

# The Real Criminals - Explained

'Murderous panhandlers' front-page news - 'panhandler hero' not newsworthy

by Rodney Graham

I read many articles this summer regarding the altercation and subsequent death of a non-homeless man in Toronto by 4 apparent 'panhandlers'. There were too many to read actually. Then there was an article about a 'panhandler' in Halifax who saved an old woman from muggers. This man was about the same age as the panhandlers accused of murder in T.O. This incident transpired shortly after the former. Very interestingly, to me anyway, is that I had a hard time finding many articles about the latter panhandler and his heroic act. Why?

Having been an activist for 20 years and also a formerly 'scary' homeless youth who grew up a poor boy in the east end of Vancouver B.C. I have a lifetime of 'experience to draw on - as well as hard facts. I remember well the thrills of auto theft, raising hell - and its consequences! I paid my dues to society the hard way. The "baddest"-and only crime I now do is train hopping - a victimless and harmless hobby. I remember the East Van Saints, Sunrise Parkers, and The Clarke Parkers, many of whom went to jail with long sentences; I have known some truly 'bad' people. I think I know a bit about who is a 'real' criminal and who is not. Panhandlers are definitely not criminals. These facts, if anyone might be interested are available in the media, on the Internet, and on our radios across the country - but you've got to read between the lines and not just accept opinions on blogs written by non-homeless citizens.

The facts clearly reveal this: When people talk about the homeless, whether they are the media reporting, or the 'general public', they seem to demonize panhandlers, sometimes just subtly. Other times not so subtly — Call it merely 'ignorance' if you will. Perhaps prejudice, arrogance, or maliciousness could be used. Conversely, when speaking of the 'general public', or the 'non-

homeless person', they are very careful to paint them as something holy and righteous — untouchable. If you do not agree please read on with an open mind, I'm sure the 'general public' are more than willing - since this is a 'liberal' country — eh? Further on in this article there are references to *actual statistics* showing a growing trend towards violence *against* panhandlers on the streets of North America perpetrated by the 'general public'. These statistics are from the U.S. We do not keep such statistics in Canada, not nationally anyway.

*National Anti-Poverty Organization* has announced they are going to challenge the panhandler by-law in Winnipeg — again. Rob Rainer, the executive director of NAPO says that the previous challenge to the law did succeed in principle in that the by-law was altered to address aggression not location, and that, without going to court. But the city of Winnipeg waffled and has again amended it to emphasize location.

Regarding why some panhandle, Rainer said, "Most people don't realize the brutal practices of the social services in Canada, most people are ignorant of the practices. There needs to be more information for the public".

During their meeting in March of 2007, Debbie Frost, director of NAPO in Saskatchewan, and Rob Rainer, the National executive director of NAPO from Ottawa, met with Wayne Helgasson of the Social Planning Council, Harold Dyke, Social activist and poverty advocate, and members of labour, as well as the lawyer representing NAPO - lawyer Byron William, of the Public Interest Law Centre.

They have already a general outline of their challenge — A copy of which can be obtained by contacting Byron William at [bywil@legalaid.mb.ca](mailto:bywil@legalaid.mb.ca) or Rob Rainer at [rainer@napo-onap.ca](mailto:rainer@napo-onap.ca). It is an outline prepared by Elena Mazinani, a law

student of University of Ottawa.

## The media and its distortions of the truth

The mainstream media have gone on a 'feeding frenzy' this summer: the alleged murder of a 'normal upstanding citizen', meaning a middle class/non-homeless person in T.O.- by the ever-stigmatized 'scary dangerous street punk.' I am always amazed at the one sided, hyped up, overblown treatment of panhandlers and 'street people'.

Interestingly, the media (Mainstream) often try their absolute best — to portray the poor (Especially the younger ones) of being dangerous, violent, and larcenous. That is because most mainstream media know absolutely nothing about poverty and the less fortunate ones among us. I've watched them for years! They send their 'crew' down to the 'street' and then immediately interview, who else? A merchant/businessman of course. Then they interview, who else? A cop — of course. Then a politician. If they are real ambitious maybe they will then also interview a social worker or professional — or some fund sucker or poverty pimp. Then — of course, the 'bad guys' — the poor. And, of course, they make sure to pick someone who they've interviewed of the panhandlers who is not going to be a good representative of panhandlers either. Kids I have spoken to have told me time and time again that the media who interviewed them twisted their words and/or wrote things they didn't even say! - making them look bad.

