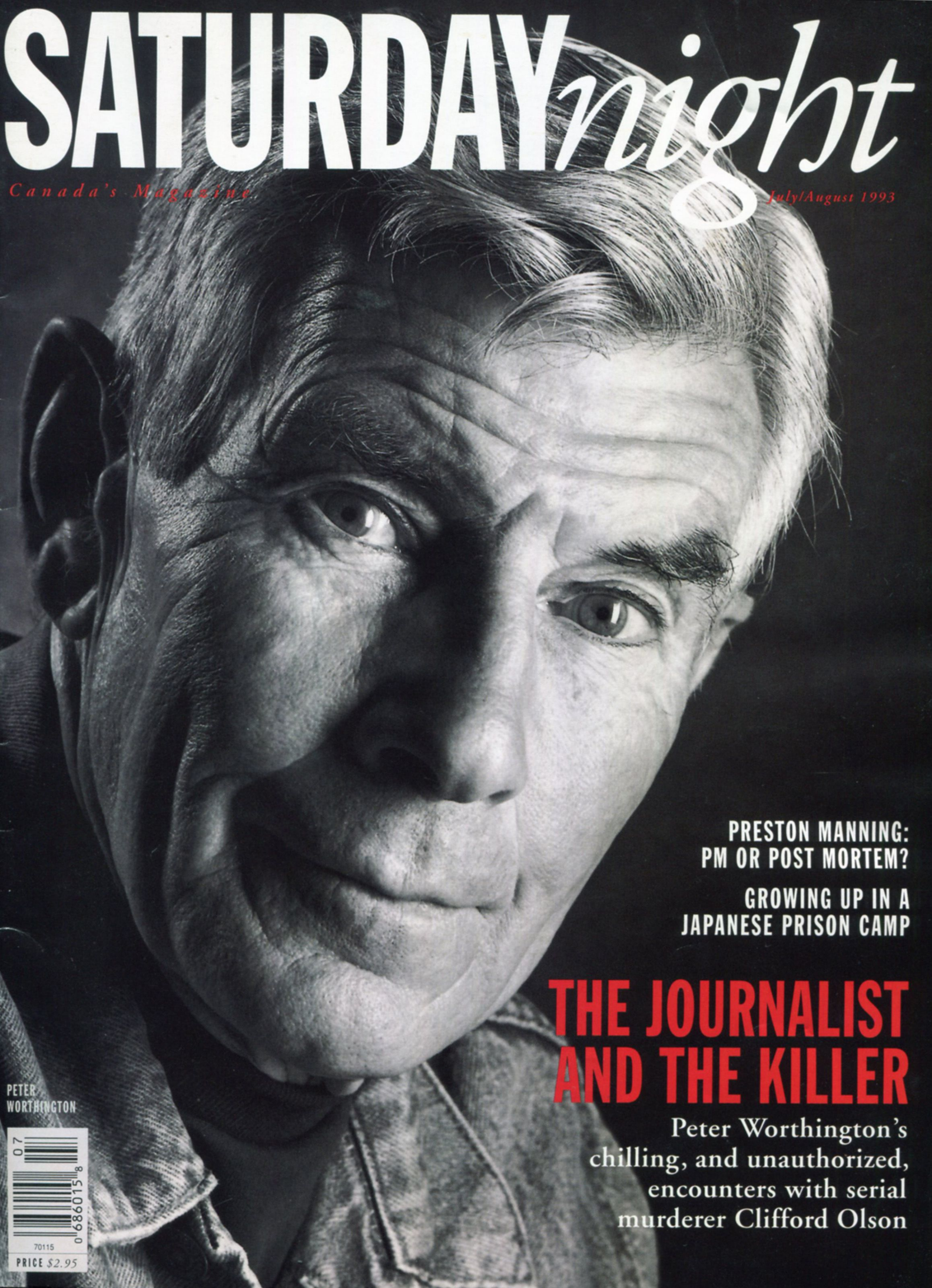


SATURDAY *night*

Canada's Magazine

July/August 1993



PRESTON MANNING:
PM OR POST MORTEM?

GROWING UP IN A
JAPANESE PRISON CAMP

THE JOURNALIST AND THE KILLER

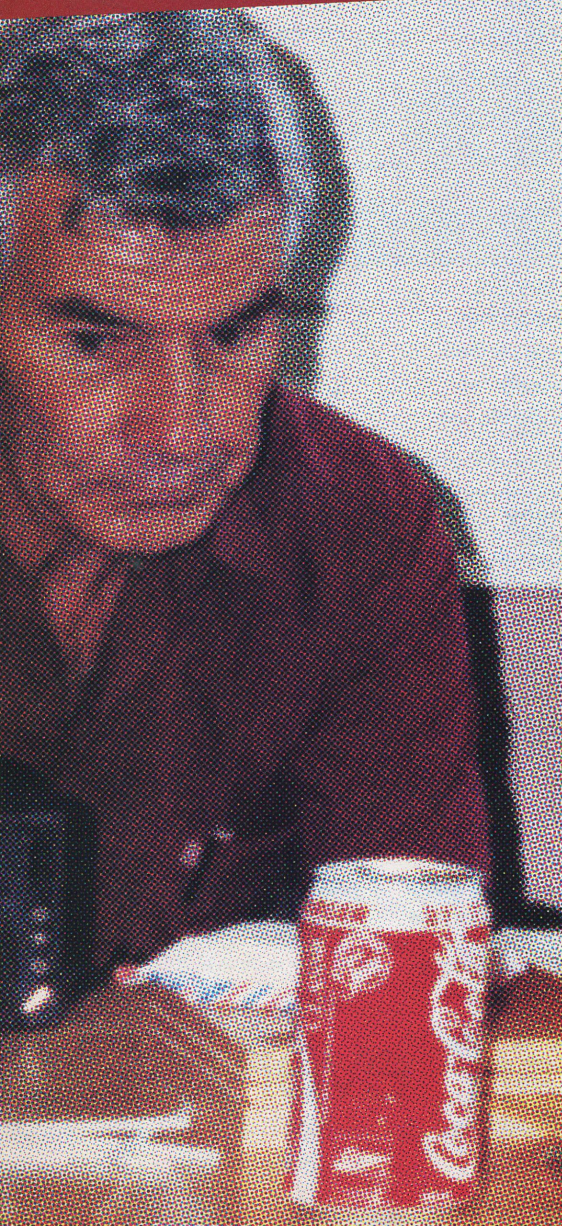
Peter Worthington's
chilling, and unauthorized,
encounters with serial
murderer Clifford Olson

