

Bill Rea ? Wedding for Bernardo?

It was something I've always believed and I became even more convinced of it last week.

One really great way to sell newspapers is to put a picture of Paul Bernardo on the front.

He was back in the news last week, with reports in the Toronto Sun that there's some woman who might be interested in marrying him. And has that ever sparked a lot of reaction.

There are a couple of facts that I should set out.

I have very little use for Paul Bernardo; approximately the same amount of use I have for the likes of Clifford Olson, Russell Williams or Charles Manson. The only use I have for any of them is they are rather interesting characters to read about. And I know I'm not alone in that regard. The Sun doesn't put Bernardo's puss in print as often as it does because the editors have space in the paper that they don't know what to do with. They do it because they know he's going to attract readers.

Bernardo currently resides in prison ? exactly where I neither know nor care. And considering what he did to get there, I have no problem with that arrangement.

In 1995, after a sensational, but well-run trial, Bernardo was found guilty of all the charges against him. One very clear memory I have from that time was the fact that a very sensational trial was going on in the United States involving O.J. Simpson. The Americans put their guy on trial very quickly, while the judicial feet in Canada seemed to be dragging. I remember hearing lots of complaints in the media and listening to radio phone-in shows about how slow the Canadian system was.

The spectacle that was the trial of Simpson was nothing short of a bloody disgrace. And as a Canadian, it made me feel good that once they got the trial of Bernardo going, things moved very efficiently. The critics in this country were basically compelled to shut up. And most people who followed the trial seemed satisfied with the verdict, believing they got the right guy. How many people in the U.S.A. reflect on the Simpson verdict with much satisfaction?

One of the very few positive points of Bernardo's arrest and trial that I remember was the way all his rights were respected. He was given a fair trial and I recall he had a lawyer who fought like a tiger for him. There are people in this society who complain that people accused of terrible crimes have too many rights. I'm not in that group. I want those accused of the most terrible crimes to be given every break the system allows for. Then once they are found guilty, we can have some additional confidence that the right person has been caught.

And let us not forget that we sometimes get the wrong guy. Some 50 years ago, people were pretty convinced Steven Truscott was guilty of the crime for which he was sentenced to death.

I remember the opening sentence in my column the week Bernardo was found guilty ? ?Now that the trial is over and the verdict is in, we can all say with impunity that Paul Bernardo is a certified scumbag who should spend the rest of his days and nights in the clink.?

I haven't changed my mind much since then.

True, he will be eligible to apply for parole in a couple of years. The fact is I have no problem with that. The laws of this country clearly state that an incarcerated person is allowed to seek parole after a specified amount of time has been served, and as I stated above, it is important that our system makes sure the worst criminal gets access to the best benefits available. Our judicial system would quickly become a farce if anything less than that were tolerated.

Let Bernardo apply for parole a couple of years from now. He will be turned down as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow morning. According to Wikipedia, Bernardo turns 50 next month (and many happy returns of the day). Assuming his health holds out (as if I really care), I would conservatively estimate that guy's got at least another 25 years to spend in his current situation, and I think I'm being very generous in my prediction. A more realistic estimate is when he leaves prison for the last time, he'll be on a stretcher with a sheet covering his face.

There are people in this society stupid enough to believe that Bernardo is going to be paroled sometime soon. Not going to happen. Bernardo has about as much chance of getting paroled in the next 25 years as I have of being elected Pope (by the way, I'm not Catholic). That guy is going to spend his 50th, 55th, 60th, 65th, 70th, etc., birthdays sitting in the same kind of can he sits in now. He'll likely die there too. The thought upsets me little.

There was an article in the Sunday Sun about 20 years ago, dealing with Bernardo and the conditions in which he was living. The story even included the dimensions of his cell, and if memory serves, it was eight feet by five feet. I didn't bother breaking out the tape measure (I'm not sure I even owned one at the time), but casual estimates with my eyes told me those were roughly the dimensions of the bathroom in the apartment in which I was living in those days.

?My bathroom with a TV, and that's this joker's world probably for the rest of his life,? I remember thinking.

I also remember thinking that was just fine with me.

But getting back to the subject at hand, there's been a lot of fuss raised in the last week or so about Bernardo possibly getting married. At the risk of getting a lot of people mad at me, the fact is I have no trouble with that. The lady in question, who as of this writing has not been identified (and I hope she never is) is 30 years old, meaning she's an adult and fully entitled to make her own life decisions. True, there are questions about her emotional stability, but there are plenty of productive people like that in our society. And when did the rest of us get the authority to butt in?

As for the appropriateness of such a marriage, that is the business of the woman in question, Bernardo, officials who have responsibility for Bernardo and absolutely no one else. That includes you and me. What goes on between consenting adults is no more my business than what goes on between my wife and I is any of your business.

This latest development in the Bernardo story has sparked a lot of anger. I think it's very safe to say that there are a lot of people out there who are angry because Bernardo is still alive. While I understand such feelings, I am vehemently opposed to capital punishment, so I don't share them. I am happy to live in a country that does not put transgressors to death.

Since Bernardo is alive, presumably healthy and likely to remain that way for the foreseeable future, I have no problems with people corresponding with him, and vice-versa. I don't think people would object if I, as a journalist, tried to contact Bernardo. I've read that Olson and the late Peter Worthington regularly corresponded. I've also read that Manson has set some kind of record for the amount of mail he receives.

I don't know a lot about how the system works, having never been incarcerated. I would gather there's some procedure in place that allows people in prison to get married to people outside. If there is such a system, then I have no trouble with Bernardo making use of it.

I would hate to see the rules adjusted just because of a guy like Paul Bernardo. I think the last thing anyone in this country would want would be that guy getting the idea he's something special.

He's not

