

GAY-BASHING IN HIGH PARK

A tale of homophobia and murder

O

n a Monday in late June, 1985—it was the first week of the school holidays, hot and humid—16-year-old Henry Juszczuk called his best friend, Steven Baker, into his backyard. Henry, it seemed, had something important he wanted to talk about but, as Steven waited, couldn't get the words out. He was shaking. "Go

ahead," Steven encouraged him. "It can't be that bad."

"We killed somebody."

"You're kidding," said Steven.

A few days later, on Friday evening, Henry sat in a room in 11 Division Metro Police Station.

"Did the officer tell you why you are here?" asked a sergeant.

"Murder," Henry replied.

"What does that mean to you?"

"It means to kill someone."

"Do you know who you are alleged to have killed?"

Henry was at a loss. "What's his name?" he asked.

That same evening, in other rooms at 11 Division, a number of Henry's friends were also being questioned by police. A week before, around midnight on Friday, June 21, eight teenage boys from the Swansea area had gone to a densely wooded section of High Park near Colborne Lodge Drive. There, five of them had chased a man up one of the trails to a lot where the man's car was parked; they cornered him inside his car, beat him and then left. The next day, they learned from news reports that he was dead.

If any of them had read the Sunday Sun for

June 23, they would have seen a blurred photo of the tall, bearded man whom they had beaten. They would have learned that he was 40 years old and a librarian at Williamson Road Junior Public School in the Beaches area. His name was Kenneth Zeller. They would also have learned that Zeller had spent the early part of that Friday evening at a party with some fellow teachers. After the attack, he had been found and pronounced dead in less than an hour. Police requested information on "anything suspicious in the park."

Had the boys also read the *Star* for that day, they would have been privy to police speculation that Zeller had been beaten with a blunt instrument, perhaps the victim of a gang that had previously been reported in the park. They might also have decoded the *Star's* additional piece of information: "Zeller, who is not married, shared a home in the Dufferin-Queen streets area that he owned with another man." The presumed gang, the *Star* added helpfully for those slow to decipher its journalistic euphemisms, had been "prowling through bushes looking for homosexuals in the same area." The somebody they had beaten and killed was, it seemed, a homosexual: a victim who, apart from that fact, might as well have been anonymous. They had, after all, set out that Friday evening to "get money from a queer" and "beat up a fag."

On Tuesday, November 26, 1985, five of the teenagers who had been in the park that night were sentenced to prison terms of nine years each. They were: Richard Bauer, 15; Michael Bedard, 18; Michael Burak, 16; Steven Christou, 16; and Henry Juszczuk, 16. All of them were students at Western Technical High School, except for Bedard, who attended Brockton High School. The three oth-

BY BRIAN SHEIN

ers who had been with them but had not physically taken part in the assault had gone free. The five had originally been charged with second-degree murder under the Young Offenders Act; subsequently, their lawyers and the Crown attorneys struck a deal where-

Although the judge clearly recognized that the defendants had attacked Zeller because they presumed he was homosexual, the sentences he handed down may have been mitigated by defence testimony offered during the two-day presentencing hearing. (Since



the defendants had pleaded guilty, this was not a trial—and the strict rules of evidence were not in sway.) During those two days, a stream of friends, relatives, teachers, youth workers, psychologists and psychiatrists presented a collective picture of the five boys as average, likable teenagers, not prone to violence and not motivated by homophobia. In the prisoner's dock, the boys wept; several addressed statements of remorse to Kenneth Zeller's family. As they were led from the courtroom, friends and family members rallied around with calls of encouragement. Although one psychiatrist had cited "a subtle social

enough to buy beer and liquor. As the weather got warmer and the school year neared its end, a number of younger boys started to see the advantages of hanging out with him and his friends. By the time June 21 rolled around—the last day of school, the longest day of the year—there was a bunch of them ready to party. The group included small, scrappy Mike Bedard (the only one of them with a police record), bright but withdrawn Richard Bauer, the hardworking Mike Burak and his best friend, Steve Christou, and tag-along Henry Juszczyk. They knew one another from school, from the Swansea Community Centre where they all played hockey, and from their neighborhood hangout, Rennie Park. A CBC scriptwriter creating a slice-of-life social drama set in the Swansea area could hardly have invented a group with a better cross-section of that community's ethnic background: Anglo, German, French Canadian, Greek, Ukrainian, Polish. By and large, they were from strict, hard-working, immigrant families; many of them had part-time jobs as well. The school year was over, their families' curfew hours away. The truck was a taste of freedom.

