

The Last Will and Testament of A. T. Renouf
Markham, Ontario
Oct. 16, 1995

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Last Friday (13-October) my bank account was garnished. I was left with a total of \$00.43 in the bank.

At this time I have rent and bills to pay which would come to somewhere approaching \$1500 to \$1800. Since my last pay was direct deposited on Friday I now have no way of supporting myself. I have no money for food or for gas for my car to enable me to work. My employer also tells me that they will only pay me by direct deposit. I therefore no longer have a job, since the money would not reach me. I have tried talking to the Family Support people at 1916 Dundas St. E. their answer was: - "we have a court order," repeated several times. I have tried talking to the welfare people in Markham, since I earned over \$520.00 in the last month I am not eligible for assistance.

I have had no contact with my daughter in approx. 4 years. I do not even know if she is alive and well. I have tried to keep her informed of my current telephone number but she has never bothered to call.

I have no family and no friends, very little food, no viable job and very poor future prospects. I have therefore decided that there is no further point in continuing my life. It is my intention to drive to a secluded area, near my home, feed the car exhaust into the car, take some sleeping pills and use the remaining gas in the car to end my life.

I would have preferred to die with more dignity.

It is my last will and testament that this letter be published for all to see and read.

Signed,
A.T. Renouf

A Suicide Remembered

Rev. Alan Stewart

The letter that Andrew Renouf left before he ended his life on October 17, 1995, was addressed: "To Whom It May Concern".

We gather here today, whether we knew him or not, because we are concerned, deeply concerned about the pain he experienced and the issues that he brought to our attention as women and men in a civilized society.

his inheritance as he passed it on, in this letter. As Andrew was a man, I will speak first about what the letter may point to in terms of those of us who are men; what we can glean from Andrew; what is his legacy for us?

In this letter, we are either Andrew, or there is an Andrew who is our acquaintance, our friend, our brother, our co-worker. We are reminded that four times as many men kill themselves as do women.

can and do feel as deeply and as profoundly as any woman. Andrew mentions that he has not seen his daughter in approximately four years. While I am not privy to the intimacy issues of the Renouf family, I can say that fathers naturally tend to love their children. A mother's or father's relationship with their child is separately authentic from their relationship with each other. I can say that children need the love of both their father and their mother. The access that mother and father have with their children, aside from obvious abuse, should not be determined by the issues that the mother and the father have with each other. Each parent can say that we are having problems with each other, but we both love you very much. We know that children feel guilty about a marriage break-up and they need to know that both parents love them. It takes years to recover from taking sides, and that same taking sides sabotages future relationships when those children become adults. Society says that men are producers; they bring home the bread. Andrew's letter screams to us that he cannot produce without limit. There is a limit to what a man can produce. There is a limit to what a man can take. If we, as a society, teach boys that to be a man is to control, and then, as in Andrew's case, we take all of that control away to the point that the only way for him to keep any control is to stop the wage garnishee, then by definition, we oblige him to make that choice. Andrew mentions two government agencies: Family Support Services and Welfare. One garnishees his wages, the other tells him that he still really has the money the other agency took away. It is the classic case of the right hand not letting the left hand know what it is doing. What this did to Andrew is profoundly heinous in an age of computerization, fax machines and telephones.

For Welfare to say that he made more than \$520 the month before is not true. It is a lie. Not only is it a lie, but the Family Support agency had all the documentation to prove to the Welfare people that Andrew Renouf did not have any of the money he had worked for during the previous month. The Family Support Services, in reality, did not support the Renouf family.

The policies of the Welfare Office and the Family Support agency were contributing factors in the destruction of the Renouf family. Fathers are part of the family unit. Husbands are part of the family unit. You may listen to what I am saying and say that there are many issues here: the issue of child support the issue of gender discrimination the issue of alimony marriage breakdown What I would like to say to you is that there are no such things as issues, there are only people, flesh and blood men, women, and children.

If our attitudes and agencies do not work to support the health of women and men and children, then we must change and adapt our attitudes and agencies so that they do help all people. The terrible reality of this story is that everyone lost. a daughter lost her father an ex-wife lost her support society lost a good and productive member and Andrew lost the most precious thing: his life. Surely a system that makes everyone a loser has got to be wrong. The most radical thing I have to say is that the solutions to life's difficulties need a partnership that includes both men and women. We need both sides to achieve the full equation and we need to have the same rules and the same attitudes for both men and women.

There is a place in Los Angeles where there is a small mountain in the middle of an urban area. There used to be an observatory there before the city lights made it impossible to see the stars. It is a place where lovers go to park. It is also a place where people go to commit suicide. One evening, a police car drove up the winding road, just to see a young man climbing over the rail to jump off and commit suicide. The first policeman dashed to grab him, but he was too late to get a good hold on him and keep his balance without falling over the cliff himself. There was a moment when it looked like both of them were going to fall to their deaths. By then, the second policeman was able to get around the car and grab the first policeman and pull them both to safety. The first policeman was nearly killed. He was later asked, "Why did you do this? Why

did you risk your life, your future, losing your family and everything for a total stranger, a man you didn't even know?" He replied that when he touched him, he "became" the other man. To let go and let him die would have been like losing himself. He would not have been able to face himself the next day. He became the other man.

So, we are more than our brother's keeper. We are our brother; our brother's and our sister's welfare is directly linked to our own. When Andrew died, part of us died with him, men and women alike. May God give us the grace to reach out in compassion for each other, to attend to each other's pain, that we might all live in mutual trust, esteem and love.

Rev. Alan Stewart,
Westview Presbyterian Church,
233 Westview Blvd.,
Toronto,
ON. (416) 759-8531