

*Sunday August 19, 2012*

## **Why do we defend dogs, not children?**

By Jim Taylor

Intervening in someone else's affairs can be risky. Intervening cost Rod Lazenby his life. Lazenby, a 35-year retired veteran of the RCMP on full pension, was working in bylaw enforcement for the Foothills district in southern Alberta. Lazenby went to a local ranch to talk to Trevor Kloschinsky about his dogs.

Kloschinsky raised Blue Heelers. He had about 30 of them on the property he rented.

Not long after, a mortally beaten Lazenby was delivered, in his police cruiser, possibly driven by Kloschinsky himself, to an RCMP office in Calgary. Lazenby died next day from his injuries.

Kloschinsky was arrested and charged with murder.

Conflict seems to follow Kloschinsky. He had been evicted from his previous dog-raising location, near Turner Valley, for at least 20 health violations.

The owner of the property that Kloschinsky rented blamed "nosy neighbours" for Lazenby going there. Neighbours had complained that the dogs were confined to a Quonset hut, never let outside, and barked constantly.

### **Not an isolated incident**

People seem to feel entitled to – even obligated to – intervene on behalf of animals who cannot intervene on their own behalf.

We have recently had a rash of similar incidents locally. I should make clear, at the beginning, that I am not taking sides in these incidents. I have not talked with any of the persons involved. I take my information solely from published news reports and court documents.

In the closest parallel, neighbours objected about a dog-breeding kennel. Too many dogs, inadequate care, failure to have the operation properly licenced.... That case is still under investigation.

Two others have been settled. One ended happily for the dog, the other didn't.

Shadow, a 3-year-old Malemute, spent 15 months -- half her life -- in the Kelowna dog pound. Animal control officers imprisoned Shadow after she burrowed under a fence and bit a woman in the thigh.

About the bite, there's no question. About the cause, there is some dispute. Some witnesses assert the victim's German Shepherd attacked Shadow first. Others claim the woman kicked Shadow in the head before she was bitten.

After Shadow's story hit the Internet, almost 7,000 people petitioned for Shadow's pardon.

Earlier this month, regional authorities negotiated conditions for Shadow's release. Shadow got to go home.

Diesel was not as fortunate. Judge Mayland McKimm ordered Diesel destroyed by August 23. Diesel, a seven-year-old German Shepherd cross, has spent the last 17 months in the pound, for repeatedly jumping on and snapping at people.

Although Diesel pays the penalty, McKimm accused Diesel's owner David Smith of "callous indifference" and called him "unreliable and profoundly irresponsible."

Over the last four years, Smith ignored 13 citations about Diesel's aggressive behavior. McKimm said Smith had "shown a wanton indifference to the serious distress his failure to control this animal has caused to his neighbours."

"It's too bad the dog has to suffer," said one of those neighbors. "A lot of it had to do with the owner."

## Property rights

McKimm's written verdict noted, "It is not a question of deciding between the rights of the animal, if an animal can be said to have rights, and its owner. The application... deprives the owner permanently of his or her property...."

"The law has always been respectful of the private property of its citizens..."

I wonder if that was why people didn't intervene with the Penticton father convicted of ten charges related to pimping his 18-year-old stepdaughter.

Apparently the abuse started when the girl was just 12. First fondling, then oral sex, finally vaginal intercourse.

Family members and friends knew what was happening. They talked about the girl going naked to her stepfather's bed. They heard the sounds of sex through bedroom walls.

Even the public knew something. After the family moved to Penticton, the father regularly brought his daughter to the local Soupateria, where he marketed his drugs and his daughter.

But no one intervened.

Do we still believe that a child is a parent's private property?

Or that "a man's home is his castle"? And that what he does there is nobody else's business?

## Those who need help

Outsiders intervene on behalf of dogs, who cannot speak for themselves. Do we assume we need not intervene on behalf of children, because they can speak for themselves?

Really? A 12-year-old?

Child psychiatrist Bruce Perry's book, *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, describes numerous instances of children traumatized by abuse. When the children spoke, no one believed them. Tragically, when the authorities eventually did intervene, their solutions often made things worse.

No one wants to be accused of meddling. But there's a fine line between meddling and intervening in what may be a life-threatening situation. Whether it's animals, children, or other adults.

Where does that line lie? No one ever knows for sure. The only thing I'm absolutely sure of is that being unwilling to intervene at all is always the wrong side of that line.

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## YOUR TURN

Last week's column particularly related to the United Church of Canada's faith stance. I was preaching last Sunday at First United in Kelowna, and more than half a dozen people thanked me for that column after the service (not what I was preaching about!) Arlene Erickson and Dave Van Zoost also wrote their appreciation.

