

The message is violence



BY JULIE TRAVES

It is a typical Sunday afternoon; my roommate and I are lazily flipping through the pages of the newest *Vogue*. Suddenly, amongst the glossy pages of Italian shoes, French perfumes and American smiles I am confronted with a disturbing image; two women, both clad in skimpy bikinis are standing at poolside pulling each others' hair. In an effort to find a new method of procrastination (as usual the assignments are steadily piling up on my desk) I saunter upstairs and flick on the television; an old *Three's Company* is on. It is a typical show. The male of the household is pretending to his landlord that he is gay in order to continue living with the two females of the house. He is prancing around the living room, making exaggerated hand gestures and veiled allusions to his gay habits. The landlord, 'of course', is disgusted. Well, early evening is approaching, time to watch a movie! One of the members of my house has graciously rented that all-time classic *Out for Justice*. Within the first five minutes the audience is bombarded with the stereotype of a 'Yo-Bitch' style pimp beating up two prostitutes and an Italian-stallion cop 'rescuing' them by attacking their antagonist.

A fashion bible, family-time t.v., an easily accessible video: isolated incidents? Hardly. In our

everyday lives we are constantly confronted with negative stereotypes of people from almost all walks of life; Blacks, Italians, gays and lesbians, women-no group is left untouched. But if we see these images every day what is their effect on our behaviour, our attitudes, our very values? While there is great controversy over the effect of violence on children, the question of the media's portrayal of stereotypes and violence's effect of adults is left relatively untouched. But according to Prof. McCormick, a specialist in media at SMU, it is adults who are the prime targets of the media; they read the most news, watch the most television and are the most important to the sponsors, those who finance the programs and layouts we are confronted with.

If it is adults who are the most affected by the messages churned out by the media, the most obvious question is; in what ways are we processing and responding to these images? Put simply, we are becoming desensitized: to racism, to sexism, to heterosexism, and to violence. As McCormick puts it, we are becoming more accepting to violence in the media, reality-type police shows glamorize both the violent aspect of police work and the drug crimes they are trying to stop. Violence seems okay, after all we can watch it on prime time every day. As will, stereotypes of those of different races, gays and lesbians, and women have become somewhat of a joke - one can easily find this message in shows such as *Married With Children*, *The Simpsons*'s... the list is endless.

Are we hopeless? Must we become total hermits in order to avoid these negative messages? While we may feel victimized by the messages we are bombarded with by the media, in the larger scale of things it is we the consumers-yes even us struggling students- who hold the power to choose media content. We may still choose to check our brains at the door and settle down with a big bowl of popcorn in front of the television on a Sunday afternoon, but at the same time we must constantly stay vigilant-after all the stereotype portrayed on tomorrow's prime time hit may be about you!

Achieving personal peace

BY SUZY KOVINSKY

Last year my mother told me that when I was five years old I intensely disliked Susan on *Sesame Street*. She was the only black woman on the show and portrayed the only character who didn't live up to my childhood standards. At first, I vehemently denied that this could be true and defended my honour and status as a non-racist, liberal humanitarian. Ever since then, I have labouriously analyzed and overanalyzed what my negative reaction to Susan implied. Was I really a closet racist? Was I a mysogonist? Why couldn't I handle being taught my ABCs by a black woman? I have yet to find any answers to these important questions yet, knowing myself as only I do, I must have thought



that one day Susan was less than kind to Big Bird or Grover and I have harboured resentment towards her ever since.

As my guilt subsides and the psychological turmoil lessens, I can get closer to feeling at peace with myself. My personal actions have once again been reconciled with my political beliefs. This is the essence of finding personal peace. It involves discovering one's genuine self or one's socially untampered and environmentally uneffected political and spiritual beliefs. Once we discover (often painfully) our values and moral principles, our actions often lie in direct contradiction with the newly written spiritual agenda. For me, personal peace can only be achieved when I have eliminated all the hypocrisies in my life. The goal should be to reconcile "who we are" with "what we do."

