

Caron Tells All

By Cathy Waite

U.P.E.I. was privileged to have Roger Caron, author of *Go Boy* and winner of the Governor General's Award for best non-fiction Canadian literature of 1978, as guest lecturer Monday evening. The standing-room-only audience in Duffy Amphitheatre was awe-stricken at Caron's account of his life behind bars.

Caron has spent 24 of his 41 years in and out of Canadian Penitentiaries "as a result of perverseness in making unlawful withdrawals from local banks and taking unauthorized walks from local jails". He first entered prison walls at the age of 16, leaving his 15 brothers and sisters behind forever. Caron believes that he turned out to be the "bad seed" of his family because of his never-ending bursts of energy that always seemed to get him into trouble. He grew up in the era known as "hard

times" and with such a large family, no one had the time to listen or talk to a boy with problems. So at an early age, Caron had been branded a criminal for life.

During Caron's lecture he spoke of the many gasty events he endured in prison. One that comes to mind is a gas invented by the Americans which was to be tested on "guinea pig" Canadian convicts. Caron was forced to undergo these gas treatments, which would leave him in a state of frenzy, shaking violently from head to toe. The final treatment left him unconscious for 48 hours, long enough to convince the prison doctor to discontinue the gasings after realizing its harmful effects.

Another incident which Caron recalls as being one of his turning points in his life, was receiving a handful

of jelly beans. He would use these beans to spell words which he knew would anger the guards in his block. Caron would continually spell these unmentionable words to annoy the guards until they "triumphantly seized" his jelly beans. From this, Caron learned the "power of words over physical strength", which gave him the initiative to write. So began his self-therapy of writing his emotions down on paper. Two years later his "Cinderella" story, *Go Boy*, was born.

Go Boy is Caron's memoir of his life behind bars. For the reader, the novel is a dramatic, gripping story of what a lifetime spent behind bars is really like. It took Caron 16 years to complete the novel, which is a remarkable feat when one considers he read his first book at the

age of 17.

Caron presently does interviews on radio and television shows, lectures throughout Canada, and is a member of the Inmate Advisory Board in one of Canada's foremost penitentiaries. Caron feels good about his lecturing because it allows the outside world to catch a glimpse of what "a person on the other side of the fence is like".

The novel has since sold 400,000 copies and is about to be made into a motion picture starring Martin Sheen as Roger Caron. But for those who can't wait to see the movie, *Go Boy* is now available in paperback at local book stores. Caron also plans to write a second novel.

The final note of Caron's lecture is one that we are all guilty of and can learn from: "Never take the things you have for nothing for granted". Food for thought!

Dexter T. Gnome



to be continued

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