

THE FREE PRESS OPINION

Page A8

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"The theory of a free press is that the truth will emerge from free reporting and free discussion." Walter Lippman

Retry him, or get off the pot

Imagine, if you will, making a late-night trip to the corner store and, while minding your own business, you are accosted by a group of individuals. Imagine these individuals intimidating you with youthful bravado. And then imagine being further intimidated by a show of physical force. What would you do?

That, allegedly, is the situation that John Joseph Kleinsteuber faced May 19, 1995 when he came out of the Queensway 7-Eleven. No one yet knows for sure exactly what happened and what didn't. To this day there remains a fog of confusion and misinformation surrounding the incident.

One of the youths alleged to have accosted Mr. Kleinsteuber, Rory Salter, is dead, and has been martyred to the cause of Family and Friends Against Drinking Drivers. Mr. Kleinsteuber says he just wants a chance to tell his side of the story, but has yet to be given the chance. No one's sure if the initial publication ban on evidence still stands. (In fact, Mr. Kleinsteuber doesn't know for certain whether he is even still on parole.) And so rumours and bits and pieces of information circulate. And questions hang.

What was Mr. Salter, a 17-year-old, doing outside a 7-Eleven 200 kilometres from home at 2:00 in the morning? What, if any, role did Mr. Salter and his friends play in making Mr. Kleinsteuber fear for his safety? Did Mr. Kleinsteuber intentionally hit Mr. Salter with his vehicle (and could it be justified as self defense)? Why was Mr. Kleinsteuber apparently driving while impaired in the first place?

No one at the 7-Eleven that night, it seems, was innocent. But these are the questions we must answer before we go making a hero out of Mr. Salter and a villain out of Mr. Kleinsteuber (or vice versa).

Everything seems to hinge on whether local Crown counsel proceeds with a new trial.

The only way the questions will be answered is if the Crown rests and Mr. Kleinsteuber is exonerated in the eyes of the law, or if they proceed with a new trial and we begin to hear the whole story. We suggest the latter course is really the only way truth and justice will be served.



Pot Hole Season Returns to P.G.

Taking heat with grace

Doug Walls doesn't need the hassles. The chairman of the school board's finance and management committee doesn't need the education minister, who is also the MLA for Prince George North, saying this school district isn't spending money wisely.

And he doesn't need Highways Minister Lois Boone, who is also the MLA for Prince George-Mount Robson and a former school trustee, saying it 'annoys' her when the school board complains about not having enough money.

He doesn't need the aggravation because Mr. Walls, along with the rest of the trustees, has to figure out ways to eliminate over \$2 million from the upcoming budget.

It's a job that he does with compassion and a certain distaste, knowing it will hurt students and force people who don't deserve it to the unemployment line.



RUMOUR MILLS

Shane Mills

If this sounds a bit like a free plug for Mr. Walls, it is. Guilty as charged. It's a way to cleanse the soul, so to speak, after this harried scribe got Mr. Walls into the hot seat.

A story on the provincial budget attributed the following to Mr. Walls: "In particular, he says teacher salaries have gone up 14 per cent and that the school board

has no control over salaries, as the deal is negotiated by the province."

One of the golden rules of journalism is context and Mr. Walls was a victim of not quite enough.

He made the following points:

Education Minister Paul Ramsey is right when he says enrolment in this district has only increased 3.5 per cent over the past six years.

And Ms. Boone is right when she says funding has gone up 10 per cent in the same time period.

His point, however, was that in the same period salaries (that's all wages and salaries) have risen 14 per cent.

Inflation hasn't stood still, workers still get raises and the school board budget - which is set for them by the province - hasn't kept pace.

The Prince George School Board has been hacking and whacking at the budget for years, but the education minister seems to think they can balance the budget without causing major pain.

Maybe Finance Minister Andrew Petter can give them some tips.

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