



# Into a New Light: Respect and Dignity for All

## A Literacy and Economic Rights Resource Reader

Published by:

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**This written work does not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada or of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.**

The cover of this Literacy Resource Reader was created by Doug Bird. It represents a journey from darkness to light — a road similar to a situation where there are no human rights to a condition where respect and dignity are enjoyed by all people.

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# **Into a New Light: Respect and Dignity for All**

## **A Literacy and Economic Rights Resource Reader**

Debbie Prim, 1958-1998

This book is dedicated to Debbie Prim.

In the struggle to promote human rights, some people stand out for their total commitment. One such person was Debbie Prim. During her all too short lifetime, she brought joy and happiness to our work. Her dedication to ensure respect and dignity for all people inspired everyone who knew her.

**Hope lives when people remember.**

*(Simon Wiesenthal Centre)*

# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Contributors</b> .....	1
<b>Thank you</b> .....	2
<b>Foreword</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>Background to Human Rights</b> .....	8
<b>Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</b> .....	12
<b>Human Rights in the Workplace</b> .....	14
1. <i>Safety at the Site</i> .....	16
2. <i>No Joke; Government Safety Programs</i> .....	19
3. <i>Inspection Day at the Dairy</i> .....	22
4. <i>Like Dogs on Meat</i> .....	25
5. <i>A Matter of Experience</i> .....	28
6. <i>The Trainee</i> .....	32
7. <i>A Union Makes You Strong</i> .....	35
<b>Human Rights and Protection of Vulnerable Groups</b> .....	38
1. <i>The Right to Work: Wayne's World</i> .....	41
2. <i>Working and Working</i> .....	46
<b>Economic and Social Rights</b> .....	49
1. <i>Decent</i> .....	50
2. <i>Roy's Freedom</i> .....	53
3. <i>Just When You're Getting Ahead</i> .....	56
4. <i>Welfare is Bad for Your Teeth</i> .....	59
5. <i>Here's What I Heard, Here's What I Think</i> .....	62
6. <i>Learning to Run</i> .....	65
<b>Human Rights Enforcement</b> .....	69
1. <i>Joe's Home</i> .....	71
2. <i>Spring Romance</i> .....	74
<b>More information about human rights</b> .....	77
1. <i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> .....	77
2. <i>Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</i> .....	79
3. <i>Complaint Process and Chart</i> .....	82

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## Thank you

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Terry Carlson, Tim Turner and Bruce Gilbert were kind enough to act as an advisory committee for this project. The Brother T.I. Murphy Centre allowed us to try out some of the articles in this resource reader with their students.

Thanks to the project co-ordinator, Kathryn Welbourn, who worked on the day-to-day tasks of this book. Special thanks must also go to the writers - Jean Graham, Kathleen Winter, Brian Jones, Ed Kavanagh and Carmelita McGrath - and to the artist, Doug Bird. Thanks as well to Lillian Newbury (layout) and Gordon Butler (electronic version of the reader). Their work was very much appreciated.

It is important to thank the teachers and students who participated in the field-testing of this reader. Their advice and suggestions helped make sure this book will be useful and enjoyable for adult learners.

Finally, I want to thank Ivan Morgan, the educational projects co-ordinator at the Newfoundland-Labrador Human Rights Association, for his suggestions and advice during every stage of this project.

Jerry J. Vink  
St. John's, NF  
September 1, 1999

## Foreword

The Newfoundland-Labrador Human Rights Association produced three human rights resource readers during the present (*United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education*). These books were developed mostly for use in high schools. Since their publication, the Association was asked to create a similar reader for persons in literacy and basic adult education programs.

The result is this resource reader, called (*Into a New Light: Respect and Dignity for All*)— *A Literacy and Economic Rights Resource Reader*.

The resource reader was designed with two major ideas in mind:

1. To create awareness of human rights, especially those enacted in the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
2. To help with the learning process in literacy and adult basic education.

The contents of a resource reader should be relevant to the reader and explained in realistic terms. Also, teachers and students should gain a greater appreciation of the importance of human rights in the workplace and the economic life of a country.

The format we have used is a simple one. The resource reader is divided into four sections: Human Rights in the Workplace; Human Rights and Protection of Vulnerable Groups; Economic and Social Rights; and Human Rights Enforcement.

The focus is on a limited number of articles in the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. The selection was based on the money we had to work with and the time available.

The readings are short and concise. They are meant to show the importance of the selected *Covenant* articles. They are also designed to encourage classroom discussion. The same applies to the artwork. The cartoons enhance the readings. At the end of each reading there are questions for discussion. They are meant to stimulate debate and to focus students who are looking for topics for their written assignments.

It is most important that students understand the human rights context. Therefore, each section has an introduction explaining the relevant human rights, and their

background. In this way, the students and teachers will learn the basic facts of the section's theme. Also, the introductions will help guide the users' understanding of the individual readings.

Finally, included at the end of the resource reader are summaries of the relevant parts of the *Covenant* and the *Declaration*. Students can then read other relevant articles and sections of those documents.

**Word List**

**Covenant:** a formal promise or pledge.

**Universal:** agreed to by all; covering many cultures.

**Declaration:** a formal settlement.

**Relevant:** important.

**Vulnerable:** open to attack; easily hurt.



# Introduction

What are Human Rights?

People often speak of rights. You have the right to drive a car when you are 17 years old. You have the right to drink alcohol when you are 19 years old. These are commonly held rights or privileges, but they are not human rights.

Human rights belong to us because we are human beings and not animals. Human rights are necessary for us to develop and to use our human intelligence and conscience. They also satisfy our spiritual needs.

If there are no human rights, then we cannot live as human beings.

Also, as a human being you must be respected. If there is no respect, we become like animals. If there is no respect in the workplace, we become like machines. Not so long ago, this was common. The working conditions during the Industrial Revolution meant that people worked in dirty conditions for low wages and long hours. In some countries, people are still treated like slaves.

Human rights are based on the idea that everyone should treat others with respect. Also, we need to be treated with respect. This makes sense when you realize that we need each other to live.

We must also be responsible for our actions. We must not treat others differently from the way we want to be treated. Also, we are responsible for those who are weaker or those who need special help.

Human rights promote the dignity of each person. If we make fun of someone who is different, we insult their dignity, and even our own dignity. If we abuse or exploit someone who is weaker, we insult their dignity and our dignity.

Human rights are protected by law. That means they are made into law by Parliament or the House of Assembly. Therefore, human rights are recognized by law.

This is very important, because we cannot demand a right if it is not made into a law. Most civil and political rights are found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In Canada, economic, social and cultural rights are not written up in one document such as the Charter. Instead, they are found in different national and

provincial laws such as the Education Act, the Social Services Act or the labour laws.

How did modern human rights begin? What are some of these rights? Which ones apply to the workplace?

In this reader, we will explain the background to human rights. We will explain which human rights apply to the workplace and the economy. To make these clear, we have included articles to help students understand more fully what is meant by social, economic and cultural rights.

However, we also want people to understand how human rights legislation is enforced. The most important means are the federal and provincial human rights commissions. Therefore, we have included a section dealing with Human Rights Enforcement.

Finally, this resource reader also includes a number of appendices. Two of these are summaries of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. We have also added an explanation of the complaints process should someone be considering contacting the Human Rights Commission.

## Word List

**Intelligence:** the ability to learn, reason and understand; in this case, the ability to use your mind.

**Conscience:** the sense of moral goodness, of right and wrong; the ability to feel guilt.

**Industrial Revolution:** (1725-1850s) when machines began to be used to make things, such as clothes and household items.

**Exploit:** to use meanly or unjustly.

**Parliament:** where the government meets; it can also mean "the government."

**Legislation:** law.

**Enforce:** to make happen.

**Appendices:** additional information or material.



## **BACKGROUND TO HUMAN RIGHTS**

From 1939 to 1945, the world was ripped apart by the Second World War. When it ended, people heard for the first time of some of the horrible things that had happened. Whole cities had been firebombed. In many places, people were shot because of their race or religion.

In Russia (then called the U.S.S.R. – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), millions of people died violently. Many were shot in revenge. During the terrible fighting in the winter there was no food and people ate the bodies of dead people.

These things were terrible, but something else had happened. This shocked people even more. The German government had set up concentration camps. The people who were thrown in these camps were Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, socialists and communists.

These camps were designed to kill people. Special rooms – gas chambers – were used to gas people. The bodies were burned. Six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Gypsies, homosexuals, socialists and communists lost their lives.

All killing is horrible, but what made these killings even more terrible?

The whole process was well-planned. Camps were built to hold people before they were killed. The prisoners were used to do work until they died. The right kind of gas was invented. Hundreds of trains were used every day to transport people. They were scheduled so that the gas chambers could be kept busy 24 hours a day.

Huge profits were made. Horrific medical experiments were done. Gold teeth were taken out of the bodies before they were burned. People were shaved so that their hair could be used. Their clothes, glasses and personal things were carefully sorted and sold. Special ovens were built to burn millions of bodies.

After the war, the Allies decided this should never happen again. Their representatives met in San Francisco. They wrote a world constitution called the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It had many good ideas. Some of the most important ones are:

- Everybody has the right to life;
- Everybody is equal;
- Everybody has equal rights;
- Everybody is part of the same human family;
- Everybody must be free;
- Everybody should be treated with respect and justice;
- There must be peace in the world.

Sadly, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is not a law. It is a collection of ideals about which everyone agrees. Many countries did not change their ways. They signed the *Declaration* to show that they agreed with the ideals. However, they did nothing to improve the lives of their citizens. Unfortunately, nothing could be done if a government did not follow the ideals of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The United Nations decided to make international laws to force countries to follow the ideals of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. People hoped things would change if there were international laws. If there were international laws, countries could be forced to treat all their citizens better. These international laws are called treaties or covenants.

The first two international laws are the most important. One was called the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. There are many rights in this covenant. Some of the most important are:

- Everybody should be allowed to vote;
- Anybody should be allowed to run for political office;
- Everybody should be allowed to speak freely;
- Everybody should be allowed to join clubs, organizations or unions;
- Everybody should be allowed to travel or work wherever they want.

However, people have other rights too. Civil and political rights are important. People also have to work, go to school, be healthy or enjoy their culture. Therefore, there is a second international law.

This is the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. There are many rights in this covenant. Some of the more important are:

- Everybody should be allowed to work;
- Everybody should be allowed to work in a safe place;
- Everybody should be paid a fair wage;
- Everybody should be allowed to go to school;
- If someone is sick, there should be access to medical treatment;
- If someone cannot work, there should be social services.

It took many years to write the covenants and have all countries agree to them. Finally, in 1966, the United Nations made them into law. It took another 10 years before Canada finally did so in August 1976.

Most of the ideals in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* are included in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The *Charter* is part of the Canadian Constitution. Unfortunately, the rights in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* are not part of the Canadian Constitution. Canada did sign the covenant, and so these rights are found in different national and provincial laws.

These rights are important for all men and women who want to be treated with respect. People should know these rights because it will make them stronger. It will also make our country and province a better place in which to live and work.

## **Word List**

**Second World War:** Nazi Germany and Japan tried to take over Europe and parts of Asia. They were defeated by the United States, Canada and Britain, among others (the Allies).

**Concentration camp:** prison camp for prisoners of war and political prisoners.

**Socialists:** people who believe in having the government control resources and provide services; they also believe the government should help care for the welfare of people.

**Homosexuals:** people who are sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex; also known as gays (male) or lesbians (female).

**Communists:** people who believe there should be no private property; they believe everything should be owned and controlled by the government for the use and good of the people.

**Constitution:** a written description of the principles and laws of a country.

**Universal:** general; includes all people or all countries.

**Declaration:** a formal statement.

**International:** including two or more nations.

**Civil law or rights:** private law.

## Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

What are the human rights that apply to the workplace and the economy?

There are a number of them. They have been included in the reader and can be found at the end of this book in *Appendix II – A Summary of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

There are limits to human rights. Human rights are binding and compulsory. They are the basic fibers that hold our society together. However, we also have to use common sense when we try to define human rights.

