

Rot in hell (or at least in prison)

By Tabitha Wells

On Tuesday afternoon I opened Twitter to see a name trending that I would be happy to never see or hear again -- Paul Bernardo. I'm not ashamed to say part of me was hoping when I clicked on his name, that the trending news would be that the man was dead. That he had finally kicked the bucket and we wouldn't need to worry about his eligibility for parole.

I was far less than thrilled to discover the reason for his appearance in my feed was because he has a parole bid set. His ex-wife, Karla Homolka, was freed from prison several years ago ? something which I also have many words about.

For those who aren't aware, Bernardo (also called the Scarborough rapist), has been serving life without parole eligibility until 25 years for multiple sexual assaults and rapes, as well as the rapes, torture, and murder of two teenage girls. The third girl, Homolka's younger sister, did not result in a murder charge due to the official cause of death being choking to death on her own vomit. This was of course, after being drugged, dosed, physically tortured, and raped by Bernardo with her older sister, while they filmed the whole thing.

I have no qualms with using the word monster to describe this man. I've seen some of the tapes; this is not something you simply come back from after time to ?contemplate?, though Bernardo's lawyer would (unsurprisingly) have you believe otherwise.

Earlier this month, Bernardo was on trial for having a weapon in his cell. After the aborted trial, lawyer Fergus O'Connor made a statement regarding the murderer's upcoming pitch.

?He's as horrified as you and I are at what he did,? O'Connor said. ?I expect that he will take full responsibility, express remorse, and he appears to be sincere in that.?

Of course, it's his lawyer's job to make the best possible case for his client. But it surprises me that anyone would be willing to take this man's case at all. Being a serial rapist, a murderer who plotted the torture, torment, rapes, and murders of multiple victims, is not something that you just ?become horrified? about, that you suddenly come to understand, after years of imprisonment, was wrong. In the late 1980s and early '90s, Bernardo was responsible for the deaths of three teenage girls, 14 rapes, and at least six additional attempted rapes.

These acts were not just something that someone ?oopsies? thought was okay. He didn't accidentally start raping. He didn't think torturing and murdering teenage girls was an acceptable hobby.

His lawyer, O'Connor has made statements that this hearing will be ?based on the rule of law and not on mob revenge mentality?, according to an article published on Tuesday by Global News. This statement, in my opinion, is ludicrous. Expecting a man with Bernardo's criminal history to serve out the rest of his pathetic existence in prison is not a ?mob revenge mentality.? Bernardo's crimes were not minimal. They were not something to scoff at. Mob revenge mentality would be calling for his immediate death or arranging to kill him after any kind of release.

Expecting that he should be punished indefinitely for such horrendous crimes IS about the law. It's about expecting that people shouldn't be excused of the worst behaviour imaginable simply because they can feign regret and be on good behaviour.

Going back to O'Connor's comments about expressing remorse ? Bernardo is a terrific actor. It's how he and Homolka managed to get away with what they did for so long. How they were able to be responsible for her sister's death and have no-one be the wiser. O'Connor also cited the fact that Bernardo is regularly visited by loving parents as something the parole board should take into consideration. Because you know, loving parents automatically means someone is a better person. Right? Right?

Ultimately, the parole board's determination factor comes down to whether or not a convict still poses a threat. In my opinion, that shouldn't be the question with people like Bernardo. This wasn't a one-time thing during a ?rough time? in his life. This wasn't an accident. These were premeditated actions.

Given Bernardo's ability to appear credible and mask the truth, it's not possible to trust a thing he says in front of the parole board. Therefore, the question should not be whether or not he poses a threat to the community. Rather, it should be, is it worth it to risk setting free a dangerous, aggressive murderer and rapist capable of pulling off his crimes while appearing to be normal and trustworthy? Is it worth it to put more women's lives at risk just because this man has loving parents and ?good behaviour?? Is it justice and upholding the law to say one man's freedom is worth more than the potential lives he could take given his history?