PETER
WORTHINGTON



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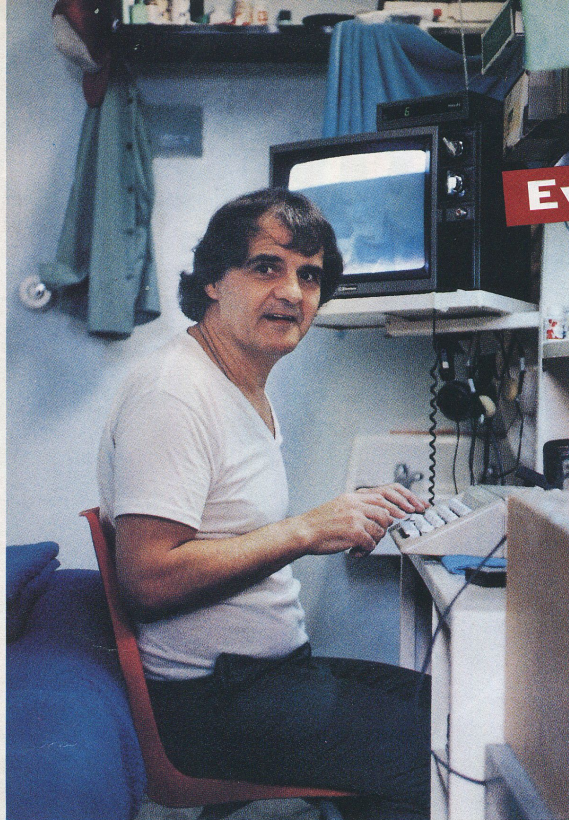
THE JOURNALIST AND THE KILLER



The Canadian public knows Clifford Olson as the B.C. serial killer who outraged everyone with his \$10,000-a-body deal with the RCMP. There was no trial to speak of; no details of Olson's private motivations and strategies. When, almost by accident, and unbeknownst to prison officials, veteran newsman Peter Worthington found himself in constant contact with Olson over a period of eighteen months, the silence ended – and the true horror emerged

BY PETER WORTHINGTON





Every time I visited
elf, harmless and
but drawn in, and

Olson he exuded bonhomie, like a benign
eager to establish rapport. I was appalled,
careful never to take him for granted

The first time I saw Clifford Olson was on a guided tour of Kingston Penitentiary. As a journalist, I would get to know Olson well, as well as anyone can get to know him – or would want to.

It was a fall morning in 1990, and Olson was being escorted by two guards across the prison rotunda. He carried himself as no other long-term inmate I'd ever seen. There was nothing handdog or whipped about him, and his step had a bounce to it utterly unlike the usual prison shuffle. Chatting and gesticulating between his impassive keepers, he grinned at us as he passed, dark eyes dancing. I thought he somehow recognized us because he kept looking back over his shoulder and smiling as he was led to his cell in the "hole," where troublemakers are isolated from the general inmate population.

That accidental encounter was the first

of what turned out to be eighteen months of regular meetings, hundreds of hours of telephone conversations, and a busy correspondence with the most reviled criminal in Canadian history. Clifford Olson is the convicted serial killer of eight girls and three boys, ranging in age from nine to eighteen, in British Columbia during 1980 and 1981 – and is suspected of having murdered many more. In the nine-month period from November 17, 1980, to July 30, 1981, he drugged, raped, and sodomized his victims, male and female, then murdered them variously by strangulation, bludgeoning, and stabbing.

Our guide, the then warden Tom Epp, seemed slightly embarrassed; he had expressly refused Arlene Bynon of Toronto radio station CHFI and me permission to interview Olson and was instead showing us around the prison. Bynon and I had gotten involved with Olson when he contacted her after she broadcast a documentary on the execution of another serial

killer, Ted Bundy, in 1989, of whom Olson spoke contemptuously ("He only killed for sex!"), but whose notoriety he envied. I was on air at CHFI with daily commentaries in those days, and Bynon suggested a co-authored book project. We had recently signed a contract with the publishers Simon & Schuster in New York. On the phone, Olson, who is serving twenty-five years without parole, had claimed that he had actually killed as many as fifty people in various parts of Canada and in seven American states. Bynon and I were concerned with those unknown murders, not the known killings; Olson had promised to provide proof of where more bodies were hidden – a promise he has yet to honour.

"I am aware of the stars. I look up at the mountains. I'm thinking, 'What the fuck am I doing? Why did I kill her? I have everything, a beautiful wife and my son. What the fuck's the matter with me? I stop ten feet from ----, where I covered her in the gravel. I wonder if she's still alive. Will they find her? Maybe I should move her into the trees. ..."

— FROM ONE OF THE ELEVEN GRAPHIC ACCOUNTS OLSON WROTE OF HIS MURDERS AFTER HIS CONVICTION

Olson told Bynon and me he had killed while travelling in Canada and the United States in the short interludes in 1964, 1972-73, 1978, and 1980-81 when he was briefly out of prison. Lending credibility to his claims is the belief, supported by such experts as the FBI's reigning authority on serial killers, John Douglas, that in most cases serial killers commit their first murder while in their twenties, though they may escape detection for years or, in many cases, are never caught. There is no known case of a serial killer starting to

kill after forty. On the contrary, they have often, with the cooling down of hormones, tapered off by then. Yet Olson supposedly committed his first murder in 1981 at the age of forty-one.

Although the federal solicitor general as well as Warden Epp had adamantly refused to let Olson be interviewed ("He's an unrepentant attention-seeker... his utterances offered nothing to a study of serial killers," said Epp), one day I got a phone call from an excited Olson.

"Guess what, I put your name on my visitors' list and it's been approved. You can come any time!"

"So you say – but the prison might have other ideas."

"No, you've already been approved. I'm sending you a form which you gotta fill out and you can come in any time – if you get what I'm gettin' at."