Around 8 that Friday night, they piled into the truck and drove to the CNE where Steve Christou was just getting off work. At a beer store, they picked up a twenty-four pack and some six packs of "Tall Boys": about forty-eight to fifty-six pints of beer among them. They drove to Jack Darling Park in Missis-

The boys were in a rowdy mood. "Hey," one of them said, "why don't we go beat up a queer instead of fighting with each other?"

by the juveniles were transferred to adult court to plead guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter. Crown Attorney Peter Shoniker called the killing "an obscenity," and said it demonstrated "the folly of intolerance." In passing sentence, Mr. Justice Gregory Evans said, "They engaged in vigilante activity which has no place in our society," and then, addressing the defendants: "It worries me that young people like you pass judgment on someone like Kenneth Zeller and perform an execution because you believed he was a homosexual."

The nine-year sentences, translated into actual time served, mean that with good behavior the five could be released to halfway houses within eighteen months. Clayton Ruby, a Toronto criminal lawyer who has recently published an authoritative book on sentencing, considers nine years a relatively light sentence for manslaughter of this sort: gratuitous fatal violence against a stranger. Given the fact the victim was homosexual, Ruby adds: "There are cases that have treated minority status in a victim as an aggravating factor, resulting in a higher sentence. That principle seems to have been ignored in this case."

permission to victimize homosexuals" as a causative factor, the consensus seems to have been that the attack resulted largely from a combination of beer drinking, peer pressure and group dynamics—either that or it was all a mysterious, unprecedented happenstance, midsummer madness warranting no further consideration. This latter seems to be the position of William Parker, one of the defence lawyers, who maintains that the killing was "a freak accident. . . It's so flukey I don't think society needs to be concerned about this. I don't think the homosexual community needs to be concerned about it."

Was Kenneth Zeller's death an anomaly? How could these so-called "average, sensitive youths" have engaged in this kind of violence? Should society be concerned? To answer these questions, we have to consider a further question: precisely what kind of violence was it that killed Kenneth Zeller?

One of the older boys had a truck—a pickup truck that his dad had bought for him as a present. Besides that, at 17, he looked old



One of the boys called, "You queer," and then tripped him. The man started to run, the group chasing him back up the trail.

sauga to look at girls and drink beer, but the park was patrolled and some plainclothes cops came by and told them to leave. As they returned to the truck, one of the older boys talked about sneaking back to slash the tires of the cop car. Instead, they drove to the back lot of a gas station to eat submarine sandwiches and fries and finish the beer. By the time they got back to Rennie Park, night had fallen and their beer supply was gone—they'd each had at least six beers. They were in a rowdy mood. Henry and another boy started fooling around, "playfighting." Henry called it "Hey," somebody said, "why don't we go beat up a queer instead of fighting with each other."

"Let's go get money from a queer."

"Let's go beat up some faggots."

They knew of the southwestern part of High Park as a gay cruising area. In fact, Mike Burak and a few others had been there a couple of weeks before, drinking beer around Colborne Lodge. (When asked why they'd gone there before, he told one of the lawyers privately, "Well, we were just going to go there and watch.") They also knew the area was densely wooded: the older boy with the truck made sure the group stopped and waited at his place while he changed from shorts to jeans so he wouldn't scratch his legs on the trails.

They drove to the park. It was getting close to midnight. The air was humid and close. There was no moon. Parking the truck, the group walked up the hill and ranged around. Nothing. Turning back onto a trail, they began heading back down to the truck. The trail was narrow and dark. They walked single file, brushing aside the heavy overhanging foliage. Mike Burak was in the lead. Coming up the trail was a man with a white T-shirt and white hair. For some reason, they let him pass by. Then, suddenly, Mike Burak almost collided with someone—a tall, youthful-looking man with a sandy beard, wearing grey slacks, a red and green polo shirt and white sneakers. The man tried to walk past him. "You fucking queer!" Mike Burak called and then tripped him. The man started to run. In the brief scuffle, he lost one of his sneakers. They chased him back up the trail. The man reached his car, a grey-green Audi Fox, in the parking lot and tried to open the door on the driver's side. Mike Bedard caught up with him and pushed him away. The man got the door open but as he did, Bedard shoved him inside so that he fell sprawling across the front seat. Bedard crawled in on top of him, kneeling on his chest and punching. At the same time, Richard Bauer kicked through the front passenger window, reached inside and opened that door so that the man's head fell back over the edge of the seat. Steven Christou and Henry Juszczuk rushed to that side, rocking the car and punching. Richard went

wild, punching as well and kicking the car. With a pocketknife, he ran around stabbing three of the tires with enough force to puncture them. There was a pause. Someone told the man to give them money. He gasped that he didn't have any. The punching started again. Mike Burak arrived at the car to find air hissing from the tires and his friends beating the man while the three others watched. Someone called out to him: "What're you standing there for?" Mike Burak moved in and kicked the man in the chest and head with his cowboy boots. Somebody suggested checking the man's pockets. No money. Richard Bauer told Mike Bedard to stop punching—the man was obviously unconscious.

