

Bill Rea ? You have say on what gets in

I think people could be forgiven for wondering if the sickos out there get a little too much attention in the media. If they do, then I guess I could be classified as being part of the problem for writing about it here, but I'll do it anyway. Take last Thursday (Aug. 1). The front page of the Toronto Sun featured a picture of notorious school-girl murderer and serial rapist Paul Bernardo. I think like many people, I recognized who was in the picture before I even bothered to read why he was in the news again.

The Sun is one of the local daily papers I usually buy every morning, and this day was no exception. I confess my curiosity got the better of me, so I sat down to read the story as soon as I returned to my office with the papers (I got myself a cup of coffee before the reading, respecting that there are priorities in life).

Like many of you, I learned that Bernardo was applying to be transferred to a medium security prison, as opposed to the maximum-security accommodations he's been enjoying in the soon-to-be-closed Kingston Penitentiary. There were follow-up stories in a couple of papers the following day, quoting people who might have some influence in the matter who were saying that Bernardo might as well forget it. And then I saw a column in Saturday's Sun, praising the prospect of his request being denied.

As little use as I have for a guy like Bernardo, I have no problems with him making such requests, or applying for adjustments in his accommodations. He can ask for anything he likes, and the reason I don't think any of us should get our knickers in a twist is because we all know what the answer will be for most of the requests.

My readings last week informed me Bernardo will be eligible to apply for parole in 2020. Apply away, Paul! Knock yourself out! You and I are not likely to bump into each other on a sidewalk any time in this century (or the next couple, for that matter). I remember reading an account of his existence in prison many years ago, not long after he was sent away for life. The story even included the dimensions of his cell, and a wee bit of measuring estimates with my eyes told me his cell was roughly the same size as the bathroom of the apartment in which I was living at the time. Realizing that the equivalent of my bathroom was likely to be this guy's world for the rest of his days was kind of symbolic and actually rather satisfying.

So if he wants to ask for adjustments in the type of facility he's held in, let him ask.

But the fact that a request was deemed front-page news was a little up-setting for some people. The matter was even briefly discussed in the office last Thursday, with a couple of negative comments being tossed in.

Whatever some of us might think about giving this guy so much attention, the reality is he sells newspapers, a point which I take credit for making in the course of the office conversation.

And I can see one positive coming from all this attention. His notoriety is so strong that he's going to have a hard time ever getting parole. So maybe seeing him on the front page occasionally has some advantages.

When I saw the headline in the morning, I figured the story would dominate talk radio for the day, and it did. But not as much as one might have expected. One reason for that, I think, was the amount of play and air time given to Ariel Castro. He's the piece of garbage who held three women captive in his Cleveland home for about 10 years. He was sentenced last Thursday life in prison, and another 1,000 years was tacked on for good measure. I hope someone is put in charge of counting to 1,000.

There was a lot of talk about that, when commentators weren't talking about Bernardo.

One point that was made repeatedly dealt with the amount of time Castro was given to address the court at his sentencing. I have heard various estimates on how long he spoke, ranging from 20 to 40 minutes, with some commentators suggesting there should be limits on how long a person in that position should be permitted to hog a microphone.

I guess I could have heard portions of his address, if I had been so inclined, either through the likes of CNN or even on the internet. It's possible I could have caught the whole thing, had I been interested. The fact is I really wasn't interested. Oh yeah, I listened to accounts and portions of his comments on the radio as I was driving home that night, and read accounts in the papers the next day. No matter how long he yakked, it is obvious Castro devoted the bulk of the time being absurd.

So I can understand why some observers would be upset at the amount of time Castro took up to be stupid, but my inclination would be to let him rant, especially since this would be the last public statement we're ever likely to hear from the guy. I think we all have better things to do than judicially muzzling perverts in the middle of their final statements. Let him talk, then lock him up. That's the wise way to deal with things.

The problem is I suspect this is not the last we're going to hear from this guy. He'll manage to get into the news again, as surely as Bernardo does.

The fact that Bernardo can make news so easily is not something I'm inclined to blame him for, apart from the fact that it's the

crimes he committed that maintains his prominence.

I have heard people accuse Bernardo and his former wife Karla Homolka of being publicity hounds, but I have never believed it. Although I am aware of many occasions in which one of them have made headlines (last Thursday being the most recent example) I am not aware of any occasion when either of them sought media attention. Quite the contrary, I believe it's the media that looks for excuses to put them into the public eye, and the reason for that is simple to explain. Like I pointed out to my colleagues in the office last week, Bernardo sells newspapers, whether we like it or not.

That has always been the case, has it not?

People still pay attention to what goes on with Charles Manson and his followers, if for no other reason than they're interested.

I guess part of the media's job is reporting on things that people are interested in. It doesn't matter if there's any sensible reason for them to be interested.

As I often tell people, the day this world starts making sense, there'll be no further use for newspapers, and I'll be out of work.

I'll have you all know I'm still employed