If we accept human rights, we must also accept responsibilities. For example, we have the right to be paid a fair wage. At the same time, we have the responsibility to work fairly and hard. We have the right to safe working conditions. However, we have a responsibility to follow the safety rules.

In this resource reader, we have divided human rights into three groups.

Some human rights are tied directly to the workplace. They protect working people. They protect the right to equality, to a fair wage, to safety rules, and to join unions.

A second set of human rights protects workers who are vulnerable. Some people will need special protection. For example, we should not discriminate against a person who has a disability. Just because you think that a person with a disability cannot do the job doesn't mean you are right. Disabled people deserve a chance to prove themselves.

Also, if a woman is pregnant or if she is a mother, she must be protected. Pregnancy is a difficult time. Most of us want to have children. This is natural. Therefore we have to make changes in the workplace to protect the mother and her unborn child.

A third set of economic rights deals with economic or social rights. We are not machines or slaves. A fair wage must allow us to have a "good" living. It means enough money to have healthy food, warm clothes and good houses. If we lose our job, there must be a social safety net. The environment must be protected. We do not want to live and work while breathing smoke from factory chimneys.

The human rights defined in the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* help us to live and work in dignity and safety. They protect workers who are



vulnerable. They also make sure that our environment is safe, and that if we cannot work, we are protected.

**Word List**

**Compulsory:** required; must be done.

**Vulnerable:** easily hurt; open to attack.

# 1. Human Rights in the Workplace

In this section there are a number of readings that focus on human rights in the workplace. They deal with such things as equality, equal pay for equal work, the right to freely choose the work that one does, safety, and the need for unions.

The stories explain, through examples, the meaning of various human rights in the workplace. Also, there are discussion questions at the end of each reading to help students explore the meaning of individual human rights.

Everyone has the right to work in a safe place. Fortunately, most workplaces are safer than even 15 or 30 years ago. However, workplace injuries are still very common. Sometimes the things we do to promote safety can even have a bad effect. It is important to always think about safety. It is important to always question safety programs to make sure they really do the job (*Safety at the Site*).

Everyone has the right to work in a safe place. Rights also involve responsibility. If we want safety, we have to think safety. That means we have to know the rules. We must educate ourselves. Also, we have to make sure that safety regulations are put in place. Most important, we have to use common sense (*No Joke: Government Safety Programs*).

The issues of the right to safe working conditions and the right to healthy living conditions come together in places where food is prepared. Dirty working conditions affect safety. You can slip or get sick if floors or other areas are dirty. Also, if the production area is dirty, the foods that are processed may become contaminated. This will cause consumers to get sick. Some employers only do the least that they have to do. This area is one that is part of human rights in the workplace, and part human rights for the community as a whole (*Inspection Day at the Dairy*).

We all want to be treated equally and fairly. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. One of the most common forms of discrimination is against women. Discrimination can ruin someone's future. People might think they are funny when they make comments about women. However, they can cause terrible pain and destroy someone's career (*Like Dogs on Meat*).

We want to be treated equally and fairly. This also means that we must receive fair wages and equal pay for equal work. If someone has proven they can do a "higher" job, we should promote that person based on qualifications and work performance.

It should not be decided on something that has nothing to do with job requirements. In other words, we should not select a man because we do not want women to be supervisors (*A Matter of Experience*).

Sometimes people have to work at something they do not like. However, government programs that train people should respond to people's needs. People must be able to freely choose their kind of work. It is not fair to assume that a woman must be trained for an office job. It is not fair to force someone on social services to do a dead-end job or one in which he or she is not interested. Gender or social class must not replace interest or skills in government programs (*The Trainee*).

Protection against discrimination and the right to fair wages and safety at work did not come about by accident. People had to fight for the things that make for a good workplace. Even today, we have to struggle to keep the things we have. People go to jail or are killed in many countries because they want the things we take for granted. It is through unions that we can protect ourselves and make sure that we continue to be protected (*A Union Makes You Strong*).



*The right to just and favourable work conditions including... safe and healthy working conditions.*

*(Article 7)*

## **SAFETY AT THE SITE**

by Kathleen Winter

Jen's husband Ned worked at a huge construction site. He had lots of laughs with the guys. When someone new came, the other guys put peanut butter on a paper cup at break time. They stuck the cup on the new guy's hard hat when he wasn't looking. The guy could go half the day walking around the site with a paper cup on his head. Another thing they did was blow up a latex rubber glove and tie a knot in it and put duct tape on it. They came up behind you and pretended to give you a friendly slap on the back. "How's it going?" they'd say. Then you'd walk around all day with the rubber glove on your back.

"Like an angel's wing," Jen said to Ned.

"Like five little cocks and one big bag," he corrected her.

The guys needed those laughs — the work was so hard and dangerous. Ned worked with cement. He fixed cracks in the shaft and plugged holes where the scaffolds had been moved. He worked at the end of a 24-inch-wide-plank of wood, 300 feet in the air.

The construction site was a big, dangerous project with lots of safety rules. Companies often offer workers rewards for having no accidents. They put up framed papers that say things like, "60 accident-free days." This sounds like a good idea, but Ned told Jen something about the site that made her wonder.

The guys worked in crews. If a crew went a certain time with no accidents or injuries, every man got a reward. This was a cap, or a T-shirt, or a lighter with the company logo on it. These are just small things, but somehow on the job they came to mean a lot to the men.

One day when Ned was working he cut his hand. He was going to get a bandage for it. But the other men in his crew stopped him.

"If you get the bandage," they told him, "we won't get the reward."



No guy on the work site wants to let down his workmates. Maybe the company knew this. Maybe it didn't. But Ned did not get a bandage for his cut hand.

You might say it wasn't too serious. But the company had thousands of workers at that site. Who knows how many small injuries went unreported? Small cuts can become infected if they're not cleaned and bandaged. Who knows how many unreported injuries seemed small but turned out to be bigger? A person can walk around with a broken rib for days and not realize it. If an injury is big enough to stop a crew from getting a reward, it's big enough to treat.

Perhaps companies mean well when they offer these rewards. But the rewards aren't really for safety. They're for the illusion of it. And when you're working 300 feet up a shaft on a plank, you need more than an illusion of safety. That harness had better be tied.

**Word List**

**Illusion:** when something is made to seem like something else, on purpose.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Ned and his co-workers like to play practical jokes on newcomers?
2. Why do you think the men liked the small "rewards" they received for avoiding accidents?
3. Should Ned have reported his injury and gotten a bandage for his cut?



K. Winter

*The right to the highest standard of physical and mental health, including improvement of environmental and industrial or occupational working conditions.*  
( Article 12)

## **NO JOKE; GOVERNMENT SAFETY PROGRAMS**

by Kathleen Winter

Ron and Rita both worked in warehouses. They both lifted heavy boxes of canned goods all day. By the time Ron was 45 he could not work anymore. First his back gave out. Then he had a head injury. A crate of canned beans fell on him while he was on his break. Rita was not as strong as Ron, but her back was OK. A large stack of heavy boxes fell during her break too, but they hurt no one. Rita says government programs kept her workplace safe. Ron wants to know why the programs didn't help him.

In many provinces, a worker has three basic rights when it comes to safety. She or he has the right to help make the workplace safe. She or he has the right to refuse unsafe work. If a job has ten or more workers, they also have a right to be part of a safety group that reports to the government any time the job does not seem safe. This group is called an Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

Both Rita and Ron knew their jobs had committees. But Rita knew her job was dangerous. She wanted to take care of herself from her first day. She knew lifting boxes can hurt your back. She asked her safety committee how to prevent this. At first they told her they did not know. She asked them to please find out. She said it was important. So they did find out. They got booklets from the government. The booklets told how to lift boxes without getting hurt. Every worker got a booklet. Some of them thanked Rita for asking for the booklets.

Rita also noticed a dangerous thing on the job. The site was a big open warehouse with two levels. There were no guardrails on the top level. Boxes could fall. They could fall on workers, especially in the area where workers took their break. Rita asked her boss to put up guardrails. He said it would take too much time, space and money. He said it wasn't necessary.



Rita asked the other workers how they felt. Some said it didn't matter. Rita said, "How would you like it if a fifty-pound crate of crushed pineapple fell on your head from thirty feet up?" A few agreed with her. Together they told the boss they refused to work on the lower floor until he put guardrails up. They told him the safety committee could report the problem to the government. He put guardrails up that week. A stack of crates fell a few days later, but the rails kept them from falling to the lower floor.

There were no booklets on back safety at Ron's job site. Nobody asked for any, even though many workers had bad backs. Ron felt he was strong enough to lift boxes without a booklet telling him what to do. He hurt his back because he never did learn to lift the boxes safely.

At Ron's warehouse crates fell all the time. It was easy to knock them over because they were stacked very high. One worker said maybe the stacks were too high. The other workers made fun of him for being afraid. A worker on the safety committee wondered if he should do something. But he figured it wasn't serious. The guys were just joking around. When Ron was injured by a falling crate, the workers sent him funny cards to cheer him up. They did not realize Ron's brain would never understand jokes again.

Ron's job looked the same as Rita's, but Rita came out of hers a lot better off.



Some people say Ron wasn't as lucky as Rita. But maybe lucky wouldn't be the right word.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Was Rita right to worry about hurting her back on the job?
2. Why do you think Ron wasn't worried about being injured at his job?
3. Why does the writer say that "luck" doesn't really explain the different outcomes in Ron and Rita's stories?

*The right to just and favourable work conditions including safe and healthy working conditions.*

*(Article 7)*

## **INSPECTION DAY AT THE DAIRY**

by Brian Jones

When milk goes sour, it gives off a gas. Sour milk in a plastic bag will make the bag blow up like a balloon until it is as big and hard as a basketball. The milk turns yellow, with sickly looking chunks floating around in it.

It takes about a week past milk's "due date" for it to reach that disgusting state. When milk is only a day or two past its due date, it can start going sour without you even noticing, except for a slightly odd taste and smell. But if you drank too much of it, you could get sick.

The government doesn't want people to get sick from drinking sour milk or unclean milk. That's why every month or so they send health inspectors into the dairies.

The health inspectors tell the dairy managers when they are coming. A few days before their visit, the managers will declare clean-up day. All the workers at the dairy will spend almost half the day scrubbing and cleaning the floors, the walls, and the machinery.

When the health inspectors come, they check for two things. First, they see whether the dairy is clean, so that its products will be free of germs. Second, they make sure that the dairy isn't sending out milk that is close to its due date. Such milk will "expire" while still on store shelves.

Todd works at Sunny Meadows Dairy. On clean-up days, it is Todd's job to "dump" all the cartons of milk whose due dates are almost up. The milk is often still good, but within a few days its due date will be up. There is no use sending it out to the stores. By the time somebody buys it, the milk will be past its due date. It might even be sour. Then the store and the dairy will get in trouble if a customer complains.

Todd's job on clean-up day is to go to all the storage areas where the various kinds of milk are stacked in crates while waiting to be delivered. He looks through

them and takes all the cartons that are within four days of reaching their due dates. He stacks a dozen plastic crates at a time onto a pallet and uses a hand jack to pull them away. He takes the crates of milk to a back room where there is a large dumpster. There is a red button on the side of the dumpster, to activate the crusher. Todd throws all the milk cartons into the dumpster and stacks the empty plastic crates on the pallet. Then he pushes the red button. The crusher is a huge metal plate inside the dumpster, like the ones on garbage trucks. It moves from one end of the dumpster to the other. It pushes all the milk cartons against one wall and flattens them. Milk sprays everywhere inside the dumpster. There are openings on the dumpster floor to allow the milk to flow out. It goes through a giant grate upon which the dumpster sits, and flows away down a drain.

It usually takes Todd a couple of hours to throw away all those cartons of milk. When he is done, he has to disconnect the power supply to the dumpster. He pulls the plug. Then he has to wash the inside and the outside of the dumpster with soap and hot water, to kill any germs. If germs got loose inside the dairy, the health inspectors have the authority to shut it down.



Todd uses an industrial-strength soap to scrub the dumpster with a long, hard scrub brush that looks like a floor broom. The soap is kept in barrels. You push down on a knob on top of the barrel, and soap comes out a nozzle.