face was a mass of bruises, the back and side of the head thick with blood: he had vomited as well. From a nearby phone, the man in the white T-shirt called the police. At 1:09 a.m., Kenneth Zeller was pronounced dead on arrival at St. Joseph's Health Centre. The cause of death was severe cerebro-cranial injuries: perhaps the severity of the battering against the door frame from the punches and kicks was what led police initially to believe that a blunt instrument had been used to bludgeon him. A secondary cause of death was asphyxia—he had choked on his own vomit.

By 2:30 that morning, police were photographing the car in the parking lot and beginning to comb the surrounding area. On the footpath they found a single white canvas



As they turned to leave, a shadowy figure in a white T-shirt scurried into the bushes at the edge of the parking lot—it was the man they had passed earlier on the trail. He had watched it all and now feared they were coming after him. The group ignored him and headed back to the truck, shouting above one another's voices, bragging about what they'd done.

They drove back to Rennie Park and went home from there. Some of them were out past their curfews and their parents were worried. Steve Christou was hungry. He made himself a couple of bacon and cheese sandwiches and downed them with some pop.

The man in the white T-shirt emerged from the bushes. He found, sprawled across the front seat of the Audi, the man's body, head dangling out the open passenger door. The

The man was able to get to his car and open the door, but as he did he was shoved inside so that he fell sprawling across the front seat.

sneaker, on the ground beside the driver's door, a Timex watch with the wristband broken; on the ground beside the passenger door, a set of car keys. On the ledge of the car's rear window was a blue baseball hat with an OPP crest. A folded umbrella lay on the rear floor. There were two hardcover books on the rear seat: *Who's Who in Children's Books* and *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*. On top of them was a map book of Toronto opened to a page show-

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ing the High Park area. On the dark-brown upholstery of the front seat: a broken cassette tape holder, a gold neck chain, shattered glass, bloodstains.

Dr. Gary Hunt, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto's faculty of education, lives with his two children in the Swansea area. Through his activities organizing hockey at the community centre, he knew all five boys involved in the assault and, in particular, was very close to Michael Burak and his friend Steve Christou. He had hired Michael as an assistant for the faculty of education's summer program, given him supplementary tutoring through the boy's Grade 10 year and talked to him "just about every second night" through that year. He considered that he and Michael were "very, very close friends" with Michael's confiding in him about social and personal matters, and referred to the boy as probably "one of the finest adolescents that I have worked with." As the summer of 1985 approached, Gary Hunt was in the final stages of writing a book, *The Adolescent Predicament*, which was a study of teenagers in the 14- to 17-year-old period. Presumably, Gary Hunt had some awareness and understanding of adolescent boys in general, and of Michael Burak in particular. Yet Michael's arrest left him shocked at how little he knew about the activities of Michael and his friends—shocked and stranded with a book that obviously needed rewriting. Yet, he stated, he would still put his utmost trust in Michael. At the presentencing hearing he suggested that the killing took place because the boys involved were "nonleaders" and susceptible to peer pressure. Neither Michael Burak nor Steve Christou, he stated, expressed dislike of homosexuals.

Hunt was not alone in this assertion. Dr. Clive Chamberlain, a psychiatrist, declared that "Michael Burak was not of a predatory nature and had no homophobic tendencies," while Dr. Barry Cook, a psychologist, testified that Richard Bauer "showed no homophobic tendencies." In the course of the hearing, various factors were cited to explain the sudden, violent outbreak on the part of otherwise normal adolescents: the disinhibiting effect of alcohol, repressed anger, strict family backgrounds, a need to please the group. Further, Hunt suggested the boys failed to perceive that the punches and kicks they inflicted could lead to a person's death: "They forgot to multiply three minutes by five boys." One of their lawyers privately advanced the theory that, not being street-smart, the boys failed to pull their punches: this, it seemed, might prove how anomalous this type of violence was for them.

