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Living with cancer: one student's story

Entering your first year of university is a considerable change. For me it was such a transition that I decided to go to Dalhousie, here in Halifax, where I have lived for many years. First year has always been described to me as a "settling in year". It's a time to learn what courses you like and dislike, to meet new friends, learn about campus life and party.

When fresh week arrived, I was especially cheerful, but halfway through I caught a flu. I ended up missing out

on most of the fun, but I could not do anything about getting sick. I went to the doctor and she performed a physical exam, just to make sure that I was fine.

During the exam she noticed an abnormal mole. She told me I should have it removed. I shrugged her suggestion off and went home. Her comments festered in the back of my mind, and I decided to have it removed.

By now it was mid-September, my 19th birthday was coming up and I was just too busy. I booked, cancelled and

re-booked the appointment several times. By the beginning of October I went in to have the procedure done.

I finally realized that not knowing what it was affecting me, and wanted to put all suspicions to rest. The week that followed was the worst I could have ever imagined. On Thursday my boyfriend broke up with me. I never had the heart to tell him what was going on. On Friday my doctor called to tell me the mole was indeed abnormal, and I would have to come back in.

It was cancerous. The next few weeks were like a whirlwind. Everywhere I turned there were doctors and words like melanoma, malignancy, chemotherapy and the one I had in the back of my mind; death. In what felt like a blink of an eye, everything I knew was ripped away from me.

I could not bring myself to tell any of my friends. I was convinced that I was going to die. I started to push everyone emotionally away from me. I hurt so much inside and did not want to cause anyone else to hurt like I was. All I wanted was to disappear and have no one care. I did not want to bring pain to those I cared about.

Don't get me wrong, I looked like I was having a great time, partying and drinking every night. It got to the point that I could not take the pressure anymore and I told two of my best friends. It felt good to let it out. They were both concerned and helpful. I didn't care who knew, but at the same time I didn't want to be treated like a lab rat. I did not want people to tiptoe around me.

Treatment continued and it took so much out of me. On a good day I threw up four times. I continued to act as if everything was fine, even to the people I told that I was sick. This was my self-destructive nature taking over again, shutting everyone out. I was exceedingly depressed and wanted to die. Everything I knew was shattered, and nothing in my life was stable. All I could do was cry myself to sleep every night, although I'd only sleep for, maybe, four hours.

The doctors told me I would have about four more months of treatment and I'd be fine. This may sound like good news, but for me this meant four more months of agony. Then the genuinely good news came a week later, the doctors changed the prognosis and said I had only one and a half

months left of treatment. I never felt so happy in all my life.

The colour came back in my cheeks and I started to laugh and smile again for real. I was walking on air for about three days. Then I hit my breaking point coughing up blood and unable to function. My mood swings were to the point that I could not recognize myself. I would have violent outbursts that scared me more than anything ever has.

That Monday when I went for treatment I told my doctor to go to hell. I felt healthy and fine before all their pills and treatments, and now I was too sick to cope. Doing well in school meant the world to me and I was not functioning, so I quit treatment.

My mother went ballistic telling me I was out of my house if I didn't go back to treatment. I knew it was a hollow threat so I told her to go to hell too. This is the point I'm at now.

I have so much anger and hate inside. Why did this have to happen to me? I felt so cheated by life; I guessed being happy was too much to ask for. I did start treatment up again the other day. I know now that quitting was a childish thing to do. The truth is that I do want to fight. It is just that I have been doing it for so long, that there almost no strength left in me. This was not supposed to happen to me. I have always taken care of myself; I never even suntanned.

The only thing I have learned is that I am not going to live my life as a sick person. It is very hard to do, but I'm going to make the best of what I do have. I am trying to look on the positive side of this situation. My doctors could have found this too late for treatment, that is what really scares me — the 'what ifs'. I am the kind of person that must always be in control, and somewhere I lost it. But slowly I'm getting it back.

NAME WITHHELD

A Corporate Bill of Rights

Last Wednesday evening, approximately 150 people crowded into room 234 of the Arts and Administration building to hear a panel discussion on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. The discussion was hosted by the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group.

Judging by the wide range of people, young and old, who came out to learn about the MAI, this is an issue that many citizens are concerned about, and rightly so.

According to Renato Ruggiero, Director-General of the World Trade Organization, the MAI is an attempt at "writing the constitution of a single global economy". The basic purpose of the MAI is to force national governments to treat foreign investors at least as well as domestic investors.

On the surface, this might not sound very threatening, but what it amounts to in practice is the inability to discriminate against any potential investor, regardless of their record on human rights abuses, environmental degradation, or labour practices.

The MAI is the product of secret negotiations carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development since 1995. The OECD is a group of 29 of the wealthiest nation-states whose economies make up 84 percent of total global investment capital.