"I wonder why."

"Who knows with those goofs? Don't ask questions, just fill out the form and come see me. Great, eh? They won't dare stop you!"

Olson was right. And for the next year and a half, until he was transferred to the maximum-security federal penitentiary at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, just before Christmas, 1992, I met with Olson regularly every few weeks for a couple of hours, sometimes with a tape recorder. We would

Olson in his Kingston cell: "Quiet and secure. And I got my cellular phone." (Right) Olson meets famous U.S. lawyer Melvin Belli: neither proved to be very useful to the other but they kept in touch

sit at one of the dozen anchored wooden tables in Kingston's restricted visitors' centre, overseen by a bored-looking guard inside a glass booth. Olson would chain-drink Coca-Cola and hot chocolate from a vending machine in the room, boast of his exploits, discuss schemes for making waves within the penal system, and tell me how he could "escape any time I feel like it – out the window at the hospital, where I go for my back; I'm just not ready yet."

Each visit was a surreal experience. I never ceased to wonder at Olson's animation, at his relentless good spirits. He is a little man, about five foot six, stocky, growing soft around the middle, with thinning brown hair that covers his ears. He looks younger than fifty-three; the years and prison have treated him gently. His exercise is running, and he once told me he had run the mile, around and around the perimeter of the exercise yard, in five minutes, thirty seconds. He is ▶



never still, his body forever shifting position, the brown, almost black, eyes roving and probing. In his nasal, high-pitched voice, he exchanged quips or rude pleasantries with any passing guard or another inmate snuggling with a visiting woman in a corner, laughing at his own jests. He exuded bonhomie, a benign elf, harmless and eager to establish rapport with whom-ever he was talking to. He offered me drinks from the machine for which I always brought a supply of loonies – vintage Olson to offer a visitor refreshments that the visitor paid for.

But the restless eyes glitter with feral intensity, missing nothing. I felt I was constantly being appraised. While Olson flatters and tries to ingratiate himself, he is incessantly looking for ways to manipulate, for openings – something he admitted to when he proudly referred to himself as “a weasel” who usually gets what he wants. Without let-up he tried to impress me with his importance, his cunning, his

notoriety, his status as an epic serial killer. One moment he could dispassionately discuss how he had tried to strangle a thirteen-year-old girl with his shoelaces in 1980, and finally stabbed her to death in a field beside the Fraser River (“Jeez, my hands were hurting from the laces, they were cutting into my hand and then they broke. So I had to stab her – about seventeen times”), then switch without pause to speculate on how the Blue Jays might fare in their next game. I was drawn in, appalled, and careful never to take him for granted.

To this day, I don't know how or why I got access to Olson. The ban on journalistic interviews imposed by Solicitor General Robert Kaplan after Olson's conviction in 1982 still stood. Olson could write letters to anyone and receive letters, but was allowed no direct contact with

the media. The authorities felt he thrived on publicity, so being interviewed was a way he profited from his crimes. Interview requests were routinely denied. But Olson has managed to outwit and exploit the penal system as perhaps no other inmate ever has. I felt that he was virtually running his area of Kingston Penitentiary, especially during the first nine years of his incarceration. Many, though not all, of the thirty or so inmates who were, like him, in protective custody had weak, susceptible, or otherwise inadequate personalities, and Olson carried on like their sergeant major. His collect phone calls were sprinkled with asides: “Larry, get me my green file.... Rambo, bring me that chair.... Tell the fuckin' librarian I'll get that stuff later....”

“What's going on there? You sound like a busy executive, Clifford,” I would say.

“Yeah, well, I do okay.”

“You sound like you're running the joint.”

“Well, let's just say things are goin' okay, if you get what I'm gettin' at” (his favourite expression).

Then Olson was transferred to an isolated cell and had no more inmates to bully. By law he was allowed to telephone his lawyers and make two social calls a month. Yet he would phone Bynon or me sometimes five or six times a day. Eventually he got access for hours at a stretch to a cordless phone in his cell, and then he could reach anyone in the world who would accept collect calls; he told us that now and then he even charged long-distance calls to the prison.

Until Olson's transfer to Prince Albert last December, the authorities had no idea he was phoning Bynon and me so often

and regularly. We have him on tape chortling about what “goofs” prison staff were, and “what a racket we've got goin'!” He fantasized that Bynon and I would appear on “The Today Show” or “Good Morning America” when the book came out and he would place a call to the programme and be interviewed live on network TV. He imagined phoning Geraldo Rivera “live from Kingston Pen,” and driving prison officials crazy. He realized that if he ever pulled such a stunt (and had the opportunity presented itself he could have), it would end the phone calls.

“It'd be worth it to see the look on the faces of them goofs.”

“Surely they'd get even with you.”

“Now. They can't touch me. I'd hit 'em with a legal writ so quick – anyway, what're they goin' to do? I'm never goin' to get outta here unless I escape, so what do I care?”

“She is in front of me on my left. She is reaching for a key that's not there. I take the hammer out from behind my belt. It's in my right hand. I think, ‘Can I

still do it – kill her...?’ She reaches up and I swing the hammer and hit her on the back of the head really hard, right in the middle of the back of her head.”

Olson cheerfully, even proudly, describes himself as “the most hated man in Canada.” Yet no-one, except perhaps his long-suffering lawyer Robert Shantz, of Maple Ridge, B.C., Arlene Bynon, and me, knows much about him. Even the RCMP don't have the details of how and why he killed. And prison authorities aren't interested in his background – only in keeping him protected from other inmates and safely locked up.

Experts on serial killers mostly agree that all were physically and sexually abused as children. When you talk to Olson about his parents, he insists he had a normal, happy childhood. He didn't. He was born in Vancouver during the Second World War and his father, a soldier, married his mother when he returned from overseas three years after Olson's birth. He says he remembers being “bum-fucked” by an “uncle” when he was four “but it was no big deal, the sort of thing all kids go through.”