Speaking after the hearing, Clive Chamberlain pointed out that "an explanation isn't a justification" for what they did, and

talked about how the boys reflect general societal attitudes to homosexuals. And, at the hearing, he had talked about how teenagers "put down homosexuals in order to come to terms with their own sexuality." Hunt, pondering the boy's attitudes toward homosexuals and their own developing sexual identity, spins out an odd theory of his own: that they associate masturbation with homosexuality and, therefore, experience a crisis of fear and guilt around their own practice of masturbation.

The descriptions of group dynamics and outbursts of repressed anger fuelled by alcohol indeed describe part of what took place in the park; the suggestions of the boys' perception of homosexuals as easily victimized scapegoats, accentuated by their own anxieties around sexual identity fill in some other pieces. But none of these fully describe the attack on Kenneth Zeller and place it in a social context in which it is not a freak accident. Reviewing the events of that June night, one wonders what more—beyond deliberately setting out to beat up a homosexual, finding what they presumed was one and beating him to death—the boys would have to do to demonstrate homophobic tendencies. In fact, Kenneth Zeller's death simply highlights the fact that he was the victim of a particular and not uncommon form of violence: the homophobic assault or, in popular terms, gay-bashing. Looked at in this way, his killers are, indeed, average—frighteningly average gay-bashers.

Dennis Altman, an Australian writer noted for several major analytic books on the history of gay liberation and the emergence of a gay culture, particularly in North America, has pointed out that "the growing openness of male homosexuality has been accompanied by an apparent rise in homophobic violence. . . In one way the growth of anti-homosexual violence that has been noticeable in the past few years, especially in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Houston, is the other side of partial acceptance. When the social strictures against homosexuality begin to decline, individuals most troubled by homosexuality will themselves become vigilantes. . ."

Gay men get beaten up. Because of the victims' shame, confusion and fear of, or resignation toward official indifference or antagonism, many of these attacks go unreported: had Kenneth Zeller not died, we might never have known about those savage few minutes in High Park. It seems there has been a rise in homophobic assaults since the early 1980s, a rise that can be linked to both the growing visibility of gay culture, with the resulting tensions described by Altman, further polarized by a shift to more conservative politics. In 1981, in the Manhattan district of Chelsea, figures compiled by the Chelsea Gay Association hotline indicated that, on average, 1.5 lesbians and gays were physical-

ly attacked every day, purely on the basis of their sexuality. These figures, of course, represent victims both willing to report an attack and aware of the existence of the hotline. In Toronto, the gay community noted a rise in assaults after the massive police raids on local bathhouses in February, 1981. Perhaps because the police action was seen as sanctioning attacks on gays, there were an estimated two to three reported assaults a week from February into the fall of that year. In 1983, the American National Gay Task Force polled 2,000 gays from eight U.S. cities and found that ninety per cent reported abuses because of their sexuality; of these, most reported verbal abuse but ten per cent of the men and five per cent of the women (i.e. 270 people) reported assault with a weapon. And, in a major 1984 article on homophobic violence by Ted. R. Bohn of Rutgers Law School, the author cites figures to indicate that "anti-gay violence is fairly widespread, affecting twenty to forty per cent of the gay male population," and describes this violence as "an epidemic social problem." It is also a problem that, he notes, has been largely treated with indifference or neglect.

Bohn draws on enough research material to present a portrait of the typical homophobic assault and to indicate that its nature differs significantly from that of other forms of violence. In most cases of assault, victims and assailants know each other before the attack; in most homophobic assaults, this is not so. In homophobic violence, the odds are more likely to be heavily weighted (against the victim): the perpetrators use a weapon and/or outnumber the victim. Outnumbering the victim seems to be a key element in many cases, with perpetrator-to-victim ratios ranging from 2:1 to as high as 9:1. When the perpetrators are armed, in more than half of the cases the weapon of choice is a knife—make what you will of the significance of slashing and stabbing. Homophobic violence is chiefly directed against gay men, or at least those perceived as gay men. In some cases in which lesbians have been physically assaulted, it is because the assailants have mistaken them for gay men. In other cases the epithets used during the assault ("faggot," "queer") indicated that the assault

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was being rationalized by linking lesbians to gay men. And because of the factors of the assailants' being armed and outnumbering the victim, the majority of these assaults indicate premeditation.