Once when Todd pushed down on the knob, thick red soap sprayed out and hit him in the face. It got in his eyes, and they stung so painfully that he could hardly open them. Somebody had replaced the knob and nozzle incorrectly after refilling the barrel.

Todd stumbled out of the storeroom. "My eyes! My eyes!" he screamed. Some of his co-workers came running. They carried him to the first-aid room. But it was the evening shift, and the first-aid room was locked. They ran to the nearest bathroom. Todd's co-workers held his head back and pried open his eyes. One of them took a cup and poured cupful after cupful of cold water into his eyes. The gushing water washed away the soap, and Todd felt a lot better. He even went back to work.

The next day the union lodged a couple of complaints. First, they wanted the company to use only new barrels of soap and other cleaning materials, and stop the practice of getting them refilled. A lot of chemicals were used to clean and sterilize the dairy. If somebody had incorrectly replaced a knob and nozzle on a barrel of chemicals, somebody could have been blinded. Second, the workers wanted a new policy for the first-aid room. It should be open and staffed by a nurse on every shift, not just the day shift, they said. After hearing about Todd's accident, the dairy managers agreed to the changes.

Todd never did like clean-up days. After the accident he liked them even less. And not just because it seemed like a terrible waste of a lot of perfectly good milk.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Do you think the health inspectors should warn the company when they are coming to check out the dairy?
2. Have you ever had an accident at work? What happened?

## **LIKE DOGS ON MEAT**

by Kathryn Welbourn

Karen is a newspaper reporter. She writes a lot of stories about people who have problems on the job. When Karen had trouble at work no one wrote about her. She just had to take it.

She got her first job at a newspaper because she was smart, pushy and hard-working. In the news business those are good things to be. But the bosses also wanted to be able to treat her like some kind of boy-toy. They made sexy jokes to her about "boobs" and "asses." They stared at her chest and her bum. They put their arms around her. They said things about her clothes.

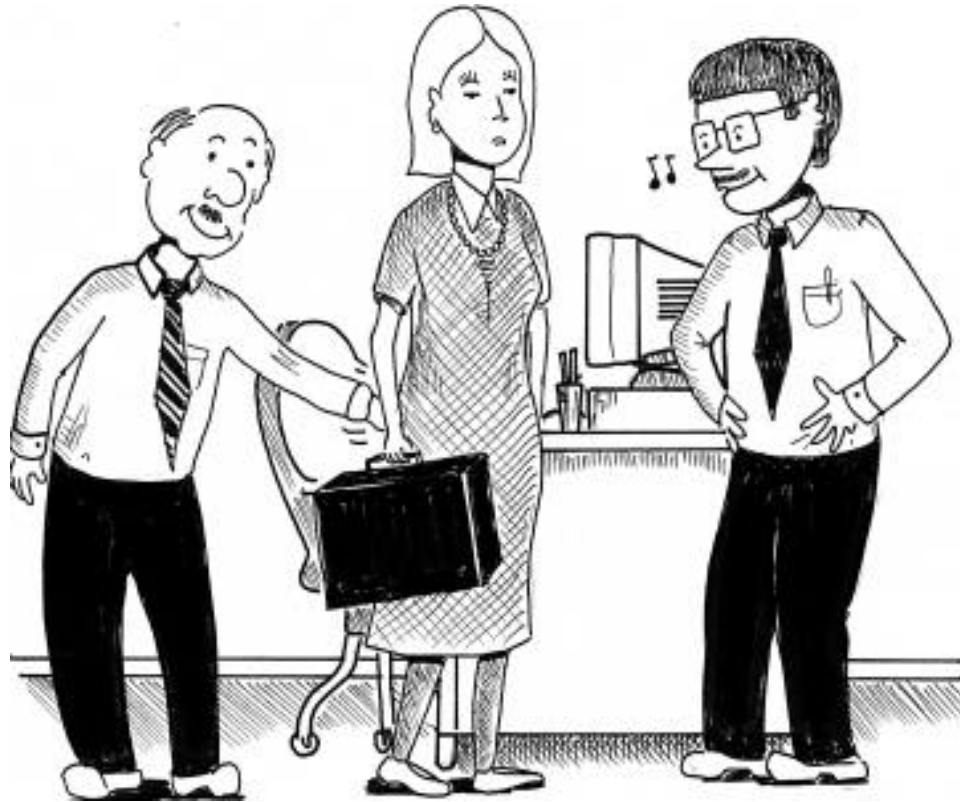
At first Karen just found it annoying. Her bosses were like flies — always buzzing around and getting in her way. Then they started changing her stories whenever they felt like it. Sometimes the changes made her news stories wrong. People she had interviewed would call. They were angry about the mistakes. They said they wouldn't trust her again.

Her bosses also began yelling at Karen in front of the other reporters. "Clean out your ears," they yelled when Karen asked a question they didn't like. They started blaming Karen for mistakes other people made. Sometimes they blamed her for mistakes they made. Karen kept trying to stick up for herself. She kept trying to explain things to her bosses. But the more she argued the worse it got.

Karen was not the only woman at work to be treated this way. There was only one woman editor at the paper. And women didn't get the other important jobs there either. Another reporter, when she got pregnant, was told she should quit. They made her work a lot of overtime. They made crude jokes about her being "knocked up." She didn't quit. But she didn't say anything about it either. And after a while they left her alone. Karen was the only one who argued about the way she was treated.

"You shouldn't fight with them," one of the other reporters told her. "They're just looking for a reason to fire you. They've been at you like dogs on meat since the day you started."

One day when Karen went in to work she found a letter on her desk. It said she was fired for not listening to her bosses. Everyone in the office knew Karen was being fired. No one would look at her.



The union gave her a lawyer. It took six months, but the company agreed it had been wrong to fire Karen. It agreed to give Karen six months' pay if she didn't ask for her job back. The lawyer told Karen she should take the deal. She would just face all the same problems or worse if she went back to work. Karen was so upset and hurt she agreed to take the money without the job.

Karen got a few small jobs after that. But she couldn't find another full-time job in the news business. One year later she was still unemployed. She was angry, depressed and broke. She could give up the news business or leave the province. She packed up and moved west to find work.

If you ask her, Karen will tell you she was forced to choose between her career and her province because she is a woman. But what could she do about it? Even her lawyer didn't believe things would change.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. What do you think of the way Karen was treated at her job?
2. Do you think her lawyer was right to tell her to take the money and not try to get her job back?
3. Karen says she had to choose between her career and her province because she is a woman. What do you think?

*The right to just and favourable working conditions including... fair wages and equal pay for equal work for men and women.*

*(Article 7)*

## **A MATTER OF EXPERIENCE**

by Ed Kavanagh

Whenever I tell people that I work for the government, they always make jokes about how easy I've got it. "Lots of money, a good pension plan, time off — you've got it made!" Well, it's not quite as simple as that. Now don't get me wrong. I like my job and I'm good at it. But it's always a struggle. There's always something to frustrate you.

I'm 46 years old. I'm a single mom with two teenaged children. I've always worked to improve myself, to make a better life for my kids and me. But it can be hard to get ahead when you're a woman.

A few years ago a supervisor in my department quit suddenly. I don't know why he quit. There was, of course, lots of gossip. But all I know is that one day he just didn't turn up. It was no great loss as far as I was concerned. He was a nice man, but he wasn't very efficient. I always thought I could do a better job.

The supervisor may have disappeared, but his work didn't. That became clear right away. Everyone else in the office was left scrambling. We kept waiting for a new supervisor to show up. We wondered who it might be.

A few days after the supervisor left I was called into my boss's office. His name is Mr. Williams. He started off by telling me what a good worker I was. Great, I thought. Tell me something I don't know. Gradually he worked the conversation around to the ex-supervisor.

"I'd like you to take on his duties," he said. "I'm confident you can do the job." He peered at me over his glasses and smiled. "Can you handle the extra responsibility?"

"Sure," I said. "I can handle it."

Mr. Williams stood up and shook my hand. Then he passed me a heavy file folder. "Fine," he said. "Report to me if you have any problems."



I was shown to the door. I was almost outside when I stopped and turned to him. "How long do you think this will be for?" I asked.

Mr. Williams shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"It's just that... it is a lot of extra work."

"I'm sure it won't be too long. As soon as I know something, I'll be sure to let you know," he said.

"And my salary and job description...?"



Mr. Williams turned and went back to his desk. "For now, those will remain the same," he said over his shoulder. He sat down and switched on his computer. "But if anything changes I'll be sure to let you know."

The next day I had two jobs. It was very busy. My suspicions were right. The ex-supervisor had left a lot of work. His files were a mess. It took me weeks to figure things out and track things down. A lot of angry people called looking for him. I was the one who had to deal with them. And I still had my old job to worry about.

Lots of times I worked nights — sometimes quite late at night. I wasn't seeing my kids as much as I used to. But I liked my new responsibilities. I liked doing a good job. I learned a lot. It was hard, but I kept telling myself that it would pay off in the end.

My boss was impressed, too. He started calling me "The Juggler" because I always had so many things happening at once.

Time passed. Weeks. Then months. And there was no sign of a new supervisor. The job was never posted. Whenever I asked my boss what was going on, he just shrugged. "When I hear something," he would say, "you'll be the first to know."

But that's not what happened.

A year went by. Finally, the supervisor's job was posted. But Mr. Williams didn't tell me about it. My friend Kathy told me one day when we were having lunch in the cafeteria. Someone in administration had mentioned it to her.

"Are you going to apply?" she asked.

"Sure," I said. "I've been doing the job for a year. And I've had no complaints."

That afternoon I ran into Mr. Williams in the hall.

"I hear the supervisor's job has finally been posted," I said.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I meant to tell you this morning. I guess it slipped my mind."

"Well, I'm going to apply," I said.

Mr. Williams looked past me down the hallway. "Yes," he said. "You should do that."

And I did apply. The interview went very well. I knew it would. I was confident. After a year there wasn't much about that job I didn't know.

But I didn't get the job. A man got it. A very nice man named Mr. Walsh who had worked in a different department, in a job very much like my old job. I asked questions, of course. I asked where I had gone wrong, if I had said something I shouldn't have in the interview. But it was hard to find anything out.

I decided to see Mr. Williams. When I went into his office I knew he had been expecting me. He looked very uncomfortable. I asked if he knew why I didn't get the job.

"It was just a matter of experience," he said. "Mr. Walsh is a good man. He's been around a long time."

"So have I," I said. "And I did that job for a year — for nothing."

Mr. Williams leaned back in his chair. "I know you did. And I'm grateful. We're all grateful." Mr. Williams stood up. "There'll be other opportunities," he said.

"Sure there will," I said.

There didn't seem to be anything else to say. I turned to leave.

"There's just one more thing," said Mr. Williams.

I stopped and looked at him. "Mr. Walsh will, of course, need some help getting used to his new duties. I suppose we can count on you to help him out?"

Suddenly I felt very tired. "Well, sir," I said, "I'll think about it. And when I've made a decision, you'll be the first to know."

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why do you think the narrator took on the supervisor's duties? Was this a wise decision? How did it affect her family life?
2. Do you think Mr. Williams was honest with the narrator?
3. What do you think the narrator should have done when she learned she was not going to get the job?
4. Was the narrator a victim of sexism? If so, what can be done to combat this?

*The right to work and to freely choose one's profession or type of work. Also, governments must provide training programs and have policies to foster full and productive employment.*

*(Article 6)*

## **THE TRAINEE**

by Carmelita McGrath

"Tell me what you know about working in an office environment," Mr. Hardy says.

Everything, Pat thinks. More than you could imagine. I've only been doing it for six years. I could run this place in my sleep.

But Pat doesn't say this. She smiles. She tells him about the other places she has worked. She tells him she is on time. She says she works hard, can take orders and can work a lot on her own when this is needed. She has given the same answers in many interviews. She has practised saying the words in many classrooms.

"If you work here," he says, "you'd be an office administrative assistant trainee. There might be a future in it for the right person."

Pat wasn't going to ask what the job was, anyway. She knew she was going to be some kind of "trainee." She always was.