One of his early memories, again from around the age of four, is filling empty beer bottles with water, hammering the tops back on, and selling them to his family for a dollar. The adults found this cute and enterprising, and young Clifford basked in their approval. A year or two later, he recalls, he was stealing flowers and fruit from neighbours' back yards in Richmond, B.C., then selling them at the front door to the very people he'd filched them from. It appealed to his sense of humour, even then. It was a technique he would practise the rest of his criminal life: pay cash for a stereo or power tool, carry the item out to the trunk of his car, walk back into the store with the bill, pick up the same article, tell the cashier he'd changed his mind, and get his money refunded – thus selling the store its own merchandise; later he'd unload the stolen object at half-price. Olson calls it “rehashing” and believes it's foolproof if done right; he claims to have stolen almost \$1-million worth of goods this way in 1980 and 1981.

Olson's mother's creed was, as he recalls her telling him, “If you do something, don't get caught.” For a while after the war, his father was a milkman, making deliveries at (Continued on page 50) ▶



Dear Peter:

Hi again stranger. Well I better get you a letter off for this Monday. Morning coming March 26th, 1993. Its 2:30 p.m. here right now. I just called Melvin. He was out of the office and Richard Brown said to call back there on on Fred. His secretary they want to talk to me. So they don't forget me. So I just got this back today. You can keep it.

You must have sent another application in. There will not be any problems. So I'll take in the weekend of Sports. On you, I just had those 12 photos taken just now. I'll get them next week. So I'll send the negatives you can get copies made for SHANTZ. Arlene yourself and make me an extra copy for me. I just marked. And sent the negatives copy to me will you. So I just got.

So what else is new out your way. So what do you think of the screw up of the Police on the Paul Bernardo case. Talk about the worst bull shit Ontario has had in a long time. It will be interesting to see what comes of this. I will be by the charges of murder. Because of no evidence. It will be the news papers not going into this issue. Any idea. You the reporter.

It looks like OUR GIRL KINNY is off to the Prime Ministers job. No one can beat her from the conservative party, and the Women vote alone in Canada will put here there Peter. Canada wants someone with a dash of class, let all those old ducks from the other parties go into deep freeze. Like anesthetize to extreme retirement.

So what else is new. I'm waiting to hear what changes they wanted you and Arlene to make. I think you make a mistake by NOT adding the updated material. It would not take much more a couple of pages. As for news. Well you got all you will need when your book comes out. The ONLY thing I promised was a photo of the murder girl in the U.S.A. with myself and Seattle. That is your big front page story for you all when the book is ready to be issued to the public. Plus of course ONE I said one photo of the group photo of the elite at Kingston. All of us.

Fuck what Brown said. I got the photos, no thanks to him. But Melvin. It will be good to talk to him next week.

CONF

PAGE 2

HERE IS MY FIRST CARTOON. I THINK YOU DO YOU THINK.

As for this goof. Jeannie. I will never get close to the Ministers office. The Prime Minister is got it made. The very first Canadian woman. The Prime Minister. Well is not not the only one that sees the world on the wall.

Its her that will turn the conservatives back in if she dumps a few old policies. One thing is clear. Jeannie Christian Liberal leader can not lead the liberals back in. They need some YOUNG anyone but the old guard as we say. But then you know this yourself. make sure the sun people see by very first CARTOON.

You know what I hate. All these old war crimes trial. Its all shit. the wars over man.

I'll let you know what is going on with all the so call experts on Criminology from the U.S. when I get all there replies back. I must be the most stupid person on earth. I can't understand why there own cases. I don't want to say anything till I read what you wrote. But you don't really know what I did. accept by the books shantz let you read. here is were the story is when you add what I thought. of course you don't have that for publication.

So I'm going to call it a day. I'll get back to you soon. say hello to Arlene from me. I miss her fights with me. smile now. You got that book I sent you I hope on the place here. See what I was telling you. Its an old fokes home. In fact the old fokes don't have it this good here. and yes. Its 100 times better than where I was. smile. and yes. Its operating on Cliffys time programme. You should know that.

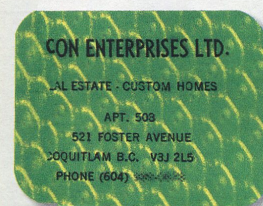
I got to get a letter off to Janet.

Have a nice day.

As Ever.

Clifford

P.B. A great cartoon.



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Clifford Olson

(Continued from page 35) dawn from a horse-drawn wagon. Olson would accompany his father and steal from the cream jar where change was kept. Soon he realized that, if he rose earlier, he could swipe the money customers put out for milk. He also learned to crawl through the milk boxes built into most houses then, and rob homes while the occupants were asleep or out. He remembers that for sport he might sometimes go to the fields around Lulu Island, near Vancouver's airport, and shoot at incoming Air Canada flights with his .22 rifle. "Just kid stuff," he says. "I never hit one, I don't think."

Until he was charged with murder in 1981, Olson was regarded as a nuisance rather than a menace. A succession of classification officers and social workers as far back as 1957 – Olson at seventeen was a first offender (break and entry) – listed him as having a "dull normal IQ." But he has earned marks in the eighties and nineties in Queen's University correspondence courses; his assessments of sports, politics, and issues such as abortion, terrorism, education, or religion are surprisingly sensible and astute. During most of his days in prison, the only environment in which he is really comfortable and functional, he wasn't considered dangerous, though he was recognized as a highly manipulative liar and a bad risk for parole. While it was noted that Olson had grandiose ideas about himself, he was basically perceived as likable, friendly, non-violent, and harmless.

Yet, since 1957, Olson has lived barely four years on the "outside"; thirty-two of his fifty-three years have been spent in prison. But his lawyer, Bob Shantz, has calculated that, during that very short period of freedom spread over the years, Olson committed an average of one sexual offence a day, seven property crimes a day, and, possibly, a murder a month – or, cumulatively, 1,200 sexual offences, nearly 10,000 property crimes, and perhaps more than forty murders.

Back in 1981-1982 Olson gathered outraged headlines when it was learned that the RCMP had made a deal to pay \$10,000 in trust to his now divorced wife, Joan, for every body or murder site he took them to. At the time he was a suspect only in the murder of a fourteen-year-old girl, whose name appeared in a notebook he kept. While denying the murder of Judy Kozma, he dropped hints about other murders, and indicated he knew the locations of other bodies, which

he "might" reveal for \$10,000 a body. RCMP Corporal Fred Maile won Olson's confidence, and a deal was negotiated. Olson was so pleased with the arrangement that he agreed to give the Mounties what he called a "freebie," and delivered eleven murders for the price of ten.