For Bohn, several of these elements (anonymity, arming, outnumbering) indicate that the assaults represent the scapegoating of homosexuals by nonhomosexual men: intergroup conflicts and anger focus on the homosexual as a likely victim. But many other factors (the sheer intensity of the assaults; the dramatic and often blind targeting of almost exclusively male victims; the selecting of victims on the basis of their association with other gay men, their perceived "effeminacy" or their presence in an area identified as gay) indicate that these assaults are intended, perhaps primarily, to enforce male sex roles. Gay men are seen as the antithesis of traditionally conceived masculine roles: when gay men appear in public, they must be violently suppressed. And since some homoerotic feelings are present in all heterosexuals as well, any male insecure about his own orientation who identifies these feelings as nonmasculine and, therefore, "wrong" may be driven to attack homosexual men. Dr. John Money, professor of medical psychology and pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University and Hospital and co-editor of the massive *Handbook of Sexology*, refers to this as "the exorcist syndrome. . . . When teenagers see something evil about themselves, one way to get rid of the evil is to destroy it. It's an old story, isn't it?"

Reviewing all these elements, the attack on Kenneth Zeller falls into place as a typical homophobic assault: males deliberately go to an area identified with gay men, select a victim whom they do not know but presume is gay, outnumber him and attack him with intense violence. The ratio of 5 assailants to 1 victim is about average. Even the knife—in this case directed with fury against the victim's car—is present. Was the Audi presumed, by association, to be a "faggot" car?

Henry Juszczuk's references to the victim as a "somebody," a "what's his name," merely highlight the brutal anonymity of the attack. Richard Bauer's description, while being questioned by police, evokes another quality of those three minutes at Zeller's car, an odd familiarity: "Mike was on the driver's side and he pushed Kenn away from the door. Kenn got into the car and Mike punched him. Kenn fell over to the passenger side. . . ."

The sergeant questioning Bauer noted the boy's casual references to the victim. "You refer to him as Kenn," the policeman said. "Did you know him prior to the occurrence?"

"No."

"How did you come to know the deceased's name?"

"By the news and the newspaper."

Perhaps Bauer's disturbingly familiar tone was simply that of a teenager trying to appear knowledgeable, reasonable, in control in the eyes of an adult in authority. But there is, as well, an eerie echo of what the French writer Guy Hocquenghem has called "the intimate, ancient and very strong bond between the homosexual and his murderer."

An additional part of the symptomatology of homophobic violence, it would seem, is the way in which many in the legal and counselling professions ignore or minimize the role of homophobia in these assaults. Sometimes this results in grotesque miscarriages of justice: in the late 1970s, in Tucson, Arizona, four heterosexuals beat a man to death out-

Although each case of gay-bashing may seem like an isolated incident, the pattern of these incidents tells a very different, darker story

side a gay bar. They admitted murdering him because he was gay, but the judge dismissed the charges, characterizing the attackers as "model athletes." In Vancouver, in 1985, a teenager, aided by two adults, tortured to death a man whom he had never met before. Over a six-hour period he carved his name in the victim's chest with a straight razor, slashed his body profusely, gouged out both eyes and cut off the nose and one ear. Eight hours later, the youth tried to repeat the performance; the second victim managed to escape. In his defence, the youth alleged the first man had made a pass at him. Dr. Roy O'Shaughnessy, a psychiatrist, stated in court "that essentially this boy shows no evidence of any psychiatric disorder, or serious emotional disorder, or psychological disorder. . . . were it not for the homicide and the brutality of the mutilation, this boy would look like any other boy." Judge Douglas Campbell called the killing "an isolated incident," and added that "it cannot be concluded that this boy is dangerous" and cited the boy's lack of a criminal record, good character references and psychiatric assessments that he was not dangerous. The boy was sentenced to three years; with good behavior, he could be released in six months.

Model athletes, boys like any other boys, isolated incidents—these are the blind spots that surround gay-bashing. Zeller's killers were model athletes as well, "average, sensitive youths," and Zeller's death "a freak accident." It is precisely by such model athletes

and average youths (or men) that much homophobic violence is committed. Although each individual case may seem like an isolated incident, the pattern of these incidents tells a very different, darker story.