They write what sells — write what the people want to hear.

The facts don't matter. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence could spend one day finding the real stats on violence and real "injustice". They might be surprised to find that the mainstream media, the police, and the merchants, and I would include so called 'professionals'

across Canada are feeding them hogwash. The stats (The few there are in Canada) show that it is the *well off* who usually attack/abuse the *poor* on the street.

Back to the topic of violence and panhandlers; I challenge anyone to check the internet for articles about the panhandler who saved an old woman from muggers in The Commons in Halifax. Better yet, check with papers (Dailies) across Canada. Try to find all articles about him AND all the 'opinions' of the 'general public'. You'll have to search hard. Then search for articles on Panhandlers who killed a man.

Make sure you have a hell of a lot of time to read since the articles and blogs raving about the 'scary panhandlers' is quite lengthy!

Then do some simple arithmetic and check out the stats from National Coalition for the Homeless. Although it's stats about American cities - the same trend is happening to us in Canada.

In recent articles I have written I have proven that the people who run our wonderful system in Canada are twisting the truth completely out of anything resembling reality! It is the *less fortunate ones* who are being assaulted on a regular basis by middle class and non-homeless persons! The media are correct in one area, however; that is this: Violence on the street HAS increased over the years. But the fact is that violence AGAINST the homeless has increased not the other way round as the media and those they interview would lead the naive public to assume. In fact, it has always been that way! You are far more likely to be murdered by a loved one or relative than a homeless person. You are far more likely to be raped at some middle class party than by a street person. The less fortunate ones on the street are far less likely to harm anyone in the public! The 'well off' assault each other far more as well as assaulting the poor!

Yes, some of these so-called 'street people' are getting fed up with being assaulted, provoked, and insulted continually. When the poor are assaulted you can bet on this:

It will not be reported to the media or to police. But there will be a day of reckoning. It's why I believe in God — To think otherwise would be illogical. Someone surely has to repay the enormous injustices that are deliberately covered up by police, politicians, and also merchants and bureaucrats. At the risk of being accused of being redundant - the following recycled article(s) are even more relevant than ever!

I saw with my own eyes the problems in the 'system': the ineptitude, the government facilities run by men and women who would be a perfect example of the 'Peter Principle' and the way the young are abandoned to a world of fear and misery.

I am not saying there are not good social workers, bureaucrats, and agencies out there; I have met a couple just recently; there are good people out there — But not many. The problem is that the less fortunate don't have a voice, so they fall through the cracks and end up in a system that often is not the portrait of mercy, love, and kindness that the average naive, ignorant middleclass and upper class, or even working class can understand. This is why it is so crucial to have a street paper - to have an alternative source of information talking about the lives and the issues of the less fortunate among us — Written by people who are, or were, formerly homeless. If people learned about them they would not be 'afraid' of them as they are now, and no one can tell me that is not the absolute truth!

Unfortunately, the mainstream media goes directly to 'the establishment' when seeking an easy story to hype up a bit and make it tantalizing for the middle and upper class that love to hear their 'fears' supported by the media.

In short, the media writes what people want to hear — I wonder if they don't fear the chamber of commerce and City Hall more than the 'scary street people'

I panhandled on the street in Vancouver at the age of 12! People will quickly ask me, of course, why didn't you go to the social services? Couldn't you go to relatives? What did you do that your family abandoned you? You must have done something - So many people against you - you couldn't be right, there must be something wrong on your side if so many couldn't "stand" you. I can answer all of that.

First of all, there is not that many resources out there for young people like you might think there are. The ones there are - are not always good at what they do, and some are outright scams! One thing they do is refer you directly to Government Social Services. The next thing is that the Social Services contact your parents (And MOST youth are on the street as runaways BECAUSE of their parents!!!). They often are required by law to contact abusive parents for permission to help them. I won't delve into the problems but there are many and suffice it to say that the youth is behind the eight ball from the start and the cards are stacked against them.

Relatives: Can you imagine being a youth and going to a relative who has their own family already, maybe a nice house and a wonderful family you feel intimidated to be around even? You probably hardly know the relative anyway. People just don't seem to be able to step into the shoes of a less fortunate young person at all. Relatives are also just as embarrassed too when a wayward kid shows up. Another thing is that, just like social workers - the relative is probably afraid to go against the parent(s) of the child/youth. I could go on and on..

YOU must have done SOMETHING wrong. If you are outnumbered and so many people say you are 'to blame' YOU must

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