Until he did, the RCMP had only four murders, none connected as far as they knew. They weren't even aware there was a serial killer loose – a little-known term then; the media at the time wrongly described Olson as a "mass murderer," which he wasn't. When, at his 1982 trial in Vancouver, Olson suddenly and unexpectedly changed his plea to guilty, Judge Harry McKay quickly sentenced him to eleven concurrent life terms for a total of twenty-five years without possibility of parole. The plea and sentencing lasted barely thirty minutes since no evidence was required; none of Olson's techniques of recruiting victims or his sociopathic propensities were revealed.

There is still widespread public anger over the RCMP's \$100,000 deal with Olson. As *The Toronto Sun's* editor in chief then, I joined the chorus of indignation. But now that I know more about the case and about Olson, I'm absolutely convinced it was the best investment the Mounties ever made. There was so little concrete evidence against Olson at the time it's unlikely he would have been convicted of murder. The bodies might never have been found. Seven of the eleven young people weren't even listed as murdered, only as missing – six of them presumed to be runaways from broken homes. Until Olson told all, there had been no realization that for nine months – at least – a monster stalked the Fraser Valley.

Olson pleaded guilty only to the murders of the eleven youngsters, with no mention of rape or sexual violation, which was an oversight by the Crown. After his conviction he threatened legal action against anyone who accused him of sexual offences, pointing out that in a career of 103 convictions he had never been found guilty of a sex crime. And indeed, Olson has forced officials to issue retractions for saying he is a sexual offender. To Olson, typically, not being charged or found guilty is the same thing as never having done something. And he thinks he's being clever when he says he "knows" about a certain murder but doesn't admit to being the perpetrator. Lies get confused with what might be true, and police have long since learned to be wary of his publicity ploys. "What can they do to me anyway?" he asks as always. "I'm never goin' to get

outta here unless I escape, so what can they do to me – except extradite me to a state that has capital punishment?"

"I have a small hypodermic syringe with a thin needle that is used by diabetics for insulin shots.... I take her left arm and I inject the needle and try to put air into her artery. Blood flows into the syringe. I then push air into her artery. I do this three times, taking the syringe out each time. Nothing happens.... I have anal sex one more time, then I get dressed again, and dress her."

Today, Olson's ego and vanity know no bounds: he is the most litigious inmate in Canada's penal history. More thoroughly familiar with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms than many lawyers, he uses it constantly to make mischief. He's had a succession of legal-aid lawyers, and has had some twenty cases reach the Supreme Court – a suit on the grounds of "cruel and unusual" punishment in being forced to exercise in a concrete yard, fifty by twenty feet; a suit against a warden who refused him permission to buy stamps to mail legal documents to his lawyer; a suit against guards who he felt didn't protect him from inmates throwing urine at him. And so on. He's lost them all. He's also tried to press a complaint that being denied the company of a "Solid Pleasure Life-size Revolutionary Not Inflated Sex Doll" in his cell violates his human rights; as a guarantee of safe sex, he attached a condom to the grievance he filed.

"Clifford, it seems to me that the new Charter of Rights is tailor-made for someone like you," I said once.

"You'd better believe it," he replied. "It's made life a lot easier. The goofs are scared shitless of it."

"Suppose it didn't exist?"

"Then I'd have to use the old Diefenbaker Bill of Rights – and it was a pain in the ass; not nearly so useful."

Making mischief – if such a mild term is appropriate – is, it seems, what chiefly fuels Olson's animation.

The RCMP, too, suspect that Olson has killed more than the eleven admitted victims. To us he claimed he had committed notorious highway murders in British Columbia and Alberta in earlier years. He also told us that he was a friend of the Seattle Green River Killer, who is believed to have murdered forty-nine prostitutes in the Seattle area between 1982 and 1985, and who has never been caught. Olson told us they had killed ▶

Clifford Olson

together *before* he was arrested, and that he knew the location of bodies – but always avoided disclosing their locations to us. To this day, Olson has immunity from the nearly moribund Green River Task Force if he will testify before them; serial-killer expert John Douglas, of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico, Virginia, also plans to interview him.

When Olson learned that I was a friend of the San Francisco lawyer Melvin Belli, he promptly wrote and asked Belli to represent him. He wanted Belli to negotiate a deal with the Seattle District Attorney if he delivered the Green River Killer. The flamboyant Belli has been a high-priced, famous lawyer for most of his eighty-six years. He has defended Jack Ruby, killer of Lee Harvey Oswald, and the TV evangelist Jim Bakker; served a long list of Hollywood celebrities; and sued on behalf of the victims of the Bhopal chemical disaster and those of the Korean airliner shot down by the Soviets in 1983. In the summer of 1991, Belli attended a lawyers' convention in Toronto, where I picked him up, along with his partner, Richard Brown, and drove them to Kingston to meet Olson. I took a picture of Olson and Belli enthusiastically embracing.

"Do you know the Green River Killer's name?" Belli asked Olson.

"Yes, I'm goin' to summons it all up for you," said Olson quietly, using a malapropism as is his wont. "I'm goin' to put it all in a nutshell, no beating around the bushes."

He paused, looking at his expectant audience. The four of us – Bob Shantz had flown in from Vancouver for the occasion – were crouched forward on the hard chairs around a fixed table in the visitors' room. The pop and coffee machine hummed in a corner. A guard scanned the room from the glassed-in booth.

"I'm prepared to give you the whole file, everything, stuff I never even gave Bob Shantz."

"When you say 'stuff,' what do you mean?" interjected Belli.

"Photos...of my friend the Green River Killer – and his victims." Olson said material was already in the mail to Belli. "I sent 'em last week – through a lawyer in Toronto, by double-registered mail."

"Good. We'll have them when we get back to San Francisco," Belli said. "When did you last hear from this guy – the Green River guy?"

"Four months ago," Olson answered, a bit nervously, I thought.

"Do we know where this guy is, where he's gone?"

"I know where he is."

