

November 1, 2012

To: Toronto Star Letters Editor

Editor:

Congratulations for Diane Zlomislic's powerful article with photos of Ashley Smith. ("Shocking Ashley Smith video revealed," Nov.1,2012).

It's about time the public saw these horrific videos the "correctional" system, especially the self-serving guards union, tried to cover up and hide from public view at the current inquest. This is a good example of the prison system's inhuman and degrading social control policy that authorizes or condones torture against "noncompliant" prisoners. Ashley was never "mentally ill", a common myth, but somewhat rebellious, struggling to assert her individuality and autonomy for which she paid with her life. A damn tragedy, triggered by being sentenced to jail when she was 14 or 15 for "throwing crab apples" at a postal worker! The prison videos and other evidence clearly show that Ashley was severely and repeatedly assaulted by guards and supervisors, further mistreated and forcibly drugged by doctors who incompetently and negligently prescribed brain-damaging neuroleptics ("antipsychotics"). All prison staff who "treated" Ashley willfully inflicted cruel, degrading & inhuman punishment or torture against her, a vulnerable adolescent woman, for months or years up to October 2007 when she died. They all should be criminally charged. All were complicit in driving her to suicide, some guards watched her hang herself - citing a "management" policy about non-interference an excuse(!) - at the Grand Valley Prison for Women in Kitchener-Waterloo.

There are undoubtedly many other Ashley Smiths in the Canadian "correctional" and "mental health" systems.

Instead of prisons, it's time governments provided urgently needed crisis centres and affordable housing for youth struggling with human crises in their lives.

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