

Visiting his sick mother

Daycare chairman arrested for draft evasion

By PAUL KELLOGG
Chairman of the York Daycare Centre, Mark Biddle, is in prison in the United States.

Expected home from a visit to his parents on March 19, 1976, Biddle was instead, unexpectedly arrested by American military police on a 1973 conviction of draft evasion and jailed at the Camp Pendleton marine base in California.

A letter-writing campaign to secure his release began last week after it became clear that the marines would push ahead with Biddle's court-martial.

"We're asking for letters speaking of the injustice of Mark's arbitrary confinement," said Deborah Biddle (his wife), in an interview with Excalibur. "They can be sent to the CYSF office and we'll

forward them to his commandant, the American and Canadian governments and press. Public pressure is the only recourse we have left.

"They have absolutely no reason to prosecute him. They can't be trying to set an example, there's no draft any longer in the States. They can't argue rehabilitation, because he'll never be a soldier. On top of that, it's costing them a lot of money."

LETTER CAMPAIGN

Already, numerous friends of the Biddles have sent letters, as well as the executive board of the daycare centre, and the CYSF, which also contributed \$50 to his defence fund.

The history of Biddle's case is complicated. When drafted in 1968,

Biddle, like many others, chose not to spend two years fighting in Viet Nam, and came to Canada to avoid arrest. However, Canada was not his home, and Biddle wished to return to the States.

UNDERSTANDING

In 1973 he did return, with the understanding that he would serve his time in the armed forces and accept a less than honourable discharge. As far as he was concerned, the courtmartial for his 1968 AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave) charge was a mere formality. He didn't even hire a lawyer.

"We accepted a military lawyer," said Mrs. Biddle, "expecting no problem. We should have known better."

However, the trial did not go as expected, and Biddle was convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to the seven months he is presently serving. Biddle appealed the decision, but, "deciding there wasn't very much justice," deserted the marines and returned to Canada.

But in February of this year, Biddle discovered that his mother was seriously ill with cancer. Wishing to visit her, he consulted with his lawyer in San Diego, and Marine headquarters as to the possible consequences of a trip to the U.S.

NO CHANCE

They were both unequivocal. There was no possibility he would be arrested and jailed. In fact, Marine corps. headquarters signed his bad conduct discharge, recommending that he not be confined. For reasons that are still not known, the commandant at Biddle's marine base waived the recommendation and had him arrested, to serve his 1973 conviction and to be tried for the more serious charge of desertion.

Steve Grossman, an official with



Daycare chairman Mark Biddle with daughter Caterina.

Amex, an organization established to aid American war-resisters living in Canada, emphasized the importance of the letter-writing campaign in bringing public pressure to bear to free Biddle.

"It's worked in the past," Grossman pointed out. The editor of our magazine, with a sentence of 10 years hard labour hanging over his head, travelled publicly in over

50 American cities to publicize why war-resisters were boycotting President Ford's so-called "clemency" programme. The army couldn't touch him because of his broad public support, and the outcry that would have occurred had he been arrested. That same outcry is Mark's only hope."

Meanwhile, Deborah and Caterina, the Biddle's two-year old daughter, with \$170 to live on till the end of May and to finance Mark's defense campaign, continue to try and free him . . . and wait.

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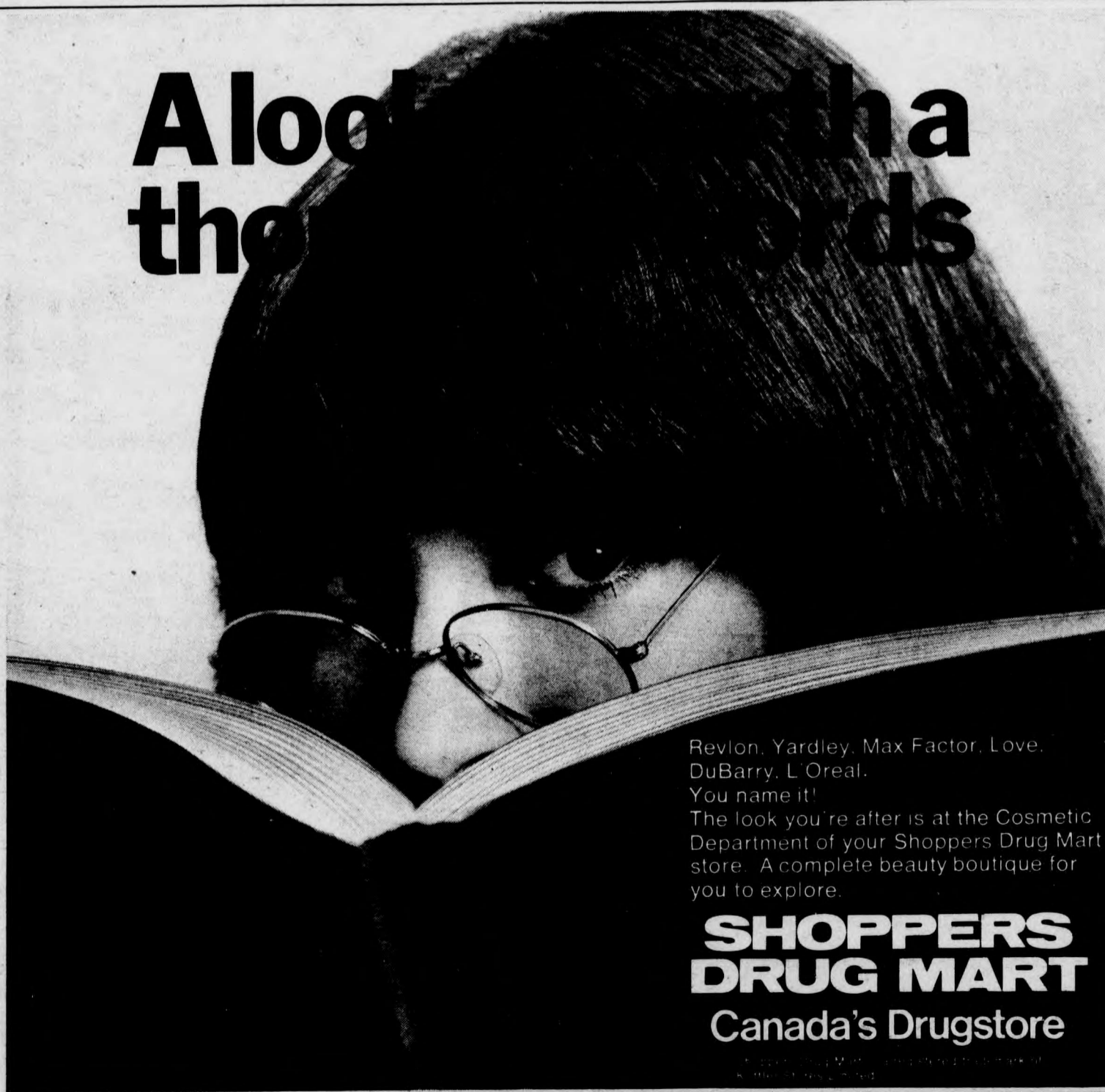
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