"His name – any reason you won't tell his name?"

"It's in the letter. I've written it to you."

"Well, tell us now, save us time."

Olson hesitated, looking uncomfortable.

"Well? What is it?" asked Richard Brown.

"His name is Ken Young," Olson said, and he sighed.

The detailed and graphic reports Olson wrote of his rapes and murders are the most horrifying and pornographic that I've ever seen

"Kevin Young?" Belli asked.

"No, Ken Young. No-one knows that. Not even Bob Shantz. Ken Young. He's the one I call Ronnie."

Olson told us Young was now living incognito in New Zealand. He produced a photo of a nondescript man in a T-shirt standing beside a right-hand-drive delivery van.

"This is the Green River Killer," Olson said dramatically. He insisted that the name not be revealed.

The van had a phone number painted on the side. One of Belli's contacts later traced it to New Zealand. Eventually I phoned the man in the picture. He was named Bridgeman, had a broad New Zealand accent, and had never lived in the United States. Bridgeman was a born-again Christian who, as part of his missionary work among repenting criminals, had written to Olson – I even found his letter amongst material Olson gave us access to; it's filled with pious homilies and references to God's love. I told Bridgeman that Olson had identified him as a serial killer of forty-nine American prostitutes. He was mildly surprised. "I guess he has nothing better to do with his time," he said coolly.

Belli never received Olson's package. Olson said the Toronto lawyer had screwed up. As it turned out, Belli wasn't much use to Olson, and vice versa, but the pair kept in touch, perhaps because one was a celebrity, the other notorious, and both were unique. Though Belli never charged Olson a cent, Olson eventually "fired" him, then "rehired" him.

"I am looking at him and I'm thinking what to do? I have the hammer in my right hand and I think I hear this:

'Cliff, why are you doing this to me?' I look at him and not thinking, hit him again on the head and then I swing the hammer and hit him on the side of the jaw."

Olson was and is a man with barely a redeeming quality. Gordon Taylor, a former Alberta cabinet minister and later a Tory MP, tried to get a private member's bill passed (Bill C-671) in January, 1983, to authorize the execution of Olson, and only Olson. The last execution in Canada had been a double hanging in 1962. MPs were tempted, but finally rejected the proposal to dispatch Olson – who rather relished the notion of being so despised that a special death penalty was sought in his name.

And yet... and yet I found him to be interesting, even entertaining. You can't remain perpetually horrified, disgusted, or offended if you're trying to understand someone like Olson. I was trying to understand what made him tick, to get in sync with his thinking, and learn what other killings he had done. A confrontational approach was nonproductive, but appealing to his ego often got him to reveal more. Bynon tended to argue more with Olson. I was the "good" cop, she the "bad." It worked well. We talked for hours about his murders and motives in the most matter-of-fact way. It was always with a sense of relief, of coming up for air, that I left the prison. On the two-hour drive back to Toronto I'd play the tape of our talk. As often as not, it was repetitious, an exercise for Olson in reliving his past, gloating about his notoriety, anticipating the fuss a book about him would make. Since he had no editorial control, indeed no access to our manuscript, Olson was making plans for his own autobiography, which he insisted would reveal hitherto unknown secrets. He's already talked his life story onto some thirty-five

cassettes; he sees Jack Nicholson, if not Robert Redford, playing him in the movie adaptation.

In our talks I would find myself in bizarre disputes about whether a certain victim was dead or alive when Olson had sex with him or her. That he might be having sex with a corpse of his own making didn't bother him, but he knew that was unacceptable, so he would argue that the person hadn't yet died. In retelling the story, he got angry again at that "bitch," a seventeen-year-old girl, who deserved to die because she'd anticipated Olson's intent, grabbed his knife, and tried to stab him first.

"I want you to ask God to forgive me, ---, for what I'm doing. I killed and raped eight other kids, ----. I don't know why. You won't feel anything. Will you ask God to forgive me for what I'm doing, ----?"

He described how he'd driven a three-inch nail into the top of a fifteen-year-old boy's skull "to see what would happen," and was surprised to find the boy was still alive. Just before he killed a sixteen-year-old boy, he insisted the youngster should tell the police about a homosexual attack by someone else "because you can't have people like that running around loose."

RCMP officers who have dealt with Olson – especially Fred Maile, who was the Mountie most involved in winning Olson's confidence and persuading him to cooperate in Vancouver – have difficulty explaining the curious relationship that can develop with this repugnant serial killer.

There is his Yogi Berra tendency for malapropisms. These are unconscious and ambush you steadily. My first exposure to them came when we were discussing one of his victims.

"And then I had annual sex with her," Olson said.

"Annual sex? Once a year?"

"No. Annual. From behind."

"Oh. But she was dead!"

"No, no. She was just unconscientious."

Olson was always applying for the right to have "conjugal" visits in prison with pen pals, which he called "congenial" relations. "I've got enough antidotes to fill five or six books – enough for a trilogy"; society should "spend more money to help less-unfortunate kids"; and he was determined not to be an "escape goat" no matter what the "migrating facts."

There's his twisted sense of humour. When he received a letter from the then justice minister Kim Campbell denying

one of his requests, Olson photocopied the letter, blanking out everything but the letterhead and signature. Then he typed in a new letter to the effect that Kim Campbell was asking the warden for seventy-two hours with Olson so the two of them could have sex. Olson would roar with laughter at his own pranks – just as he would when he clipped photos from *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines and wrote porn messages to himself from the women. He prepared lists of his favourite movies, books, songs, foods, actresses, drinks, and sports, as if he were a genuine celebrity. Sometimes he mailed these to newspapers, which occasionally printed them as offbeat features. He wrote essays on love, sex, abortion, even capital punishment, which he argued from both sides on different occasions.

And I remember the day he excitedly reported that he had willed his remains to medical science. He'd made a tape for the medical students to be played when they were presumably gathered around his corpse. He described various aspects of his body – such as the scar on his stomach from an operation when he was a child. "But we all know what interests you most, students," he said, and laughed at the thought of the gowned young people studying his genitals.

