"The only thing about Katimavik that's bad is that there is no pre-screening before the program. You might get people that are impossible to get along with, so it just ruins your whole experience," said Cameron.

"Katimavik teaches you how to cope with whatever problem life throws at you, to look at the problems in the face instead of turning and running away. It teaches you how to stand up, and to get up when you fall," Hellum said.

"Katimavik doesn't give you a job, but it prepares you for it. I wouldn't have gotten my job as a teacher's aide at Montessori without my experience in Katimavik," said Hellum.

"It seems so long ago now, but I am still learning from Katimavik. For example, in the middle of a sociology class I'd think: 'Yeah, right, that happened in Katimavik,'" said Cameron.

"Katimavik is virtually the last hope for our youth gaining control of their lives. We are going to be the ones running Canada in the future, and the government has taken away what's rightfully ours. I don't think it's fair. All the more power to Hebert; I hope he makes it," said Hellum.

More health

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lements.

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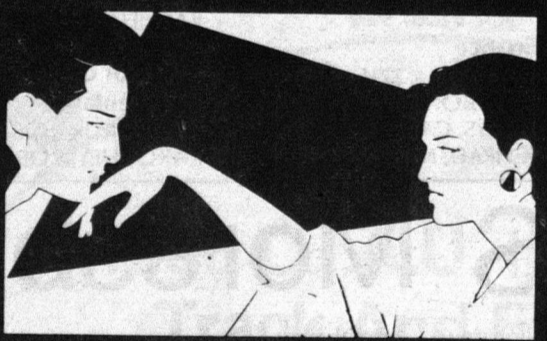
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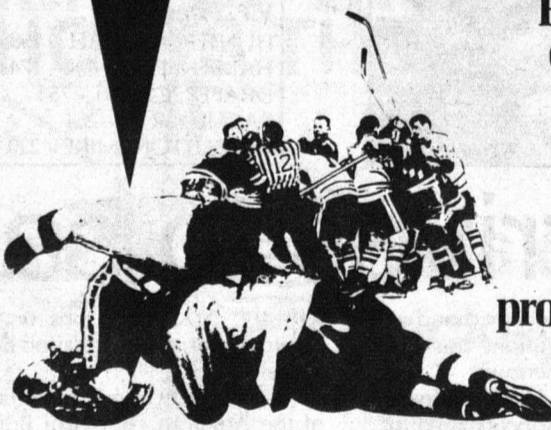
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