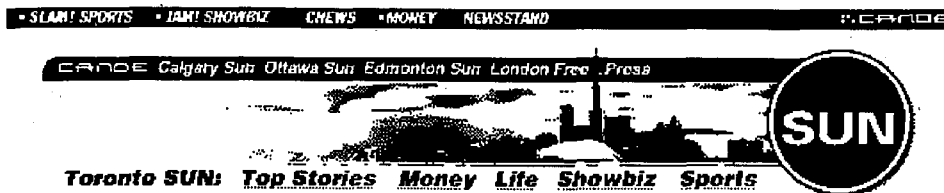


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Sun Media Columnist: Michael Harris

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Coverup or witchhunt?

By **MICHAEL HARRIS**
Ottawa Bureau



In 1994, a sex-scandal exploded in Cornwall that shocked the nation. Five years later, the OPP is still investigating whether a pedophile "clan," including priests, Crown attorneys, police and probation officers, victimized scores of boys between the ages of 8 and 18 over a 30-year period, and then manipulated the system to cover up their crimes. MPP Garry Guzzo wants Premier Mike Harris to call a public inquiry to clean the air. The OPP stands behind its investigation and says that Cornwall is in the grips of McCarthyism. Coverup or witchhunt? The Sun's National Affairs columnist Michael Harris investigates in a two-part series.

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- At the marinas on Las Olas Blvd., the yachts are bigger than a poor kid's dreams.

Thirty years ago, before the "pharmaceuticals" industry (the local name for the drug trade) came to South Florida, the wealth here wasn't nearly as ostentatious.

Neither were the lodgings. Laid out in neat avenues parallel to Ft. Lauderdale's famous beach -- immortalized in the 1960 movie, *Where the Boys Are* -- the city's down-market guest houses offered chalky northerners the basic comforts during their brief vacations: Perfect Ozzie-and-Harriet digs.

The names of these sun-baked getaways have changed as often as their pastel facades. But the Saltaire Hotel is still here, a meticulously clean, white stucco low-rise with a palm-fringed courtyard and the gleaming cars of its clients parked nose-in from Birch St.

When Ontario Tory MPP Garry Guzzo first saw the Saltaire, Birch St. was part of Ft. Lauderdale's "pedophile row," a seedy strip where men with a taste for boys and an aversion to getting caught indulged themselves thousands of kilometres from home.

"I first learned about the strip 30 years ago, when I started bringing my family down here," Guzzo said. "I went out for pizza one night, and I saw the older guys with boys, and the young male prostitutes cruising the street. You didn't have to be a vice cop to figure out what was happening."

Hotel named by alleged victims

One of the alleged victims in the Cornwall case claims that the Saltaire was one of the places "clan members" took children for "molestation, fondling, oral sex and intercourse" between 1957 and 1993.

Enter Guzzo. Three decades later, the MPP for Ottawa-Rideau has gone through nearly as many changes as the Florida neighbourhood where he and his wife, Anne, now own a condo. The father of two girls has been a successful lawyer, a municipal politician, and provincial court judge with 11 years experience in the family court division.

Worried that his own government, unwittingly or otherwise, might be party to a coverup "at least as bizarre and maybe worse than Mt. Cashel," Guzzo took the highly unusual step of writing Premier Mike Harris about a continuing major crime investigation by the



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OPP:

"I am 100% certain in my own mind that the former owners and operators of the motel on the pedophile strip in Ft. Lauderdale, where the complainants stated they were taken on occasion by some of these perpetrators in the 1970s, have not been interrogated, nor have the motel records been requested by the police doing the investigation ...," Guzzo wrote on Sept. 18, 1998. "I am satisfied that something is dreadfully out of joint."

Guzzo's suspicions date back to events on April 8, 1997. On that date, affidavits alleging widespread sex crimes by very prominent people in Cornwall were provided to the Ontario government by Perry Dunlop, the crusading police officer who broke the sex scandal back in 1994. Officials of the attorney general agreed to take the documents, but the solicitor-general's office chose to reroute them.

Complaint against police

Deciding that the material constituted a complaint against the police, bureaucrats shipped the material to the civilian committee that deals with police complaints. The chairman of that committee, Murray Chitra, read only part of the graphic material before boxing it up again and sending it to the Ontario Provincial Police four or five days later.

After talking with Chitra, Guzzo had two questions: Did OPP investigators ever receive the affidavits, and if so, why hadn't they acted on all of the information at their disposal?

As for the copies of the same affidavits received by the attorney general's office, Guzzo was even more troubled. He found out that the AG's copies had been sent to London's then chief of police, Julian Fantino. Guzzo wanted to know why that material ended up with a police officer 600 kms away from Cornwall, instead of with OPP investigators on the ground in the city where the crimes had allegedly been committed?

When Guzzo's letters to Harris recently became public, the MPP found himself in the eye of a political storm. The premier's chief of staff, Ron McLaughlin, "went ballistic," berating Guzzo's staff for creating waves in the delicate run-up period to the widely expected June 8 election. Nor were Harris' cabinet members pleased with Guzzo's denunciation of the Cornwall investigation, code-named Project Truth.

"(Attorney General Charles) Harnick never said anything to me, but he was looking at me pretty hard in the halls," Guzzo recalled.

At 3 p.m. on March 17, Guzzo and the premier's chief-of-staff duked it out on the telephone. McLaughlin accused the government MPP of leaking the letters and "trying to sink the ship." Guzzo listened patiently, then offered McLaughlin some advice: "I said, 'You better go back and read the affidavits, Ron.'"

Guzzo still believes there is a "75% chance" that Harris never saw his letters. The two men had a private meeting, "man-to-man," in December 1998. The premier never raised Guzzo's "urgent concerns" about the OPP's investigation of the so-called Cornwall "pedophile clan."

