

CORNER

CULTURE

EDMONTON

CORNER

AFTER THE FACT

Sitting in the courtroom, waiting for the verdict to be passed down by the judge, I noticed the look of disdain on my social worker's face. The outcome, I felt, was not going to be a favourable one.

...why should my social worker care anyway? In the past two years I've had three meetings with him - all of which took place in the Calgary detention centre. No one in this courtroom seems to give a damn; my parents didn't even come to give me support. Free show! Watch Charlene Prowse be kept a ward of the province until she's eighteen. Don't help her. Condemn her before she causes any more trouble. Keep her in that prison place. Lock your doors! Beware! Beware! Charlene might steal you blind.

I've been in a girls' detention centre for the past two years; the majority of which was spent without any privileges. The most sought and most difficult privilege to achieve was classified as a 50A rating which entitled you to leave the grounds with an adult. There were few times when I worked myself up to a 50A, but for the majority of the time I had the rating of 30B, which entitled me to next to nothing. I was the oldest one in detention and I had no privileges.

When I talk to people, they always think I've committed some large felony to have been kept in detention for two years. I have a long history of misdemeanors ranging from 'juvenile runaway' to 'break and enter'. I haven't been in any trouble for the last year, but I broke out of detention twice. My parents don't want me at home and my three older sisters are all settled into their careers. I'm the black sheep of the family.

I have few alternatives and, if I get placed in detention for another year, I'll go stark raving mad. They all tell me that my behaviour is not normal for a girl of my background and intelligence. If they think I'm deviant now, wait till they see me after another year of being institutionalized.

I haven't lived at home for three years. I can hardly remember what my family's faces look like. I cry a lot more now than I ever have. I'm trying so hard to change, but people are leary about putting trust in people who have blown it. I guess I could compare my actions to 'The Little Boy Who Cried Wolf'. I've tried the - you can trust me I've changed - bit numerous times before without actually meaning it. Now when I finally mean it - I haven't any believers.

I wonder if I stood on top of a mountain and shouted my innocence to the world, if anyone would believe me. "Hey World, I realize I've done you wrong, but please believe me. I need your help. I want to change." No, I don't think anyone would believe me.

I've always tried to figure out why I've done so many things wrong. I don't think I can actually blame my family. They all seemed to try and help me. There's something about society that makes people want to impress other people. The only way I could ever make any friends was to impress people. I used to steal cigarettes, make-up and jewellery and give them to my 'friends'. That's the only way I could ever get people to notice me.

I wonder who I am. I've been masquerading in a charade for so long it's hard to figure out. To my parents, I'm a problem. To my sisters, I'm an intrusion. To my social worker, an unnecessary complication. To my friends, I'm rowdy and a bit crazy. The most important question is left unanswered - who am I to me?

I'm two years behind in my education. In St. Mary's Detention Centre where I am now, if I don't attend classes, I'm locked up. So naturally, I now attend classes regularly. The only thing I enjoy about school is the art classes and they're only scheduled twice a week. I don't know what I'll end up doing. I would like to live on my own, try to keep a steady job and sort out my life.

If I try, if I try really hard, maybe I can convert into the person I've always wanted to be...

"Charlene Suzanne Prowse please come forward. Due to the two instances of running away from St. Mary's Detention Centre, the court has decided that you shall remain a ward of the Government of Alberta until you reach the full age of eighteen. If your behaviour has not improved by that time we shall have no other choice than to place you in a women's criminal institute. You will have to work hard this next year, Charlene, and prove yourself ready to re-enter the community...That is all...Case dismissed.

A small article was found in the Edmonton Journal two days later.

'Charlene Suzanne Prowse 17-year-old ward of the Alberta Government was found dead in her room at St. Mary's Detention Centre early this morning. Causes of death are being withheld pending further investigation.

by pat
turnball