A week later, Joyce, the administrative assistant, is showing Pat how to run the copier. Pat hasn't got enough fingers to count how many times in her life someone has shown her how to use a copier. She knows them all, all the brand names. She can even fix them. But that is not what people want her to do.

Pat's jobs have all been very much alike. She makes endless copies, brings memos to offices, makes coffee and answers the phone. In some places, people have spent days teaching her to answer the phone and take messages. "Put a smile in your voice," one employer told her. "Your smile is very important to us."

Pat's jobs have all had something else in common. They have not been what she calls "real jobs." Pat is on social assistance. For a while, she was on UI. All the jobs were on projects. They were supposed to get her "into the labour market." Most were training positions, funded by the government. The government paid most of

her wages. Sometimes the employer chipped in. But none of them wanted her after the project she was on ran out. Why would they, Pat thinks? There are many more like her. Workers like Pat are a bargain.

Pat has often thought about saying no to these project jobs. But she has always been afraid. Maybe she would lose her UI or welfare. It might seem like she was lazy or just didn't want to work.



Pat stands by the copier. Joyce handed her a stack of papers.

"This is really important," Joyce says. "It's for the meeting this afternoon. Make sure everything is in the right order. And Mr. Hardy hates any black spots—so check the copies."

Pat taps her foot while the papers slide out of the machine. She checks them every now and then to make sure there are no black spots. The rest of the time, she imagines she is outdoors.

When the social worker told her about another new program to try to get people back to work, Pat said the same thing she had been saying for years. She said: "Can you get me something outdoors?"

"What?" the social worker said.

"Something outdoors," Pat said, "something like landscaping. Or cutting grass. Physical work. That's what I'd really like."

"But you have so much experience in offices," the social worker said.

"Only because that's all I ever get. I don't really like it."

"We'll see what we can do," the social worker said. "But we must be realistic."

Pat hears the copier shut down. Good, she thinks, paper jam. Something to do. She has been daydreaming again. Sometimes she dreams she is running on a wheel, like her daughter's gerbil. Other times she dreams she is out in the fresh air, building a wall of stones that will hold a garden made with her own hands.

### **Word List**

**UI:** unemployment insurance, now called EI—employment insurance

**Labour market:** the job market, where workers sell their skills for wages,

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How much choice does Pat have in the kind of work she does?
2. Why does Pat consider the jobs she gets not "real jobs"?
3. Why are workers like Pat "a bargain"?

*The right to form trade unions. This includes the rights of unions to function freely and the right to strike.*

*(Article 8)*

## **A UNION MAKES YOU STRONG**

by Jean Graham

Everyone has heard of unions. A lot of people say they're bad. Strikes make businesses lose money. Unions have too much power. People in unions make too much money.

You probably know people who think these things. I know I do.

In Canada, adults do most of the work. They have all the dangerous jobs. We have laws to make jobs safe. Employers have to obey these laws. If they don't, they can be fined.

In some countries, it's different. Little children work at big machines. The children are 12, 8, even 6 years old. They don't get paid much. They don't go to school. Their bosses can beat them. Children and adults do unsafe jobs. They lose arms or legs. When that happens, they're out on the street.

In Canada, we have Worker's Compensation. If you get hurt on the job, you will still get some money. You will not starve.

In Canada, we have a minimum wage. It's not much. Many people think it's not enough. But at least it's something.

If you work, you have rights. Your boss cannot touch your body. You have to get vacation time.

These are laws. Before we had unions, there were no laws like that. Unions fought for laws like this. Now we have laws for workers.

People say we have these laws, so now we don't need unions.

But lots of workers are not in unions. Many workers still have dangerous jobs. Many workers have bosses who treat them badly. They are afraid to complain. They are afraid they'll be fired. They feel they have no power. What can one person do?

That's where unions come in. A union is a group of people. Even three people have more power than one person. Ten people have even more.

It's like voting. One person can't change a government. More people can. People don't always vote. They think one vote doesn't matter. But many votes do matter. They matter one vote at a time.

Unions work like that. They work for all their members. Bosses have to listen. Unions are a powerful voice. Unions are formed by workers. Together the workers are stronger.

Many people in Canada work for low wages. They get no respect. They are treated like – well, you know what. Sometimes, they start unions. This lets them fight back.

The United Nations says all workers have the right to be in unions. They call it "freedom of association." It's a basic human right.



I've been in a union. I even went on strike. We worked for a big national company. Our strike lasted for five months. It was a long time. We walked in the rain. We walked in the snow. We made friends with each other.

The strike was over in January. We felt we had won. We all got more money. We had better working hours.

The most important thing was feeling strong. The big company couldn't jerk us around. I never thought about the word "power" before. Now I think it's the best thing a worker can have.



## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Have you ever had a job where you were afraid, or a job where you were not respected?
2. Have you ever thought people in unions make too much money?

## 2. Human Rights and Protection of Vulnerable Groups

Human rights apply to everyone. There must be rules to protect these rights. If the rules favour one group of people, then they are not just and there is discrimination.

Rules must be neutral. For example, on a construction site everyone must wear safety boots. Job interviews must be based on checking people's skills and relevant work experience.

Unfortunately some rules seem to be neutral, but actually their impact is not. At one time, a person had to be a certain height to be a pilot or a police officer. Since most men tend to be taller than women, the height rules kept women out of these professions. Some jobs had rules about strength. This meant that many women could not become telephone line workers. Maybe this rule made sense 50 years ago, but today machines are used to lift heavy poles.

In Canada, the courts have helped strengthen human rights. Judges have made decisions about dozens of important human rights cases. They have developed tests and explanations to make sure everyone is treated equally.

One of the most difficult areas is how to deal with groups that need special assistance or protection. Two groups that stand out are persons with disabilities and women who are pregnant and/or mothers.

As Canadians, we share a number of beliefs. These values are stated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. As part of the Constitution, it is the highest law in the land.

In Section 15, the *Charter* states that everyone is *equal before and under the law* and has the right to equal protection *and equal benefit*. It also states that we must have programs that help people who are at a disadvantage *because of... sex... or mental or physical disability*.

After hearing many so-called "Section 15" cases, the courts have developed guidelines that deal with accommodation.

Briefly, it means that people are more than slaves, or machines, or only wage-earners. People deserve respect because they are human beings. We all have an obligation to help those who need assistance. The law of the jungle should not apply. In nature the strong survive and the weak are killed. This is not the rule in civilized society.

Because we have to help those who need assistance, employers have to make accommodations. They have to have systems or rules or equipment that make it possible for certain groups to be able to work. Even if there is a special cost, we must make our workplace requirements flexible.

Therefore, we have maternity leave for new mothers. Businesses are encouraged to buy special equipment so that people who cannot see or who cannot hear can be employed. Also, building codes require special ramps and doors for public buildings. This is to accommodate mothers and those with disabilities.

Accommodation is more than changing rules and spending money. It also means that we must change our way of thinking. Often people cannot see past a person's disability. We immediately assume that a person with disabilities cannot do the job. We see a worker who is a mother and we assume that she cannot work from 9 to 5. Unfortunately, we see the situation of these people as obstacles. We refuse to realize that they can do the job. This stereotyping of people is a harmful form of discrimination.

The hope of all people, including those with disabilities, is to be working. It is to be independent and to be treated with dignity. Some persons might have physical or mental problems, but all they want is a chance to prove themselves. Their greatest obstacle is the attitude of people who do not see their potential, but rather only see their disabilities (*Right To Work: Wayne's World*).

Raising children is important. It is the biggest job in the world. If a worker accepts the responsibility of giving birth and raising children, society must help this person. A mother has to be two persons – a worker for pay and a worker at home. Accommodation has to be made if we believe being a mother is important. During a pregnancy and while a child is young, the mother needs to be treated in a special way. This is not contrary to human rights. Rather, it strengthens human rights (*Working and Working*).

### **Word List**

**Neutral:** to treat as equal or the same.

**Accommodation:** to fill a need.

**Stereotyping:** to judge someone based on general, and usually unjust, ideas about a group (eg., blonde women are stupid, or Irish men are drunks).

*Governments must bring about the rights listed in the Covenant. These rights must be enjoyed without discrimination.*

*(Article 2)*

## **THE RIGHT TO WORK: WAYNE'S WORLD**

by Ed Kavanagh

Wayne Yetman hates light bulbs. Don't even mention them to him. For six months Wayne had been selling light bulbs. He did this over the telephone. Wayne was a telephone solicitor. When he was offered the job, he was glad to take it. He had not worked for nearly two years. Besides, "telephone solicitor" didn't sound so bad. It sounded like a real job. It was at least a step up from selling tickets at the mall. Or making leather wallets and purses. Anyway, Wayne thought, even selling light bulbs is better than doing nothing.

After six months as a telephone solicitor, he wasn't so sure.

One day Wayne called his supervisor and told him he was quitting.

"Why?" asked the supervisor, surprised.

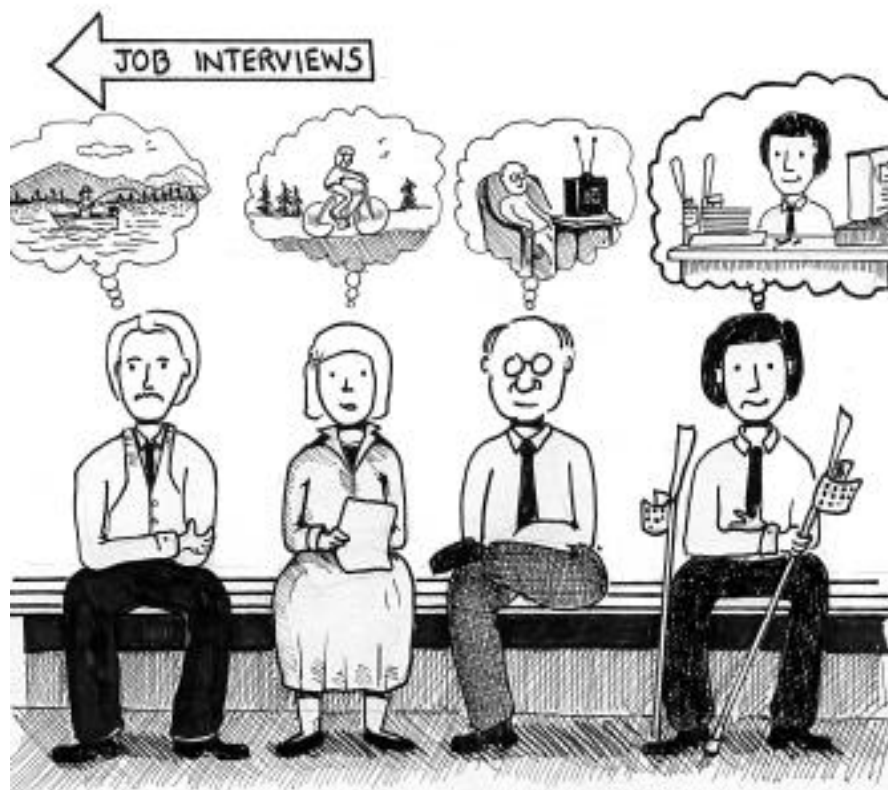
Wayne thought for a moment. "Because," he said, finally, "I want to work with people—actually see them. I want to be out in the world instead of cooped up in my apartment all day." He paused. "I just know there's got to be something better. Even for someone like me."

The supervisor sighed. "Well," he said, "it's a tough job market out there. But I guess you already know that. Good luck to you." The supervisor hung up.

The next day Wayne went to the Employment Centre. It had changed since his last visit. For one thing, the name was different. It used to be the Unemployment Centre. Wayne wasn't sure why they had changed the name. Perhaps it was supposed to make him feel better — give him hope that a job was just around the corner. Wayne didn't know about that. He was pretty sure it would take a lot more than a name change to help him find a job.