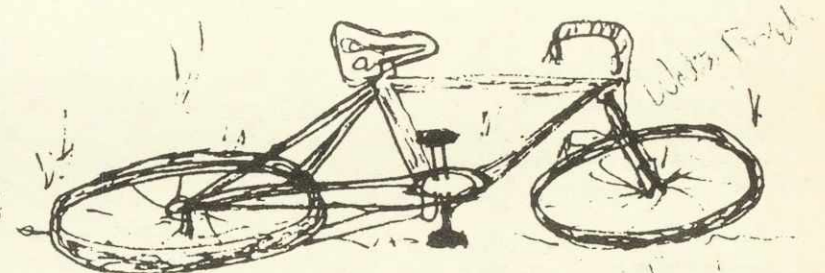
The subject of personal peace is so broad that I find it difficult to narrow it down so it neatly fits into nineteen inches of copy for a

university newspaper. Almost all aspects of my life, from vegetarianism to my education in philosophy, bring me one step closer to discovering truth and to living in a manner that can maintain a peaceful balance within myself and with the natural world surrounding me.

When I was asked to write an article about personal peace, the first thing that entered my mind was a very painful memory which has turned out to be the most important event to influence my life. In the mid-seventies my family used to rent a summer cottage on a beautiful, quiet lake in Southern Ontario. One August afternoon I was riding my bicycle through a tree lined wooded path pedalling like mad and singing my six year old heart out. Suddenly my bike jolted and I

some guilt from that traumatic experience and maybe all that I do stems from the consciousness I began developing that summer. It would be terribly wrong to say that my commitment to animal welfare is based on a search for personal fulfillment, but I must admit that every time my actions and words benefit animals I come one step closer to achieving personal peace.

This is possibly because I never felt that I was given a choice whether or not to be a spokesperson for non-human victims of cruelty. If I did decide to take a contrary or different path in my life I would be betraying every instinct, drive and passion which constitute who I am and what my destiny and purpose are. In other words, I would be de-



instinctually stopped quickly to see what I had hit. To this day I am haunted by the helpless eyes of the little green toad which I had so brutally crushed. I was so completely devastated by this that all I could do was sit by the side of the woods, roll up as tightly as possible; and cry.

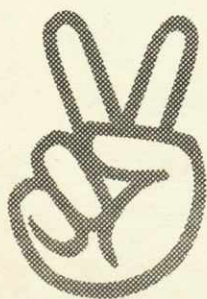
I couldn't understand how I was capable of destroying a beautiful, helpless life with one simple rotation of a wheel or an innocent acceleration in speed. It was that day that I realized the grotesque and frightening power that I had as a member of this species. Although I didn't intellectualize this experience until years later, it was on that on that summer day, sitting on a moss covered stone that I vowed to dedicate my life to joining the other side and helping the animals. I don't think it would be too dramatic to say that I left my innocence at Ray Lake. From a child's perspective, I had knowingly committed a murder and my life could never be the same.

Perhaps I still carry around

stroyed.

It is difficult to find personal peace in a society which thrives on and rewards behaviour which are aimed at destroying everything I value and cherish. My consciousness is often split between wanting to help my fellow humans towards a saner and more humane existence and having a strong part of me which is so full of anger and cynicism that I want to escape and hide from this tormenting reality.

Fortunately, at twenty-one I am still inspired enough to continue my search for truth and keep enough perspective to understand and accept my role in an interdependent ecosystem. I will keep fighting, keep screaming and keep loving until I conclude that either I can no longer make a difference or that I have succeeded in making life richer and more bearable for the creatures which I so admire and with whom I feel akin. It is at that time, if at any, that I will be at peace.



Peace is:

- "having no fighting, and a world of no fighting or violence." Amol, age 7

The following quotes are what the young people from the Dalhousie Elementary School had to say about "peace."

So we asked... What is peace, anyway?

- "loving and caring for each other." Tara, age 10

- "having a healthier earth and no violence." Michael, age 9

- "not having any wars...and also just having more care in the world than fight, fight, fight, fight."

Bartholomew, age 8

- "having a cleaner world and no war." Sarah, age 8

- "no people killing other people and no war." Colin, age 9

- "clean world and no war and no violence." Ceilidh, age 9

- "no killing, no war, fixing up the earth." Alexandre, age 9

- "relaxing; thinking of something." Sarah, age 6

- "having no fighting and enjoying yourself." Daniel, age 6

- "getting new toys." Alexandra, age 5

- "happiness and enjoying yourself." Suzanne, age 5

- "no violence." Emily, age 6

- "going for walks." Jillian, age 5

- "love." David, age 5 3/4

- "what makes you happy."

Yvonne, age 5

- "enjoying yourself." Nicole, age 5

- "being with your friend." Sophie, age 6

- "excited." Dylan, age 5

- "having some quiet." Victoria, age 5

- "time where there is no fighting." Johanna, age 7

- "getting presents." Julian, age 7

- "time for giving." Nico, age 8

- "stopping fighting." Julia, age 6