The final symptom of homophobic violence is the way in which, directly or by implication, the victim himself is blamed for the attack, much in the way that a female rape victim is often presumed to have been "asking for it." In conversations with defence lawyers and witnesses sometime after the trial, it was interesting to note how, after admitting the grave nature of the killing, voices would drop to a lower, more urgent pitch: "He was cruising, you know." Indeed, Zeller had been drinking (his blood alcohol count was 211); aware of some danger, he had locked his wallet in the trunk of his car; he carried a bottle of poppers in his hip pocket. "He was cruising": bad enough to be gay, the implication runs, worse to be exploring a part of the park where men sought and had sex with other men, worse still to encounter the very ones who made the park dangerous. Then, in a crowning touch of homosexual effrontery, Kenneth Zeller had the nerve to die, tragically ruining his killers' tender young lives and casting a shadow over their community. And so, as fingers of blame point to the victim, the symptomatology of gay-bashing returns full circle to the pervasive social background of homophobia that gives rise to this and other similar assaults.

Gay-bashing in Toronto parks has a long history, sufficiently notorious that a gay man who grew up in the relative isolation of rural New Brunswick in the early 1960s remembers stories—local legends—about gangs beating up homosexuals in Toronto cruising areas. As for the Swansea district, a gay youth who attended Western Technical School and knew the teenagers involved in the killing points out that, at school, typical gay-baiting jokes made reference to "going to High Park," while scrawled on signs around the park area or on picnic tables is the slogan: "Proud to be a Canadian queer-basher." Speaking of the boys themselves, he recalls: "One of them and his friends used to really look down on me. During lunch and stuff they'd use the word 'faggot' and it would hurt. Usually I can let it pass, but there's some days that word can really kill." A witness almost called by the defence, another former student at Western Tech, was to have testified to the fact that beating up gays in High Park was a common occurrence. William Parker, a defence lawyer, explains: "This sort of thing went on when [the former student] was there. They'd go down to the park, roll the queers down the hill and have a good laugh and so on. It's a phenomenon." Presumably, this phenomenon somehow mitigated the killers' actions. As for the possible role of educational programs in lessening homophobic attitudes among high school students, Alex Chumak, Ward 1 trustee

Gay-bashing in High Park *continued*

—the district from which the teenagers came—considers one of the highlights of his career to have been his successful campaign, in 1980, to block homosexuals from coming into the schools by his opposition to the formation of a gay and lesbian liaison committee to work with the board of education. It was more the influence of alcohol, Chumak opined, than negative attitudes toward homosexuals that led to Zeller's death.

For a glimpse at some further community attitudes, the comments of William Parker—himself a Swansea resident and parent—may prove enlightening: "I doubt very much whether it [the killing] will have any serious impact on daily life there. It'll be something people will remember, that's all. But it won't change the conduct—there wasn't anything horribly wrong with the conduct before [the killing]. . . Every kid that goes to the high schools knows about this [gays in High Park] and doesn't like it, and it's a part of their life not to like it and it's a part of their life to go there occasionally and hassle them. . . You blame the kids for the killing but [cruising in the park] is not socially acceptable. . . What [people] say is, 'the queer's got the right to be there.' I'm not sure, though. That doesn't change much about the case, but does he have the right to be there? . . . If I were the chief of police now, I'd tell the cops to do their best to clean that out of there. . . I think if I were walking through the park and one of these guys confronts me on one of those dark paths, I'd hammer the bastard."

The testimony of the defence character witnesses at the hearing seemed to some to represent the forces that had given rise to the assault. Sitting in the courtroom, Eric, Kenn Zeller's companion of fourteen years, felt the community closing ranks around the boys, "as if these dear little children are, indeed, doing a service to society by getting rid of this undesirable person. . . I felt like I was a Jew in Nazi Germany." And, during a recess in the hearing, as Kenn Zeller's mother wept, someone approached her and said: "Well, he was queer."

"Kenn Zeller was a shining example for staff and students. His creativity and hard work made the Williamson Road Library an exciting, busy focus for the school. The library was always buzzing with the activity of children at work or with visiting artists, speakers, videos and films. . .

"He was a true educator who loved children and taught with a real understanding of children's needs. . .

"He was a special friend to us all. . . We have all been enriched by knowing Kenn Zeller and we will all miss him."

—from the dedication page of the 1985 Williamson Road School yearbook

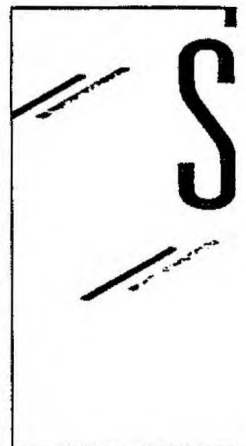
If the attack on Kenn Zeller attempted to

reduce him to a cipher, an anonymous victim to be pummelled into oblivion, it failed. Among the many who knew him, there was shock, grief and anger. But there was more. The dedication in the yearbook suggests some of his qualities and his effect on those around him. In the days and weeks following his death, an ever-expanding circle of family, friends, co-workers, students and their parents were rallying around to keep fresh the memory and influence of a man who had brightened and deepened so many lives.