When he stepped inside he got another surprise. He had expected to see walls filled with rows of cards describing new jobs. Instead, he saw rows of computers. Wayne bit his lip and shook his head. He disliked computers even more than he disliked light bulbs. It wasn't that he was intimidated by them. He studied computers

once in a government training course. Wayne understood computers very well. But to be efficient on a computer you need two good hands. Only one of Wayne's hands worked properly. His left hand and arm had been disabled by cerebral palsy. This meant that it took him twice as long as anyone else to complete a job on a computer. "In the Information Age," his instructor had told him, "speed is very important. That's why computers were invented in the first place. Perhaps you should try another line of work." It wasn't long after when Wayne started selling light bulbs.



Wayne ignored the computers. He went up to the information desk and asked to see an employment counsellor. The counsellor was pleasant. She spoke to Wayne normally. She asked sensible questions. At the end of the interview she gave him a job referral.

The referral was at a small factory. The factory made cardboard boxes. They needed someone to do small jobs, errands, and security. When Wayne went in, five people — four men and one woman — were sitting in the waiting room. They all looked at Wayne. They all looked at his left arm. They all noticed that he walked with a limp. Then they looked back at their magazines. That was probably the only good thing about being a telephone solicitor, Wayne thought. Nobody stares at you.

Wayne was the last to be interviewed. He was shown into an office. The foreman, Mr. Saunders, sat at a huge wooden desk. He watched carefully as Wayne sat down. He asked to see Wayne's résumé. Wayne passed the single sheet to him. Mr. Saunders glanced at it. He looked at Wayne. "It says here that you have epilepsy."

"Yes," said Wayne.

"Why did you put that on your résumé?" said Mr. Saunders. "If you don't mind my asking."

"Because," said Wayne, "it always comes up—sooner or later. I figured it was just as well to get it out of the way."

Mr. Saunders nodded. "And you also have...?"

"Cerebral Palsy."

"I see," said Mr. Saunders, looking back at the résumé.

Yes, Wayne thought. I bet you do.

"The epilepsy is under control these days," said Wayne.

Mr. Saunders looked at him and raised his eyebrows.

"It used to be pretty bad—especially when I was a kid. But I had an operation. If I take my medication there's not much of a problem."

Mr. Saunders nodded and studied the résumé. "And you were last employed..?"

"I sold light bulbs," said Wayne. "Over the phone."

Mr. Saunders nodded. "And how did you find that?"

Wayne shook his head. "It drove me around the bend."

Mr. Saunders smiled. "Yes," he said. "I can see that it would."

Mr. Saunders asked more about Wayne's work history. He asked about Wayne's references. He asked again about Wayne's medical conditions. All the time he looked at Wayne very carefully.

Finally, Mr. Saunders stood up and shook Wayne's hand. "Well, Mr. Yetman, someone will be in touch," he said.

Wayne nodded. Yes, he thought. I'm sure there will be. He headed out the door.

"Mr. Yetman?"

Wayne turned around. Mr. Saunders was staring out the window.

"Mr. Yetman, did you see some of the other people who were interviewed for this job?"

Wayne nodded. "Yes. Some of them."

Mr. Saunders leaned up against his desk. "Well, I have a question for you. Can you tell me why you should get this job instead of one of them?"

Wayne looked down at the floor and then back at Mr. Saunders. "No," he said. "I can't. I don't know them. Besides, that's your job, your decision." Wayne gazed out the window. "But I'm a good worker. And I want to work. I'd like to think I deserve the chance to work — the same as anyone else."

Mr. Saunders nodded slightly. "Well," he said, "someone will be in touch."

Wayne left the office, closing the door quietly behind him.



## **Questions for Discussion**

1. How would you compare Wayne's experience in looking for a job with your own?
2. Do you think Mr. Saunders wanted to give Wayne the job? Do you think he did?
3. What do you think Wayne would do if he didn't get the job? How would it affect him emotionally?
4. Do you think Mr. Saunders should give Wayne the job? If you were in Mr. Saunders' place, would you hire Wayne?
5. What do you think the government should do to enable more persons with disabilities to enter the work force?

*Governments must protect... mothers, especially before and after childbirth. This includes the right to paid maternity leave and social security benefits.*

*(Article 10)*

## **WORKING AND WORKING**

by Jean Graham



Ask anyone and they'll tell you. The biggest job in the world? Being a parent. It doesn't pay so much. But they say it's important.

I am a parent – a mother. I also have another job. The other one pays money. Not a lot of money. Sometimes people tell me to quit. They say I could make more money somewhere else. But my job is special.

If one of my children is sick, I can stay home. I have three whole days a year I can use for family reasons. That's not much, but it's something. More than most people have. Many people have to lie when their kid is sick. They say they're sick themselves. When my three days are used up, I can work at home. Nobody minds too much.

Sometimes I am late getting in. My four-year-old wanted me to stay at preschool. People at work understand.

I drive in a car pool. Every three weeks my lunch hour is at 2:15. I drive three kids from school to daycare. People understand. They set meeting times around my car pool.

My job is safe. I work at a desk. I used to wait tables. I worked in bars. This would be hard if you were pregnant. Some women work in factories or as cleaners. There are machines. There are chemicals. These can be dangerous when you're pregnant.

So I'm pretty lucky. Even though half my pay goes for child care, I'm pretty lucky. Some people can't change lunch hours. They can't be late. They have to lie. They work with machines or chemicals that can hurt them.

But everyone says raising children is important. They want mothers to stay home. That's hard, too. You want to make money. Your kids need stuff. They need food and clothes. They need glasses and medicine. Nobody wants to pay you for this important job.

So you work when you can. You fit your family in around your job. After you get home, you work again. You cook, you clean. You give them baths. You try to spend special time with them. But that's hard. Sometimes you want to cry. There is never enough time.

If raising children was so important, you'd think someone would do something. Employers could help. The government could help, too. People might want to work four days a week. Or finish at three o'clock, when school gets out.

And it's not just work that needs to change. If you have children, you need more money.

If you stay home, you still need to feed them. We know that good food is important for health. We know health is important for learning and growing. There is no law saying children must have good food. There is not much help for buying good food.

Children need safe places to live. But there is not much help for that, either. You get what you can pay for.

The government will give you tax credits. But you can't get that money unless you get receipts. Not everyone can afford to send their children to a daycare centre. No receipts, no tax credits.

When you get pregnant, you have six months' maternity leave\*. Six months with your baby. If you have a job. If you work at that job until your baby is born.

If you are sick while you are pregnant, you might not get six months. If you don't have a full-time permanent job, you don't get six months.

Everyone says mothers are important. But when you are a mother, it doesn't seem like that.

### **Word List**

**Child care:** when other people look after your kids for money.

**Maternity leave:** paid time off after a woman has a baby.

**Receipt:** statement showing how much you paid for something.

**Tax credit:** money that you paid for something which can be taken off your taxes at the end of the year.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Do you have children? Do you feel important?
2. What new laws would make mothering easier? Safer? Better for children?
3. Does society do enough for mothers and their children? What would you change?

\*When this was written government was talking about making maternity leave longer than six months.

### 3. Economic and Social Rights

Employment and equality in the workplace are important. Protection for vulnerable groups is also important. However, people exist beyond work. We are also social creatures. We express our feelings of self-worth in our lifestyles.

When we leave our place of work, we want to go to a place where we feel safe. We want to live free of despair and worry. If we work, we want to earn enough to live decently. We should be able to properly feed our families. Unfortunately, this is not always true. We might be working, but the income is not enough for a decent living for ourselves and our families (*Decent*).

Often our concern for our families and low wages force us to work "overtime." Sometimes this is all right, especially when we need extra money, like during the holidays. However, you cannot burn a candle at both ends for too long. Everyone has the right to "get away." Everyone must have some leisure time to recharge one's batteries. This is also a human right that is often ignored. Even if one finds a way of coping, the need and the right is still there (*Roy's Freedom*).

When you put a hamster on a treadmill, it keeps running without going anywhere. Human beings work and plan to get ahead. It is human nature to improve ourselves and our families. No one is happy in a "dead-end" job. The right to a good standard of living is another basic human right (*Just When You're Getting Ahead*).

Sometimes we lose our jobs. Even worse, some younger people cannot even get their first job. Most people want to work. No one wants to be dependent on others, especially on welfare. However, if you have no job and if you have children, there is no choice. It is a basic human right that those who cannot work should have the right to social security and social insurance. When you were working, you paid taxes. If you lose your employment, there must be social services. Moreover, it must be humane and fair (*Welfare is Bad for Your Teeth*).

We cannot work or rest or enjoy life if our health is poor. Rich people can afford to pay for things they need. This includes health care. However, the right to the best standard of physical and mental health belongs to everyone. This is a human right repeated in various ways in the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (*Here's What I Heard, Here's What I Think*).

No one can hope to get a job or hope to get ahead without education. No one can hope to have a decent lifestyle without education. If our children are not educated, they will be condemned to poverty and unhappiness. Education is another basic human right that is too often denied (*Learning to Run*).

*The right to just and favourable work conditions including... fair wages that will allow for a decent living for workers and their families...*

*(Article 7)*

## **DECENT**

by Carmelita McGrath

The woman behind me is staring at my cart. It's the 10 loaves of bread, 12 packs of noodles, 8 cans of fruit punch. She's thinking: look what that woman is feeding her children.

I keep my back straight as a whip. She doesn't know me. She doesn't know how I shop the sales. Like today:

10 loaves of bread for \$5.00

12 packs of noodles for \$4.00

8 cans of fruit punch for \$4.00

I have a calculator in my head. Numbers jump up in my mind's eye: \$13 spent, \$47 left this week, after the bills. Divide that between the three of us, and you know why I've got to stock up. Lunches are a fortune. Two more flyers, two more stores. I only go to the ones close together. Wasted gas is no saving.

"Give me a hand with these bags," I call from the porch.

"Freakin', noodles! Again!" Chris says, looking in a bag.

"That's not all I got!"

"Any pizza?" Amy asks.

"I got the stuff to make it."

"Oh," she says. She wants the pizza that comes out of boxes.

They don't like to come shopping with me these days. I don't blame them. When they were small, it was a kind of game—clever mom and her bargains. Now they really don't want to know. When I tell them about sneakers on sale or show off the pants I got at Value Mart, they turn red in the face. They turn away.



Late at night when the house is quiet I do the laundry. A clean, ironed smock is important where I work. I take off the tag that says "Judy. Sales Associate. Ask me about our customer rewards," and place it on the dryer. "Sales Associate" sounds like an important job. But I'm one of the army of women you see out there wearing smocks or uniforms and making the minimum wage.

A while ago, I went to a meeting held by an anti-poverty group. A woman was talking about how the working poor were invisible. I wanted to jump out of my chair, but I didn't have the nerve. I wanted to yell: "No! That's not it! The problem is we are too visible!" I was thinking about my car. One day the muffler went, and I didn't have the money to fix it. I drove around town for two weeks with the noise blasting and the thick smoke puffing out behind. Chris and Amy wouldn't ride with me.

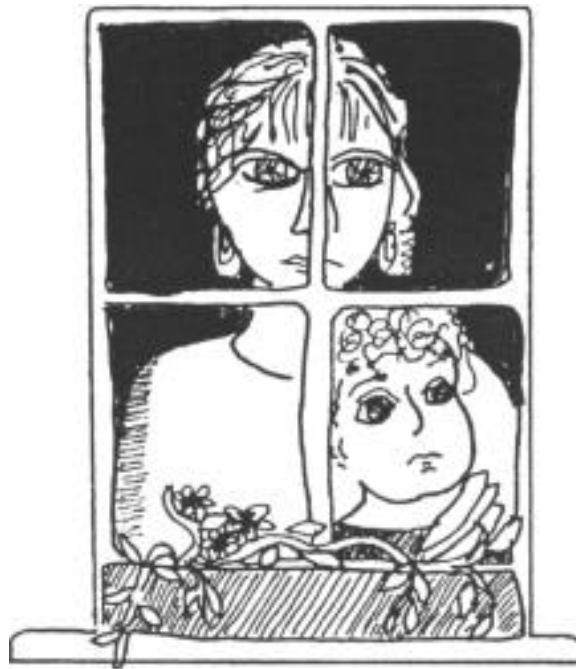
What I would like is to be less visible. If I had a choice, you would never notice my car. I'd paint the house, and put flowers out front. You would never stop and notice paint peeling off the clapboards. You would not look in my shopping cart and judge me. I would slip quietly through the world.