Olson, in fact, is obsessed with tape recording. (In his cell he had a stereo, electric typewriter, tape recorder, cable TV – paid for by himself, often with money sent to him by groupies and pen pals attracted to notorious criminals.) Olson liked to play disc jockey in his cell and tape music from his stereo – country and western, rock'n'roll, fifties music (from the time warp before he almost permanently lived in prison) – and fake-broadcast, "Live from Kingston Pen, the King of Kingston, your favourite DJ, Clifford Robert Olson, for the first love of my life, Janet, a little tune from the fifties...."

He turned "radio reporter" when there were prison disturbances, did a reasonable job describing on tape an inmate tearing up his cell and guards rushing in with truncheons, and laughed as he identified crashes, swearing, yelled threats, and the clatter of order being restored. Life in prison is never boring for Clifford Olson, who keeps meticulous records of everything that touches his life.

Then there's his amazing correspondence, much of it with young girls who send him soft-porn letters from Canada, the United States, Australia, Britain, and several European countries. Whenever he's in the news he receives letters from female students who respectfully ask why he

killed all those kids and hope he won't be offended by the question, but they're studying criminology. Olson replies by return mail, expressing remorse, saying that "the children are now in heaven and I know God forgives me." He includes a plagiarized poem and maybe a traced and coloured drawing of a butterfly or praying hands. By the third letter he sends a picture of himself ("Pretty sexy for an old guy!") and asks for a photo back, preferably nude. A startling number comply. He says he exchanges letters with about 140 people, many of them religiously inclined, who apparently think they are helping in his rehabilitation. (Some of the religious women wind up graphically describing their sexual disappointments with their equally religious husbands and asking his advice.) Olson chortles indulgently when you ask if he believes his pious outpourings.

Olson has dabbled in several charismatic religions, but has settled on the Catholic faith. (He claims to have once been an altar boy.) He has written the pope, and was once on the verge of persuading the papal nuncio in Ottawa (whom he confusingly calls the "noseo pumpo") to have the Vatican mail letters of remorse he, Olson, had written to his victims' parents. He changed his mind when the families publicly attacked him. The papal nuncio referred to him in the text of letters as "dear Mr. Olson."

"Why Catholic?" I have asked him.

"It's a great fuckin' religion. They forgive you any fuckin' thing."

Once, when I was pressing him about his murders and why anyone should forgive him, Olson replied testily: "Look. The pope has forgiven me, and he's the voice of God. So if God forgives me, who is anyone else to say God is wrong? I don't give a fuck what anyone thinks of me; God's forgiven me, so that's the end of it."

Olson is no Hannibal Lecter, the psychopathic fiend played by Anthony Hopkins in *Silence of the Lambs*. Dr. Lecter radiated malevolence and evil. He was frightening and dangerous, even in a straitjacket and locked up. True, there is an unwholesome, creepy quality to Olson, but little that is overtly menacing or threatening. Yet Olson is *more* dangerous than a Dr. Lecter. Olson seduces, beguiles, and disarms – as witnessed by twenty years in the penal system before 1980 without anyone's detecting his lethal core.

Olson's method of trapping young, vulnerable boys and girls often from broken homes was chillingly simple. He would pull his rented car up beside a ►

Clifford Olson

youngster and ask where the local employment office was. He would be well dressed, courteous, and say he was a contractor – he carried coloured fluorescent business cards to this effect – and looking to hire kids at ten dollars an hour to wash windows. Almost invariably, the boy or girl would show interest in the job. Olson would invite him or her into the car. Often he would chide the youth: “You know, you should be careful about gettin’ in a car with a stranger. Didn’t your mom ever tell you not to get into strange cars? There’re all sorts of weirdos out there, you know.” Sometimes he’d show a Department of Health pamphlet warning against taking candy from strangers.

Put at ease, the target might reply that mom worked, or that the parents were separated – and could a friend get the job too? No problem, Olson would say. He would quickly categorize, “qualify,” as he put it, children from broken homes and say he was putting them on the payroll immediately. His victims didn’t stand a chance. Olson was convincing, because he thought the way a kid thought. The countdown to murder had begun.

Olson would say he had to go to pick up some tools and, if the child came along, pay would start immediately. The victim would agree. Olson would hand him or her a beer, then a “wake-up pill – the kind all truck drivers take” – actually chloral hydrate, which acts as a Mickey Finn when taken with alcohol. When the youngster was drunk or unconscious, Olson would drive to a secluded spot and have repeated sex, then strangle, bludgeon with a hammer, or stab the person to death – or a combination thereof. And then he would have sex again. Olson said he varied his means of killing to confuse the police if the bodies were discovered. But they were rarely found, and quickly deteriorated beyond recognition in the Fraser Valley’s rainforest.

Not all young people were susceptible to Olson’s ploys. If, when approached with a job offer, a boy or a girl said no, they were expected home, Olson would often drive them there. He never forced anyone to come with him, always persuaded or conned them. Then, when they were drunk or drugged, and he sexually violated them, he didn’t consider it rape. “They never said no,” he would say. And not every minor he had sex with was killed – most were not. So why did he kill those he did?

“You know, I ask myself that question a thousand times,” he replies. “I killed them

so they wouldn’t tell – but they wouldn’t have told anyway. None of the kids I had sex with ever told. And most of them I didn’t kill. So why did I do it? I figure it was the booze and the pills I was takin’. And, of course, the Correctional Service of Canada made me what I am. Locked in a cage makes you into somethin’ else.”

“Lots of people in prison don’t do what you did.”

“Not many have been locked up as long as I have.”

Olson argued both sides of capital punishment, and in moments of candour told me the only cure for someone like himself is execution

Olson seems a classic psychopath – or sociopath, a person without a conscience, who knows right from wrong but doesn’t care, someone who is totally self-absorbed and self-indulgent and has no sense of remorse. “Psychopaths” are still a disputed and controversial topic among psychiatrists. It’s been observed that in a prison environment it is psychopaths who stir up trouble. When all hell is breaking loose in the yard for no apparent reason, you can pick out the psychopath responsible – he’s the guy sitting quietly amidst the mayhem, cool and detached.