Born in 1945 to a Mennonite family in Stouffville, Ontario, Zeller was an honors student who first considered becoming a minister, then a chef, before finding his true vocation as a teacher. His interests covered a wide range: apart from his work as a librarian, he had travelled extensively, coached fig-

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ure skating, taught soccer and modern dance, been exceptionally active in fundraising for the National Ballet, functioned as the school's computer expert, learned sign language to work with deaf children and worked toward a master's degree in children's literature at OISE. He was past-president of the Toronto Teacher-Librarians' Association and the school's staff representative to the Home and School Association. He was a gregarious man with a wide circle of friendships that he maintained over the years: he still corresponded with his childhood Sunday school teacher. His younger brother, Allan, remembers him as a natural teacher from an early age. His longtime companion, Eric, affectionately calls him "a Ritalin child—he was so busy with everything." Williamson Road principal John Gibson and vice-principal Annabelle Goodman pay tribute to his role as a unifier who managed to draw the staff closer together, and as one who created a daily atmosphere of excitement and discovery. Zelleresque touches continue to highlight the school: a striking reddish-mauve shade of paint on the office wall, a plant in the office window, a collection of postcards in the library. Home and School Association president Anne Ferguson remembers how "he always found a light side to everything,





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Gay-bashing in High Park continued

he was always able to find fun in the most serious issues." Speaking with a wry irony that Zeller himself might have appreciated, Ken Popert, writer and editor for Toronto's gay newspaper, *The Body Politic*, wonders at Zeller's sheer charm, talent, and all-round likability: a gay martyr who sounds too good to be true? The fact remains—Kenn Zeller was a remarkable human being.

On the Monday after the body was found, John Gibson announced the news to a school assembly. His brief speech emphasized the need for tolerance among people, tolerance that might have prevented this death. A letter to the community requested donations for a memorial fund. Within three days—this was the last week of the school year—the fund had reached \$1,000, much of it contributed by students. On the day of the funeral, parents took over classes so that most of the teaching staff could attend. The children contributed a plain white floral tribute to the memorial service and the same flowers were then used at the graduation ceremony at the end of the week. The memorial fund has been used to purchase a special collection of books for the school library; a portrait of Zeller, painted by a local parent, now hangs in the Williamson Road library, accompanied by a quotation from Glenn Gould, himself a former student at the school. Addressed to a child, the quotation culminates: "Yes, you are a marvel, and when you grow up, can you then harm another who is like you, a marvel. You must work, we all must work, to make this world worthy of its children."

Above all, the school and community wanted to ensure that Zeller is remembered as a full human being, not "just a homosexual." As Anne Ferguson asserts, "It doesn't matter that he was a homosexual." The affection is genuine, the tolerance moving. It is understandable that those who loved and respected Zeller would find the specific circumstances of his death painful to contemplate. And yet, if Kenneth Zeller is to be remembered in his full humanity, that vital element of his nature must be acknowledged. He was, indeed, much more than "just a homosexual," but he was certainly gay.

Tucked away in a corner of Parkdale is the home that Kenn and Eric shared: a former Victorian mansion they had painstakingly renovated over the past five years. They had been a couple for fourteen years and, in the richness of its ornamentation and quiet comfort, the house exudes the sense of a full life lived together. Visiting Eric early in the new year, the house is much as it was when Kenn was alive, almost as if he had just stepped out for a few minutes and would soon come hurrying in through the front door, full of news. Everything is very still. The Christmas tree stands by the window. Two stockings hang by the mantelpiece. It was here that the two

of them entertained their many friends. They were proud of the fact that their social world was an easy mix of gay and straight; they studiously avoided exclusively gay circles. Cruising the bars and parks was not, it seemed, part of their lifestyle. (According to Eric, when the two of them discussed cruising the park, it was with distaste for that type of sexual encounter.) Eric was accepted by Kenn's parents with that strange compromise between knowing the truth and ignoring it that many families adopt. The question of their sexuality was never openly discussed. In their personal and professional lives—Eric is a CBC production co-ordinator—neither had experienced any discrimination. A prospering professional couple, they were apparently sheltered from the harsh facts of homophobia. Reality intruded that June night when Eric, awakened by the bell, stumbled downstairs to find two policemen at the door: there was a body at the morgue they wanted him to identify. It was only after Kenn's death that his parents finally acknowledged his sexuality. And, in the courtroom, Eric had that moment of identification: "a Jew in Nazi Germany." In point of historical fact, he need not even have gone so far: the first victims of the concentration camps, after all, were homosexual men.