## Word List

**Minimum wage:** the lowest hourly wage a worker can legally be paid.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What is the minimum wage in Newfoundland? Can a family of three live "decently" on it?
2. Judy's children don't want to know about her bargain hunting. Why not?
3. What do you think a fair minimum wage is?



K. Winter



*The right to just and favourable work conditions including... rest, leisure, reasonable working hours and paid vacations and paid public holidays...*

*(Article 7)*

## **ROY'S FREEDOM**

by Kathleen Winter

My first writing job was at a newspaper. I had just finished school in another town and I missed my friends. I missed my freedom too.

My boss was strict. His name was Harry Chubb. We had to work a lot of overtime. The boss did not want to pay workers money for overtime. He said, "Keep track of your hours and take time off later." But whenever we asked for our time off the boss said, "Not yet." Not on a weekend. Not in the summer. Not at Christmas.

Finally I got my time off during a February snowstorm when the newspaper had to close down for a week. I did not feel this was fair. But it was my first job and I was too shy to complain.

Spring came. I made a friend at work. His name was Roy. He was an artist. He sold ads for the paper. He drew the ads too. He drew fur coats and shoes, cans of soup and chain saws. This was before computer graphics. Roy was much older than me. He had thick white hair and he smoked Export A cigarettes. He would soon retire. We ate soup at a café at lunch times, and we talked about art and ideas and freedom.

I found out Roy had his own kind of freedom. He worked hard drawing ads. He worked hard selling them. Every boss in every store knew him. He visited them all. Roy had two children and a wife to support. He chose to work hard so his family had all they needed. But he had an artist's soul, and he could not live without some freedom.

He kept a fishing rod in his car. Once in a while, when he had sold all the ads he could sell, and drawn every chain saw and soup can, he drove down to Stephen's Brook. For just half an hour he "flicked off." He caught sunfish and trout. He let his thoughts curl around the timothy hay and spruce and blackberry bushes. He opened his heart like a big cotton sheet and aired it in the warm sun. He never, ever stayed more than half an hour. He folded the fishing rod, put the fish in a shopping bag, and

drove back to the office, still in the suit and tie he always wore to work.



I kept in touch with Roy after he retired. We went to lighthouses and harvested capelin at sunrise. We heard the haunted sound of snipe as we fished trout in the barrens. We traded paintings with each other as I began to express the artist in my own soul. When he got too old to go "on safari" he let me inherit his secret places where cranberries and fiddleheads grew.

But the greatest thing I inherited from Roy was to know you don't have to let any job steal your spirit. Now I do not work for a boss like Harry Chubb. I searched and followed my heart until I found that the right way for me to live is to work for myself. Since I met Roy, I have met friends who have far less freedom than he did. Sometimes Roy's freedom grows as big as the whole sky when I remember it.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Was Harry Chubb a good boss?
2. Why did Roy never "flick off" for more than half an hour?
3. Do you think that in Roy's view, freedom is dependent on how much money you earn?

*The right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing, and housing and a continuous improvement of living conditions. As a minimum, everyone should be free from hunger.*

*(Article 11)*

## **JUST WHEN YOU'RE GETTING AHEAD**

By Carmelita McGrath

Irene is sewing curtains for the back bedroom.

"It will be nice to have a guest," she says. "We don't get many this time of the year. It'll be a nice change from sewing."

Irene has been working hard to make the house look good. She has turned her house into a bed-and-breakfast. She thought about it for a long time. It's hard for a shy person to open her house to strangers.

"Yes, it'll be nice," she says. "Someone to talk to."

Arch looks up, but he doesn't say anything. He doesn't really like the bed-and-breakfast idea. But there wasn't much choice.

"I'm going out to the garage," he says.



Irene watches the lights come on in the garage. She wishes he would not spend so much time out there alone. Once, the garage would be full in the evenings. People would come to pick up their cars or talk about car problems.

That was when the fishery was in full swing. People did not wait long to get their cars and trucks fixed. They were busy and they had money.

Arch and Irene didn't think much about the fishery until it closed. Then the business at the garage slowed down. Then it almost stopped.

"They're all fixing them themselves," Arch said one evening. "You can drive around and see them. They all put their trucks up on blocks in their own yards. Poor buggers, I suppose it gives them something to do."

Arch still goes and opens the garage every morning. But there is hardly any work to do. He cleans his tools and keeps everything in order. He waits for customers. And his wife waits for guests. But Arch is bitter. He has worked hard all his life. He had saved money, but it all went into changing the house to a bed-and-breakfast.

The thing that really gets him is this: He never fished a day in his life. He never saw a future in it. But he lost his work because of the fishery. That would be a good story to tell the tourists Irene wants to put in the children's old bedrooms.

Irene holds the curtains to the window. They look perfect. But sometimes the house feels strange to her now. This is not what she expected now that her children are grown. But she has always been a good cook and housekeeper. And what else can she do?

Out in the garage, Arch turns out the lights and opens a beer. He thinks about Irene. She always hopes for the best. He can't tell her how close they are to losing everything. They started with nothing, after all. Now the lobster season is opening. Arch hopes it goes well so that some work might come his way. He hopes a few tourists will lose their mufflers in that big pothole down the road.

Inside the house, Irene sees the garage lights go out. She puts on the kettle for tea.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Arch and Irene had expected their lives to get easier as they got older. Why has this not happened?
2. The fishery closure affected the working lives of many people who never fished. How many kinds of work can you think of that are affected by the fishery closure?

## **WELFARE IS BAD FOR YOUR TEETH**

by Kathryn Welbourn

I had a baby. My UI ran out and then the man I had been living with for six years left me and the province. Now the welfare people own me and it seems they always will.

My baby and I lived without money for a month. I was too afraid and ashamed to go on welfare. But my parents said there was nothing else I could do.

I was right to be afraid. The welfare people steal your privacy. They make you fill out forms in the hall. Everyone who walks by knows what you are doing. You have to give them your bank account number. You have to get notes from people you have worked for. They can see your taxes — everything. After they have looked into every corner of your life they take out their little calculators and decide how much money you need to live.

Welfare workers act like you are bothering them. They sigh a lot. They stare off into space. They roll their eyes at the things you say. Only once did a worker treat me like a client. He was in a wheelchair, which is probably why he was so kind and so professional. He had had trouble in his life, too. He told me it was my right to get welfare for myself and my baby. I only saw him once. He was laid off.

Welfare gives you just enough money so you can choose between feeding yourself or your child. My parents buy my daughter her shoes and clothes. If they didn't she wouldn't have any because after I pay the rent and buy diapers and the bit of food, the money is gone.

People on welfare are supposed to depend on others for everything. You are not supposed to have a car. I know, because I asked if welfare could help me get a car seat for my daughter and they said no. Welfare people are supposed to take taxis.

It's not a good idea to work if you are on welfare. I got a six-week contract. I hoped I was finished with welfare. I went to their office and gave them their last welfare check back. They were amazed that I didn't try to find a way to keep the money. "You'll be back," they said.

They were right. My contract wasn't renewed. When I went back I owed the welfare department money. I was supposed to save the extra I made at my job in case I had to go on welfare again.

Welfare workers won't tell you what they can do for you. You have to beg. I went in and cried when I needed a bed for my daughter. They just let me go on and on about why she needed a bed. I found out later I should have been given a bed right away. Their job seems to be to give you as little as possible. And to make you feel bad about everything you do get.

Only people who have been on welfare for a long time know how it all works. A lot of people think welfare people cheat. Some probably do, but I don't blame them.



If you stay on welfare for more than a year or two you're screwed. Everything you get on welfare is the cheapest possible — like the bed for my daughter. It's already falling apart. And everything you buy yourself is the cheapest possible because that's all the money you have. People on welfare can get really fat from eating cheap food all the time. People on welfare are not allowed to have fillings in their teeth. Welfare only pays to have teeth pulled. I couldn't even afford a haircut while I was on welfare. So after a year or two, even if you got a job interview, you'd have to go there in a taxi with a bad haircut, a front tooth missing, cheap clothing and run-down shoes. Who would hire you then? Who would even want to know you then? Everything you had would be falling apart, including yourself.



I was lucky. I got a good job again doing the work I went to college for — before it was too late. My parents gave me enough money to live between my last welfare cheque and my first paycheque. I don't make a lot of money, but a little more than I did on welfare.

I should be free of them now. But your welfare records follow you around. Everyone feels like they can treat you with contempt. No one takes you seriously. When I went to court for custody of my daughter, the clerk looked my papers over and tossed them to her assistant.

"Oh, it's another one of those social services cases," she said. She didn't even look at me.

### **Questions for Discussion**

- 1) Do you think people who get welfare should complain about the way they are treated?
- 2) The woman in this story says the welfare people own her. What do you think?

*The right to the highest standard of physical and mental health. This means that governments must... provide universal health care.*

*(Article 12)*

## **HERE'S WHAT I HEARD, HERE'S WHAT I THINK**

by Jean Graham

### 1. What I heard

You would know his name. You see him on TV. He owns a big store. He yells at you in the ads. People don't like him much. They don't like his ads. He sells a lot of what he sells. He's very rich.

Last year, he was very sick. He needed surgery or he would die, the doctors said. He went on a waiting list. He found out he would have to wait a year.

He was afraid to wait. He was afraid he would die. Sometimes people are forced to wait too long for surgery. They die. It happens.

But he is rich. I told you that. It's important.

Instead of waiting, he made some phone calls. He called his doctor. He called his banker, I guess. He called more doctors.

He found a doctor in another province. That doctor could make him well right away. The rich man would not have to wait. He had to pay a lot of money. He paid more money than most people make in five or ten years of work.

Now he's all better. He tells his friends, "I would be dead if I didn't have money."

### 2. What I think

In Canada, getting better is supposed to be free. If you are sick, you go to a doctor. If you need surgery, you go to a hospital. It is all free.

But it is not cheap. The government pays doctors. The government pays for hospitals. The government pays everyone who works in a hospital.

The government says it does not have enough money. It pays for many other things. It pays for roads. It pays for schools. It pays for things I don't understand.

Parts of hospitals get closed. Doctors won't stay. They have to work too hard. They can make more money somewhere else.



So people wait for surgery. They might wait for a year. Sometimes they die.

But rich people can go somewhere else.

I think this is wrong. People who are sick need doctors. They should not have to wait. It is not fair for only rich people to live.

People don't need very much, really. You need a home. You need food. You need clothes. You need school.

I think we need health care, too. I think there should not be two systems. Regular people get sick just like rich people. They should not have to wait.

Who decides these things? The government decides. The government gets elected by spending money.

Where does the money come from? Some comes from rich people. Some more comes from big companies. Not much comes from people like me.

In Canada, we have the right to get better if we're sick. Being rich should not matter.

That's what I think.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Could you pay a lot of money for care if you were sick? Could most of the people you know?
2. What can you do to change things?
3. Do you agree with the writer's ideas about health care?



*The right to education, this includes... access to literacy and adult education for those who did not complete the whole of their primary education, regardless of age or other factors.*

*(Article 13)*

## **LEARNING TO RUN**

by Ed Kavanagh

In Canada people have the right to an education. In fact, children are required by law to attend school. This is not true for all countries. But even in Canada not everyone always gets a full and proper education. Sometimes, for many reasons, people quit school. Sometimes the schooling people do get is not very good. Here is the story of a young man who struggled to complete school. Now he wonders if it was all worth it.

When I was 13 years old I suddenly realized that I had been lied to all my life. I know that sounds pretty awful, but it's true. What's even worse is that the people who lied to me didn't know they were lying. They thought they were helping me. As the old saying goes, "Their hearts were in the right place."

I share an apartment with a friend named Mike. It's not too bad. It's small, but it has a good view. It's wheelchair accessible. It's paid for by Social Services. And I don't mind sharing with someone. I've lived with other people all my life.

I turned 22 last Wednesday. Up until I was 17 I lived in institutions. That's because I was born with spina bifida. Physically, there's not a whole lot I can do for myself. I use a wheelchair. I've always needed someone to help me dress and bathe. The person who helps me is called an attendant care worker. Over the years I've had lots of them.