These secret negotiations were only revealed when a draft of the MAI treaty was leaked a couple of months ago. Now that these negotiations have become public knowledge, our government has decided to allow public input on the issue — a total of 36 hours of hearings held only in Ottawa.

What this treaty portends is the possibility of foreign investors demanding access to the public health and education industry. It also eliminates the ability of governments and public utilities to develop natural resources and reinvest the profits in local economic improvement programs.

Nor will governments be able to subsidize national publishers or cultural development agencies. Under the MAI, if a government does not give a foreign company the same treatment as local companies or public utilities, the company can take the government to court and sue for damages. Global capital finally seems to have become a law unto itself; more powerful than national governments and the citizens whose interests these governments are supposed to represent.

Many of us are swayed by arguments that claim opening up Canada to foreign investment will

ultimately benefit us all through a trickle down effect. The evidence indicates that the trickle down effect is not as copious as the corporate propagandists would have us believe.

Gordon Teason and Matthew Barrett claim the economy is on the upswing. But whose economy are they talking about, the economy of the average household, or the economy of the multinational corporations? It's quite obvious that the real unemployment rate is higher now than at any time since the Great Depression.

What's even more frustrating than this economic doublespeak is the fact that governments don't seem to have learned the lessons of history; that is, that monopolization always results in a glut of overproduction, chronic unemployment, a hoarding of wealth by the rich, and increasing deprivation and poverty for workers.

To top it all off, we have a PM who is so far out of touch with reality of the average working Canadian that during the recent election debate he said, "The essence of a strong society is a strong economy." What a perverted view of society.

Someone who would say such a thing can have no moral compunction whatsoever in letting people freeze and starve on the street, or letting people go sick and uneducated because schools and hospitals are too expensive. It's made quite clear that his main job as PM is to be an overseer of the Canadian people to tell them to obey the decrees of the bank and corporations.

Despite the Liberals' focus on attracting investment, the banks and big corporations don't need any more help from our government — they are laying people off while making record profits. At the same time there are 600,000 more Canadian children living in poverty since 1993.

The number of corporations that pay no taxes at all has gone from 66,000 in 1993 to 82,000 today. Capital gains are still taxed at 75 percent, while the working person's income is taxed at 100 percent. Only 60 percent of Canadians are employed, many of which are underemployed.

But millions of dollars are wasted on grants, tax breaks, and forgivable and interest free loans for businesses, while the unemployment insurance program is pared to the bone.

What's more, we have a finance minister who lies about the progress made in cutting the deficit. The largest part of the federal budget goes to paying interest on our 600 billion dollar debt. If the interest rate is half of what it was the previous year, (as was the case this past fiscal year) our interest payment will be halved as well.

The government saved at least 30 billion dollars in interest payments

alone last year — four times more than the total cuts to health and education since 1993. A more important statistic is that public spending on health care had already dropped from 19 percent of the total budget in 1981 to only 2 percent in 1993. Health care was not the huge cash drain it was made out to be. Don't believe the lies about the deficit — programs don't cost that much and cuts don't save that much.

It's important to keep in mind the old adage — an economist is someone who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. You can call me a loose cannon, but my aim is dead on. I've said it before and I'll say it again — what's good for business is not always good for society, in fact, it's often bad for society.

The MAI is a perfect example of this. It's a brutal illustration of how our government has turned from representing the public interest, to eagerly sacrificing it to the corporate agenda. It's time we fought back for social values. If not, our governments will continue to invite foreign investors to come in and exploit Canada's "human resources".

MARTIN STEEVES

Doctor assisted suicide

continued from page 8...
the medication. The following Monday, Robinson held a press conference to describe the incident to the press.

To bring us back to the present, I resubmit to you the Morrison case. Neither the police, the prosecuting attorney Craig Botterill, or Morrison's lawyer Joel Pink want to refer to this case as a mercy killing. Yet, can anyone tell me why she would end Paul Mills's life? Is it at all possible that Mills asked to die?

The question here is whether or not we have the guts in this country to make

laws that would accommodate doctor-assisted suicide. My recommendation is that an application for death be made available, which would require the signatures of three medical doctors verifying the patient's condition as incurable and incapacitating, and one psychiatrist to verify the patient's mental stability. In the event that the patient is unable to speak on his/her behalf, three family members could signify their approval in lieu of the psychiatrist.

This is not an easy decision to make, and would likely only affect a tiny

fraction of all patients out there. As the usual defender of the religious right, it bothers me for the first time that there is no loophole in any of the Ten Commandments. However, there must be a difference between this and flat-out murder. It's only if we keep this issue in perspective and recognize it, that it may be relieving people of agonizing pain, or just that feeling of helplessness. Our burden of guilt is no match for their incalculable pain and feelings of no relief.

ALAN LEBLANC