The five teenagers who killed Kenneth Zeller are currently serving their sentences in Warkworth penitentiary. The issues raised by their crime continue.

What of William Parker's contention that cruising in High Park constitutes a provocation, and his battle plan for "cleaning up" the park? Metro Police Staff Inspector Pat McCullagh of 11 Division differs on the subject: "If there were activity that the public found offensive, we'd certainly hear about it. The number of complaints is very, very small." He good-naturedly points out that the park is so big that any sexual activity can be relatively discreet; the park, he implies, is big enough for everybody.

In the recent past, the Toronto gay community has responded to homophobic violence with a Gay Street Patrol in the downtown area. Formed after the bathhouse raids in February, 1981, the patrol raised the issue of gay-bashing to a public level and made as strong a statement to the gay community as to potential bashers—a statement about the need to overcome fear. In the course of three summers, the patrol created a presence and served an educational function. Interestingly, Ted Bohn's study of homophobic violence indicates that precisely this kind of community organizing and raising of public awareness remains the most effective preventive measure against gay-bashing.

In Ottawa, federal MP Svend Robinson is campaigning to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to specifically prevent discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Robinson cites the Zeller case as a pow-

erful incentive to press for this amendment, adding: "Similar social pressures are mounting in some quarters against victims of AIDS. It is essential that these forces of intolerance and hatred be vigorously combatted through education and legal sanctions."

In Toronto, Ward 6 school trustee Olivia Chow is beginning an initiative to develop educational programs that might begin to change homophobic attitudes within high schools. Much of the basis for this initiative is grassroots organizing among lesbian and gay students themselves: documenting instances of discrimination, presenting material to student councils.

At a meeting of Lesbian and Gay Youth of Toronto, a lively and flourishing support group, one gay student talks about the positive effects he has noticed in the course of speaking about homosexuality to high school groups. In one classroom, he recalls being heckled throughout his presentation by two football players at the back of the room. By the end of his talk, apparently impressed by his courage, they came forward to shake his hand. And, at the same meeting, another gay student emphasizes that increasing openness about homosexuality is, ultimately, the only way to combat homophobia. He imagines the results with humor that might have appealed to Zeller: "I would love it if they would all come thronging out of their closets. I have a dream or fantasy that I'll wake up one day and every gay person will all be pink. You'll find out that your mother might be a lesbian."

The night of June 21, just before midnight. Kenn Zeller is coming from a party where he drank more than usual and danced—he'd wanted everyone to dance. He drops off some of the teachers at the Dundas subway station, then drives past Parkdale, onto the Queensway, heading west. He has just turned 40—in a few days, he and Eric will celebrate the birthday with a large group of friends. For now, though, he is alone. No one else knows where he is. He sees the sign ahead: Colborne Lodge Drive. The map book in the back seat of the car suggests this is his first time here. The little Audi climbs the hill to the parking lot. The headlights dim, the motor fades to silence. The midsummer night is warm, still, full of promise.

Sometime later, he walks up the narrow trail, brushing aside the heavy overhanging foliage. He bumps into someone walking the other way—a teenage boy. Beyond him, crowding forward in the darkness, are others, how many he cannot tell. Sensing the danger, he tries to squeeze past them. They edge toward him. Unknown to them, the tall man in the polo shirt struggling against the foliage is a teacher, precisely the sort of teacher who—through his example and influence, humor, curiosity and love of life—might have prevented them from doing what they are about to do.

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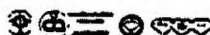
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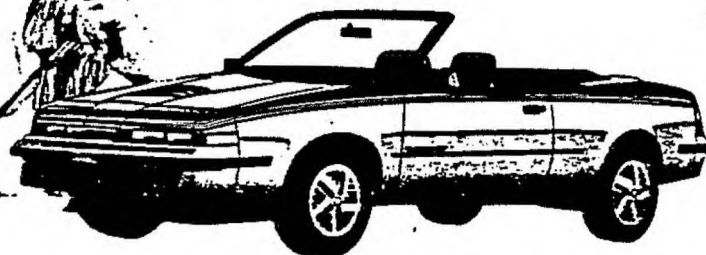
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