Two months later, Guzzo wrote to Harris again, warning him that the problem wouldn't go away.

Meanwhile, Guzzo's inquiries were beginning to raise eyebrows in high places.

First, he received a call from OPP Chief Supt. Wayne Frechette. Frechette himself had been called by Bob Hunter, a senior adviser on police matters from Solicitor-General Bob Runciman's office. Hunter wanted Frechette to get to the bottom of Guzzo's written complaint to the premier.

Knowing that the civilian complaints committee had forwarded the boxes of affidavits to the OPP on or about April 13, 1997, Guzzo was surprised when Frechette told him that the force didn't have any affidavits. Guzzo, then in Florida, said that Frechette asked for a meeting with the MPP when he returned to Canada.

"He kept saying 'what affidavits?'" Guzzo said. "He told me he thought I was wrong about the affidavits, but that if the OPP did have them, and they contained what I said they did, it would be a serious problem if no action had been taken."

Contacted by The Sun, Frechette had a different recollection of the telephone call he acknowledged placing to Guzzo:

"I just called him to say that if there was someone else we should be talking to, we'd be glad to do it. If he would tell us what he was interested in, we would do our best to track

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it down if we hadn't already done it."

An assistant deputy minister in the attorney general's office also called Guzzo. According to Guzzo, Murray Segal first told him that the affidavits provided to the government on April 8, 1997, had been turned over to the OPP.

Pressed on whether the AG's office had personally delivered the documents, Segal said that they had not been directly turned over to the OPP. Instead, as Guzzo already knew, they had been sent to Fantino. It would be 15 months before the affidavits in question reached Project Truth investigators.

After Segal assured him that everything was being properly handled, Guzzo asked more questions to see whether he could improve his comfort levels with Project Truth:

"But you didn't get the hotel receipts. You're the chief prosecutor of the province. Speaking lawyer to lawyer, wouldn't you like to have those originals from the Saltaire in Ft. Lauderdale?" Guzzo asked.

Segal promised to make further investigations and get back to him.

Guzzo was astonished that OPP investigators had not made the trip to Ft. Lauderdale, especially since a private investigator had already visited the area and had no trouble getting hotel owners and male prostitutes to identify photos of various people from Cornwall who allegedly used the area for sex parties.

As a judge, Guzzo knew how valuable the original hotel receipts could be. In most court proceedings, a judge would prefer, and perhaps demand, the originals of any documented evidence alleging criminal activity. More to the point, Guzzo had up close and personal knowledge of the potential evidence.

Last year while on vacation, Guzzo reviewed the original hotel receipts which had been provided to a retired Ft. Lauderdale policeman by an intermediary. Guzzo claims that some of the names he saw on the hotel receipts matched the names of alleged pedophiles named in the affidavits given to the government.

The question was simple: Why hadn't the OPP chased down those original receipts after the government received the abuse affidavits back in 1997?

"One reason you don't pick up the original receipts is that you have no intention of going to court," Guzzo wryly observed.

Contacted by The Sun, Segal said he preferred not to talk about his conversation with Guzzo.

Segal did say that he was "satisfied" that the material was in the hands of the authorities from "two sources," and that the OPP had proceeded in a "thorough and diligent" manner. On March 13, at 7:45 p.m., Segal had left a message to that effect on Guzzo's Ottawa office telephone, advising him that if he had any further questions about Project Truth, he should call the OPP.

"I was rather surprised that someone in the AG's department would invite me to call the police directly. I'm a trained lawyer and judge. I know the rules."

Instead, Guzzo faxed Segal more questions. Was the ADM saying that the OPP had the documents now, or had had them for a lengthy period of time? If so, for how long? And exactly what did the ADM mean by "authorities," the OPP or some other police force?

Guzzo came by his concern for the Cornwall pedophile scandal honestly. While still on the bench, he occasionally served as a substitute judge in Cornwall. A devout Catholic with excellent connections in the city's religious community, he received accounts of a coverup in the Cornwall abuse case from people he trusted.

Guzzo also had a personal involvement in the affair that would be hard for anyone to forget:

'Excellent reputation'

"As a judge on the family court, I probably handed over kids to the care of a guy named Ken Seguin. At the time, he had an excellent reputation as a probation officer. I had no idea that he was one of the pedophiles who used these 'bad boys' at the sex parties."

(Seguin, who was high on the OPP's potential perpetrator list, committed suicide on Nov. 24, 1993, without ever being charged.)

Since then, Guzzo has quietly made it his business to examine evidence and information that other people bring to him unsolicited. In the course of this "passive" information

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gathering, he has met with a number of sexual-assault victims, including a man who himself later became a pedophile and is ready to go to jail for it.

Standing in the pro shop of a Ft. Lauderdale golf-club, Guzzo readily admitted that he probably hasn't done himself much internal good with his outspoken criticism of Project Truth. But don't expect him to pull in his horns any time soon.

"They don't like to hear it, but as I told the premier in my February letter, this isn't going away. Remember, there's a retired judge and policeman in our caucus, and a few others who won't just let it drop. A few judges have contacted me to express surprise at what I've done. Frankly, they're worried that I haven't done enough."

In part two of our series, the OPP answers its critics. Giving their first media interview from Project Truth's Cornwall headquarters, detectives speak with Michael Harris about their lengthy investigation. Were investigators deprived of vital information? Did the OPP drag its feet interviewing key witnesses? Have socially prominent suspects been ignored? Has there been a coverup to protect powerful pedophiles who might still be active in Cornwall. Tomorrow in The Sun, Working the Shadows in Salem: The Police Perspective.

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