Fran Ota, form Cornerbrook in Newfoundland, admitted to mixed feelings: "I sort of agree and sort of don't. Actually I wasn't in favour of including Song of Faith (yet) because it may be altered, as the 1968 statement was -- and once it's in the Manual, any alteration requires another remit..."

"When I was in seminary, Harold Wells taught a course called 'Confessing our Faith'. The course consisted of written assignments, one per week -- to rewrite the Articles of Faith, and explain why we did what we did with

theological support from various sources. It was an exceptional exercise, and I've kept those papers; I've had study groups in congregations try it. Most congregations (including mine here) didn't know we even HAD those Articles.

"What was interesting as I did each assignment was that they could be rewritten in such a way that they DO express current United Church theological understandings. I was then able to go on to ordination and say with confidence that I was in 'essential' agreement with the Articles of Faith. I think what the church needs to do now is define what it means by 'essential agreement'. We are not a 'doctrinal' church, so is there one statement which says who we are clearly? Yes -- the 1968 Creed for me is the best statement of faith we have."

Steve Roney commented, "For my part, I could not sign on to the original 20 Articles, but would have no problem signing on to the Song of Faith. This, however, makes me vastly prefer the 20 Articles as a statement of faith. The Song of Faith seems simply so ambiguous that anyone vaguely in line with the Christian tradition can read into it whatever they want. That leaves it useless as a statement of faith -- it commits to no faith, and requires none."

Diane Robinson shared a bit of her own story: "As one who was born into the United Church, I am grateful that I've been encouraged to grow my faith and grow IN faith. As a child, I believed that the earth and all that lies therein was literally created in six 24-hour days; and that a man named Noah actually built a boat that was large enough to accommodate two of every creature, and that I was so sin-soaked that only the bloody sacrifice of God's son could save me from myself (and the disappointment of God).

"I equate the Twenty Articles of Faith and their relationship to the young United Church with the unquestioning (blind?) faith I had as a child. As The Articles have influenced our growing United Church, so the Bible's stories of creation, floods, and sacrifice have influenced me -- both for better and for worse. They are a part of our/my history, but only a part.

"I think that the 1940 Statement of Faith, the 1968 The New Creed, and the 2006 A Song Of Faith speak to -- and are illustrative of -- the United Church growing up, its coming of age faith-wise. I hope, as the Church continues to 'grow up' in its faith, that its faith statements will continue to reflect that maturing process.

"The Apostle Paul wrote: 'When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.' (I Cor. 13: 11). I like to think that Paul would agree with your comment that 'faith is fluid, not frozen'."

Isabel Gibson saw statements of faith having a wider implication: "Your piece today got me thinking about these statements of beliefs in general. I have often been made uncomfortable by corporate statements of values -- the organization so blatantly did not live up to them. Self-serving nonsense! One executive encouraged me to see them as something the company aspired to -- a statement of what it wanted to be. Why couldn't it just say that, then? Because that wasn't sufficiently sales-worthy. Mutter, mutter.

"So, in this case, I find myself thinking again about statements of beliefs. I don't suppose any UC member (or any other human, for that matter) lives perfectly consistently as an embodiment of God's love, nor in the full exercise of our responsibilities (much less our opportunities!). Yet how wonderful to say it -- not necessarily for what it does for anyone else, but what it does for us: remind us of what we want to believe, who we want to be."

Vern Rathzlaff saw the United Church's actions as an example to other churches: "A great summary statement of faith process, Jim; we other denominations (Mennonite, in my case) have yet to do the same creative probing."

Allen Polen (perhaps his first letter of response) asked: "Are the new statements of faith anywhere on the internet? I would like to read them."

I'm sure all four documents are available somewhere on the United Church of Canada's website. For reference, though, they are all gathered into a single (long) document that was issued to facilitate discussion, prior to the vote, at <http://www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/statements/our-words-of-faith.pdf>

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## PSALM PARAPHRASES

I have started including a psalm paraphrase for the coming Sunday with my Soft Edges column, on Wednesdays. Why not on Sunday, you ask? Well, partly because psalms seem to me to fit better with the general mood of Soft Edges, which is more likely to deal directly with faith-related matters than these Sharp Edges columns. And partly because Soft Edges is about 250 words shorter than Sharp Edges, and so including the paraphrase on Wednesday won't make the e-mailing quite as long.

That does mean that if you want to receive the paraphrase, and are not on the Soft Edges mailing list, you'll need to subscribe. No charge, just send me a message, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or you can subscribe automatically by sending a blank e-mail to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca).

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### TECHNICAL STUFF

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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### PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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