Because of my disability I've always known there are certain things I'll never be able to do, like run a road race or go mountain climbing. But inside my body I have a mind. A good mind. And I have talents. There are lots of things I know I'm good at. Like writing. But not everyone believes that.

Even though I lived in institutions, I always went to school. Well, perhaps I should say that school came to me. Teachers would come to instruct the residents. Ever since kindergarten I was told I was smart. I could always read well and I loved books. And from the time I was six years old I always passed. My report cards were glowing. And why wouldn't they be? I found school easy. I thought it was supposed

to be easy. Now I know that it was too easy. Because in grade nine everything changed.

For grade nine I went to a public high school in St. John's. I was really nervous the first day. I had never seen so many people in one place before. They moved so fast. They talked so loud. They always seemed to be laughing and pushing each other. I didn't know what they would think of me. Of the kid in a wheelchair. The kid with a student assistant sitting next to him. How would I fit in? As it turned out, fitting in was the last thing I needed to worry about. Most of the students and teachers were very nice. They treated me just fine.

The real problem started with the first class. It was math — one of my best subjects. Or so I thought. But I was lost from the very beginning. The teacher could have been speaking Greek. At first I thought she was just a bad teacher. She couldn't explain things well. But when I looked around at the other students I realized I was the only one who was lost. It was the same thing with the next class, and the next, and the one after that. Even literature was hard. And, as I said, I love to read. But the teacher talked about the poem she gave us using words I had never heard before.



At first I thought I could catch up. After all, I was smart. So I studied hard. And even though I was shy, I asked a lot of questions in class. But I soon realized the other students and the teachers found my questions boring — though the teachers tried hard not to show it. After a few days I stopped asking.

Nothing made sense to me. I felt like I had been dropped onto another planet. I had never been more confused in my whole life. Why had everything changed? When I looked back on my first eight years of school, and compared them with life at my new school, it didn't take me long to realize the problem.

My first eight years of school were a sham. I remembered that in grade five we spent more time doing arts and crafts than fractions. I remembered times when we would have no teacher at all for a week or more. It was during one of those weeks that I read *Tom Sawyer*. Once we didn't have a teacher for a whole month. We were told to study on our own. Nobody seemed too worried about it, so I didn't worry, either.

School in an institution was not like school in the outside world. I kept asking myself why it had to be like that. Why hadn't I learned the same things my new classmates had learned? When I looked down at my wheelchair, I knew the answer. I was different. The other students would all go on to jobs — in computers, firefighting, teaching, medical school. They all had a future. All you had to do was look at them to know that. But when people looked at me, they saw something else. From the very beginning they were convinced that I could never amount to anything. Perhaps they thought my disability affected my brain. Perhaps they thought there was no point in giving a real education to someone who might never use it. So they decided not to teach me; they decided to babysit me.

I didn't give up at my new school. I passed grade nine— although it took me two years to do it. And the rest of high school was also a real struggle. But I got through. Barely. Since then I've been trying to improve my education. I've applied for government-sponsored computer courses. But it's hard to get accepted.

How would my life have turned out if I'd always gone to real schools? Maybe I wouldn't be spending so much time in my apartment. Maybe I'd be using my talents to make a contribution.

I've often wondered what it would be like to be able to run. Sometimes I imagine myself in a race, breathing hard, stretching for the finish line. And, you know, I don't think I'd care very much if I didn't win. But I'd like to know that at least all the runners had started from the same place.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Compare the narrator's schooling in the institutions he lived in, with what he experienced in the public school system.
2. What could have been done to improve the quality of the narrator's early schooling?
3. Where do you think the narrator should go from here?
4. Do you think people who live in institutions are still given an inadequate education today? If so, what can be done to change this?



## 4. Human Rights Enforcement

It should be clear to people who have read this book that human rights touch many areas of our lives. However, just having rights is meaningless unless they are enforced. There are a number of government departments that have the duty of enforcement.

There are some differences depending on which province or which level of government is responsible. Generally such things as workplace safety are the responsibility of the Department of Labour. Others, such as cleanliness, are the responsibility of the Department of Health.

Equality and protection against discrimination is usually enforced by the human rights commissions. Each province, like the federal government, has human rights legislation which describes the powers of the human rights commissions.

For example, in the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Act is called the Newfoundland Human Rights Code. As in most other provinces, it lists the grounds for complaints of discrimination. It also states in which area the law applies.

In the case of Newfoundland, the following are prohibited forms of discrimination:

- Race;
- Religion or religious creed;
- Political opinion;
- Colour or ethnic, national or social origin;
- Sex and sexual orientation;
- Marital status;
- Physical or mental disability;
- Age.

Human rights legislation does not cover every area of life. Usually, it will state that it applies to specific areas such as:

- Access to public services, facilities or goods;
- Housing;
- Employment;
- Publications.

Human rights legislation usually allows for some exceptions to the rule: these are called bona fide exemptions, or good faith qualifications. They reflect the need for common sense or to recognize special situations. Some examples of these are:

- If a job requires someone to climb to great heights, you do not want people who are afraid of heights.
- If a driver's licence is required for the job, then you do not want people who have serious vision problems to apply.
- If you rent a room in your residence, you may want only a certain kind of person, such as someone who can walk, because there is no elevator, or only females because the owner is a woman who is more comfortable with people of her own sex.

As was stated earlier, there are a number of prohibited forms of discrimination. In this reader we have chosen two examples.

Sometimes people are denied services because of their marital status. In other words, if you are married you are entitled to different services than if you are single. However, it can also be used in a wider sense. If you are a single parent with children, you may receive greater benefits from government institutions. On the other hand, single people get less. However, that rule can discriminate against a person such as the father in *Joe's Home*. It is wrong to assume that because children are with the mother, the father is therefore automatically viewed as a single person with no dependents (*Joe's Home*).

There are some things over which people have no control. One of these is sexual orientation. It is only recently that our laws have recognized that it is wrong to punish someone who is gay. In fact, most human rights legislation now makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. If a person does his or her job well, and meets all the work rules, that is all that matters. One's personal life, including who one falls in love with, should not concern an employer (*Spring Romance*).

**Word List**

**Bona fide:** made in good faith.

# Joe's Home

By Kathryn Welbourn

If they take my home I'll lose my kids. That's what Joe thinks about all day long. He thinks about it in the shower. He thinks about it while he's eating. He thinks about it on the bus. He thinks about it until he is dizzy with fear and sick with despair.

Joe imagines himself visiting his kids, like an uncle or a friend. That's not what Joe wants. He wants to be a full-time father. If he can't have that he wants his kids to live with him at least half the time.

Joe's girlfriend left him two weeks ago. She took their two kids and went to her mother's house. She said she didn't want to stay in the home she had shared with Joe. She would apply for another housing unit.

Joe was not surprised Laura left. They had been fighting a lot - usually over money. Joe had been unemployed for two years. They lived in public housing. Laura didn't like it. But Joe knew they were lucky to get the two bedroom unit. It had a backyard. It was fine for the kids until he found work.



When Laura left, Joe told her he wanted to look after the children. Laura said they could work that out later. For now, the kids were staying with her. Joe didn't like it. But he didn't want to upset his children even more by fighting over them with Laura.

Joe was a good and gentle father. He was still looking for work. And he had a clean decent place for them all to live. Even if he had to go to court, Joe believed would be able to keep his kids at least half the time. Then the landlord called.

He told Joe he would have to move out of his home. He was a single man now and no longer needed such a big place. Those units were for families. Joe should look for a room at a boarding house instead.

"But what about my kids," Joe asked.

"Your kids are with their mother," he was told. "Be out by the end of the month."

Joe tried to explain that he was trying to work out shared custody. He would need the apartment. It was his children's home. The landlord wouldn't listen.

Joe hung up the phone and called the Provincial Human Rights Commission. He told the intake officer his story. Joe felt Newfoundland Housing wouldn't have taken his home if he was married or if he was a woman and a mother. The human rights worker agreed to take his complaint and try to work something out between Joe and Newfoundland Housing.

Since then Joe has done nothing but worry. He can't sleep properly at night. He forgets to eat meals. He's lost ten pounds. He can't lose his home. If he does, he may lose his kids. How can he ask for custody if he lives in a rooming house?

(Note: The Human Rights Commission did work out an agreement between Joe and Newfoundland Housing. He can keep his housing unit until custody is decided. If he keeps his kids, he'll keep the flat. Joe is thrilled. He can't wait to bring his children home.)

## Word List

**shared custody:** legal agreement where both parents share the rights and responsibilities of looking after their children.

### Questions for discussion

1. Why did Newfoundland Housing tell Joe he had to move out?
2. What do you think about that decision?
3. Have you ever needed to call the Human Rights Commission? Did you?



K. Winter

# SPRING ROMANCE

by Kathryn Welbourn

The day Patrick fell in love was the same day he lost his job.

Patrick had been dating John for three weeks. They had lunch in the park that day. It might have been the beautiful spring weather. It could have been something John said. But there it was — love. He leaned over and kissed John quickly. He just couldn't help it.

Usually Patrick hid his feelings for men in public. And with good reason. He had been beaten up a couple of times by other men just because they thought he was gay. If he held hands with a man or kissed in public anything could happen.

John laughed when Patrick kissed him, and took his hand. Patrick looked up at the sky and sighed. He turned his head and looked right into the eyes of his boss, Ed.

"Patrick?" Ed said, looking surprised. Patrick dropped John's hand. He jumped up and tried to say something. But Ed had already turned and was walking quickly away.



John wasn't laughing now. He said goodbye to Patrick. He was worried someone from his work had seen them holding hands. Patrick was worried too. But he had worked with Ed for ten years. Ed must know Patrick was gay. Nothing would happen.

When Patrick got back to work he was called into Ed's office. He went in and sat down. Ed looked upset and nervous. He was older than Patrick. He was a kind and hard-working boss. Ed had been running the business for years.

"Patrick, this is a family business," he said. "Our customers expect certain values from us. We have a certain image."

"The customers like me," Patrick said. "I've never let them down. I've never let you down. I've never even been late for work."

"We could lose customers over something like this," said Ed.

"But you knew I was gay didn't you?" Patrick asked.

"Maybe," said Ed. "But I never had to think about it or see it before. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I saw you. Our customers might see you. You'll have to resign."

"But I've worked here for ten years. That should count for something with you and with the customers," Patrick said.

"I'm sorry," said Ed. And he was sorry. He left Patrick in his office by himself.

Patrick knew Ed didn't have the legal right to fire him because he was gay. He thought about going to the media. But then he realized that even if he won it would be hard to keep working with Ed after that. He liked Ed. They had always worked well together. It would be awful facing him every day after something like that. It would be even harder to get another job if everyone knew he was gay.

Patrick gave in and left the office. Before he left Ed offered him a letter of reference. Patrick was angry. But he also felt embarrassed and ashamed. He didn't know why. He'd done nothing wrong. He'd paid a big price for his springtime romance.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Were you surprised when Ed fired Patrick?
2. What did Ed mean when he said their customers expected certain values from the company and its employees? Why did he think Patrick's working there would be a problem?
3. Why did Patrick feel embarrassed and ashamed?
4. Do you think Patrick should have fought for his job?



# MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

## Appendix I: A Summary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. It contains a preamble made up of a number of general principles or statements and thirty specific articles.

The preamble to the *Universal Declaration* states that:

- Human dignity and equality is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace.
- The disregard for human rights has led to barbaric and savage acts against people.
- Human rights must be protected by law.
- All persons believe in the dignity and worth of human beings, in the equal rights of men and women, and the need to promote social progress and better standards of living.