It’s also been noted that whenever a psychiatrist is examining a psychopath, there are two assessments under way – and the one being made by the psychopath may well be more accurate. Psychopaths are difficult to treat or deal with because they don’t think anything is wrong with them. Neurotics and psychotics *know* something is amiss. Psychopaths may plead mental disorder to get out of prison and into a more comfortable institution, but they do it as a ploy, not because they actually believe they are ill.

The more I dealt with Olson, the more it became apparent that he utterly lacked anything that could be called a conscience. Yes, he expressed remorse, and clearly he knew right from wrong, but these were *learned* responses. He didn’t *feel* them. And there is no way to implant a conscience in a person without one.

“I quickly took the six-inch Phillips screwdriver, placed it in the middle of her head while she lay spread-eagle

on her stomach passed out. I took the hammer and hit it hard one time. The screwdriver went all the way into her brain. All six inches. I pulled it out. The handle came off.... There was no blood on it. I could not believe it, she was breathing normal.”

It has never been revealed that, after his sentencing in 1982, Olson wrote detailed, graphic, blow-by-blow accounts of the eleven rapes and murders, some of

them fifty pages long with drawings and maps. He says these were intended for his then six-month-old son with Joan, to be read by no-one except the boy when he turned nineteen in the year 2000.

I’ve read the booklets; they are the most horrifying pornographic documents I’ve ever seen, filled with graphic sexual descriptions of what he did to his victims, and his lust for young bodies, and details of how he raped, sodomized, killed. It’s almost as if Olson relives the experiences by writing about them, and reading them into his tape recorder and re-playing them.

“How can you want your son to read such stuff?” I repeatedly asked Olson.

“A son has a right to know his dad,” Olson would reply piously. “I want him to know me from myself – not through what others say.” (Olson has had no contact with his son since 1982, but is confident the son will someday want to meet him.)

I felt Olson didn’t fully comprehend – or care – how obscene the material he had written was. Or how devastating it would be for his son. I couldn’t read it without feeling dirty and sickened. But it rang with authenticity and was undiluted Olson.

During his ten years in Kingston Penitentiary, he frequently sought a transfer to another prison – any other prison, preferably one in the west. Correctional Service Canada consistently refused, though authorities at Kingston were willing, even eager, to be rid of him. Looking at Ottawa’s rejections, one gets the impression the requests were denied

simply because it was Olson who made them. During his last year or so in Kingston, Olson was placed in a special “Hannibal Lecter” cell, enclosed by wire mesh and Plexiglas – not because he was a threat, but because, despite his conning ways, he was tormented by some inmates, meaner and tougher than he was. Olson relished the status of his protected cell, though, of course, he filed complaints that it was cruel and inhumane treatment.

“But you love your cell,” I would protest.

“Yeah,” he’d chuckle. “It’s real quiet and secure. And I got my cellular phone.”

“So why are you complaining?”

“Can’t let ‘em think I’ve got what I want, can I? Gotta keep ‘em on their toes, the goofs....”

Olson was finally transferred because of Arlene Bynon and me. In the fall of 1992 a guard improperly leaked to the media the fact that, while Olson was being examined for a back complaint in Kingston’s Hôtel Dieu hospital, x-rays detected a handcuffs key hidden in his rectum. He was charged with having contraband and fined twenty-five dollars.

Olson promptly phoned Bynon at CHFI, told her the details, and urged that she broadcast the news that he was trying to escape. Bynon interviewed him on tape. Olson insisted he could get out of the handcuffs, out of the hospital, and disappear on the neighbouring Queen’s University campus in a matter of minutes. After all, he had escaped custody seven times in his career. He vowed that sometime in 1993 he’d break out, and nothing could hold him.

Then Olson phoned and wrote me about the key incident, scolding Bynon for what he called her bad news judgment because she hesitated before broadcasting the interview. Olson told me he’d lied when he said someone had slipped him the handcuffs key, that he’d stolen it from a guard’s desk months before. There’d been a search of cells at the time, but he’d hidden it in his collection of paperclips. He said he had figured out how to escape on five earlier trips to the hospital. His letter to me included a drawing of himself basking in the sun after his getaway.

Bynon aired the interview on “Chronicle,” the current-affairs programme she produces and hosts for CHFI. The same day *The Toronto Sun* ran a transcript, and I wrote a column about the incident. There was instant turmoil among the public and in other media. A spokesperson for Correctional Service Canada ini-

tially pooh-poohed the escape attempt and implied that Bynon and I were lying when we said Olson had such easy access to a phone and called us regularly. She stated that his “socialization” calls were controlled and restricted. In fact, I have some 150 ninety-minute cassettes of phone conversations with Olson, and Bynon has just as many.

Correctional Service Canada launched an investigation into the phone calls, which then ceased; the predictable cover-up followed. Olson was at once quietly flown to Prince Albert on an RCMP plane, the whole trip recorded on video, presumably in case he complained of abuse or brutality.

Olson wrote me from the Prince Albert Penitentiary, claiming he had masterminded the whole exercise. He said that he now had a larger cell with a window, and access to twenty-seven channels on cable TV, and that the food was excellent.

“Compared to Kingston this is a five-star hotel,” he wrote.

“‘What are you scared about, I didn’t hurt you.’ She said, ‘I’m just scared – I’m only fourteen years old, Cliff, not sixteen. I’m just a little girl – and I’m scared.’ ‘You don’t have to be scared of anything....’”

I’m asked by those who know of our relationship what I think of Olson. It’s a question that’s not easy to answer. I can’t forget or forgive what he did, yet we got on well. He is bright, well informed (CNN on TV), interesting – even intriguing. If society ever wants to understand the phenomenon of serial killers, Clifford Olson is a place to start. Yet no serious attempt has been made to delve into his personality, his psyche. In our relationship he has lied, exaggerated, fabricated; knowing his propensities was my defence against being conned by a master con man.

In rare moments of candour Olson has told me that the only cure for someone like himself is the death penalty. “If it was a pill, I’d take it; but I’d never agree to be hanged – that’s barbaric and inhumane.” Even the most ardent abolitionist would have a hard time making a persuasive case that humanity and common sense are enhanced by keeping Olson alive. I agree with Olson – he’d be better off dead.

Another question put to me is, could I, if I were asked, pull the switch that would end Olson’s life. My answer to that is unequivocal: “Easily.” **SN**