The *Universal Declaration* then states the following specific articles:

- Article 1. Right to freedom and equality in dignity and rights.
- Article 2. Freedom from discrimination.
- Article 3. Right to life, liberty and security of person.
- Article 4. Freedom from slavery and servitude.
- Article 5. Freedom from torture and degrading treatment or punishment.
- Article 6. Right to recognition as a person before the law.
- Article 7. Right to equal consideration and protection before the law.
- Article 8. Right to remedy through a competent tribunal.
- Article 9. Freedom from arbitrary arrest or exile.
- Article 10. Right to a fair and public hearing or trial.
- Article 11. Right to be considered innocent until proven guilty.
- Article 12. Freedom from interference with privacy, including home, family and correspondence.
- Article 13. Right to freedom of movement and residence in one's own country and to leave and return at will.
- Article 14. Right to asylum from persecution.
- Article 15. Right to a nationality and freedom to change it.
- Article 16. Right to marriage and protection of family. This includes equal rights for both spouses and the right to free choice to enter into a marriage.
- Article 17. Right to own property.
- Article 18. Freedom of belief and religion.

- Article 19. Freedom of opinion and to exchange information.
- Article 20. Right to peaceful assembly and association.
- Article 21. Right to participate in government and in free elections and to equal access to public service.
- Article 22. Right to social security.
- Article 23. Right to work, free choice of employment, fair working conditions, equal pay for equal work, fair pay and the right to join trade unions.
- Article 24. Right to rest and leisure.
- Article 25. Right to adequate standard of living for health and well-being.
- Article 26. Right to education.
- Article 27. Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.
- Article 28. Right to a social order assuring human rights.
- Article 29. Responsibility to community is necessary to the free and full development of the individual.
- Article 30. Freedom from state or other interference in any of the above rights.

### **Word List**

**Appendix:** added information or more information.

**Universal:** including everyone.

**Preamble:** introduction.

**Tribunal:** court.

**Arbitrary:** not fair or reasonable.

**Exile:** forced to leave your country.

**Asylum:** safe place or refuge.

**Persecution:** to hurt or harass someone from a different race or religion or group.

**International:** a group of two or more countries.

**Covenant:** formal agreement.

## **Appendix II: A Summary of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights***

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 16, 1966. It came into force as an international law on January 3, 1976. Canada was one of the countries that agreed to this. Therefore, the terms of the *Covenant* must be included in our laws and legislation.

The *Covenant* is made up of a preamble and thirty-one specific articles. However, the last six articles deal with enforcing, monitoring and amending the *Covenant* and therefore have not been included in this summary. The articles that have been included can be divided into three parts – general rights, individual rights and government obligations.

The preamble to the *Covenant* states that:

- Human dignity and equality is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace.
- Human rights are based on the inherent dignity of the human person.
- Human beings can only enjoy freedom from fear and want if everyone has economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights.
- Governments must promote respect for human rights and freedoms.
- Individuals have a responsibility to promote human rights.

The *Covenant* then states the following specific articles:

- Article 1.** All peoples (or nations) have the right to freedom and to manage their natural wealth and resources.
- Article 2.** Governments must bring about the rights listed in the *Covenant*. These rights must be enjoyed without discrimination.
- Article 3.** Men and women must have equal rights.
- Article 4.** Rights can only be limited by laws if they promote general welfare in a democratic society.
- Article 5.** Human rights must be respected and cannot be taken away.

*Everyone has:*

- Article 6.** The right to work and to freely choose one's profession. Also, governments must provide training programs and have policies to foster full and productive employment.

**Article 7.** The right to just and favourable work conditions including:

- Fair wages and equal pay for equal work for men and women.
- Fair wages that will allow for a decent living for the workers and their families.
- Safe and healthy working conditions.
- Equal opportunity to be promoted based only on seniority and competence.
- Rest, leisure, reasonable working hours, and paid vacations and paid public holidays.

**Article 8.** The right to form trade unions. This includes the rights of unions to function freely and the right to strike.

**Article 9.** The right to social security, including social insurance.

*Governments must protect:*

**Article 10.** The family, and no one should be forced to marry against their will. Also governments must protect:

- Mothers, especially before and after childbirth. This includes the right to paid maternity leave and social security benefits.
- Children. This includes protection against economic and social exploitation. People who exploit children must be punished by law. There must also be an age limit below which children are not allowed to be employed.

*Everyone also has:*

**Article 11.** The right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing and a continuous improvement of living conditions. As a minimum, everyone should be free from hunger.

**Article 12.** The right to the highest standard of physical and mental health. This means that governments must:

- Promote the healthy development of children.
- Improve environmental and industrial or occupational working conditions.
- Prevent diseases.
- Provide universal health care.

**Article 13.** The right to education. This includes:

- Free and compulsory primary education.
- Access for all to secondary and higher education.
- Access to literacy and adult education for those who did not complete the whole of their primary education, regardless of age or other factors.
- The rights of parents to choose to send their children to schools other than public schools.

**Article 14.** In those countries where there are no primary schools, they must be set up within two years. (*This article applies to colonies or very poor countries in the Third World.*)

**Article 15.** The right to take part in cultural events, and to scientific and cultural freedom.

**Articles 16 to 23** deal with enforcing, monitoring and amending the Convention.

**Word List**

**Inherent:** important part of.

## Appendix III: Complaint Process & Chart

Many employers and providers of services realize they must have policies to prevent human rights violations. This is especially true for larger institutions and organizations. Nevertheless, there are many instances where people feel they have been the victims of discrimination.

Most human rights commissions have developed appropriate ways to deal with complaints. If they cannot settle the complaint, they may follow a more formal process called a Board of Inquiry.

1. Before laying a complaint, a person should make sure it really involves a matter of human rights. The problem could be a civil issue requiring a lawyer, or even a criminal matter involving the police. On the other hand, it could also be something to be brought to a labour relations board or even a health and safety council.

Therefore, you should talk with someone who knows about human rights legislation. Also, in some cases, it might be a good idea to put your thoughts on paper. Write down what you think the problem is and what you want done to solve the problem.

2. Most people, including officials at human rights commissions, prefer not to go the legal route. Often, a matter can be resolved when both sides start talking, so human rights officials may ask you to talk with your supervisor or landlord before filing a formal complaint.

3. Human rights complaints must be filed within six months. Once you are clear that you want to file a complaint contact the Commission office. When you talk to the officials, they will explain the rules. They can also tell you if they have the power to deal with your situation. This is called the **intake step**.

4. If the human rights officials think your complaint falls under their mandate, they will ask a number of questions and write out an official complaint form. However, they will not take any action unless you give them permission by signing the complaint form.

5. Once they have taken your formal complaint, the Commission will investigate the matter. This is called the **investigation phase** and the officers will try to settle the matter during this phase. If it is not settled, a written report is prepared which

will be given to Commissioners who must decide the next stage in the process.

6. If the report contains no evidence to support your complaint, the Commissioners will not proceed any further. If the Commissioners think you have a valid human rights complaint they will refer it to the next stage in the process, which is called a **Board of Inquiry**.

7. This is a more formal process. The Board is made up of one or more lawyers who act as a kind of judge(s). The lawyer for the Commission will present your case to the Board. The other side will probably also have a lawyer. This Board of Inquiry will give a written decision which is binding and has to be followed by both parties.

8. In some cases, you or the other side may disagree with the decision of the Board of Inquiry. The matter could then move into the court system if either of the parties appeals the decision. There are three levels of appeal. These levels of court are called the Trial Division, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada.

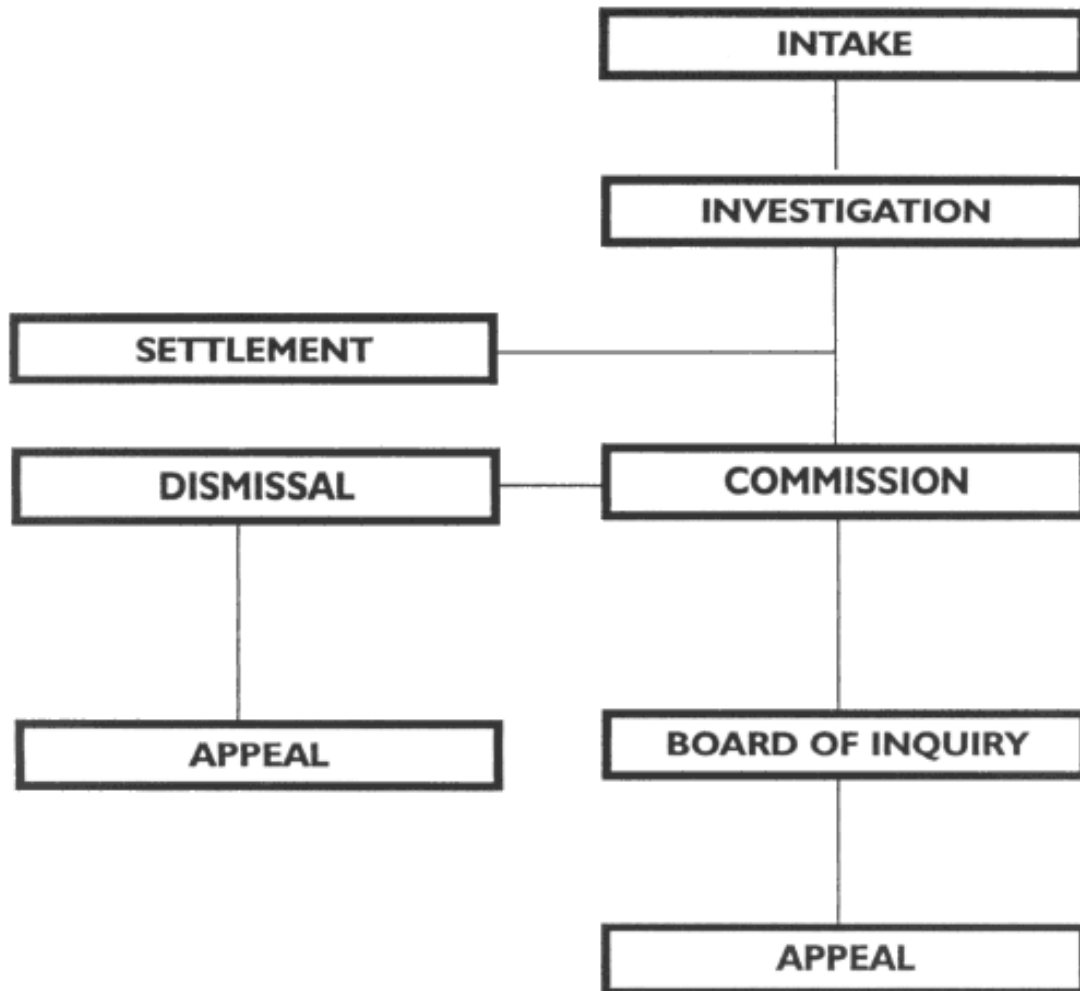
To lay a human rights complaint is a serious matter. Although there is no cost involved for you, unless you proceed without the support of the Human Rights Commission, it is a right that should not be abused. You should take an active part in your complaint and have as much proof as possible right at the intake phase. You should also try to make sure that your complaint is an important complaint. Frivolous (silly or not very serious) complaints take resources from other complainants who do have a real case that needs to be resolved.

### **Word List**

**Mandate:** a formal or legal order, or the job an organization must perform.

**Inquiry:** formal investigation to look into matters of public interest.

## THE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE



**Throughout the complaint process the Commission tries to effect settlement between the parties. If settlement is not achieved the complaint follows the outlined process and may be referred to a Board of Inquiry. Decisions of the Board and dismissal by the Commission may be appealed to the Courts.**



**Groups which helped with this reader:**

- 1. Brother T.I. Murphy Learning Resource Centre Inc.,**  
Water Street, St. John's, NF, A1C 1A5
- 2. Department of Education,**  
Box 8700, St. John's, NF, A1B 4J6
- 3. Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador,**  
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- 4. National Literacy Secretariat,**  
**Human Resources Development Canada,**  
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- 5. Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Adult Education,**  
P.O. Box 6161, St. John's, NF, A1C 5X8
- 6. The John Howard Society of Newfoundland,**  
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**Consultants:**

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- 2. Newbury Creative Design,**  
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**Other Human Rights Resource Readers published by the NLHRA:**

*The Way We Are: A Cross Cultural Education Reader*  
*Freedom and Responsibility: A Human Rights Reader*  
*Economic Rights: The Road Untravelled*