



DOWNLOAD SONGS FOR FREE!

Get Canadian artists at no charge at theprovince.com **ENTERTAINMENT B1**



The Province

FINAL EDITION

WEATHER
Wet, icy
C16

\$1.25 minimum
in outlying areas

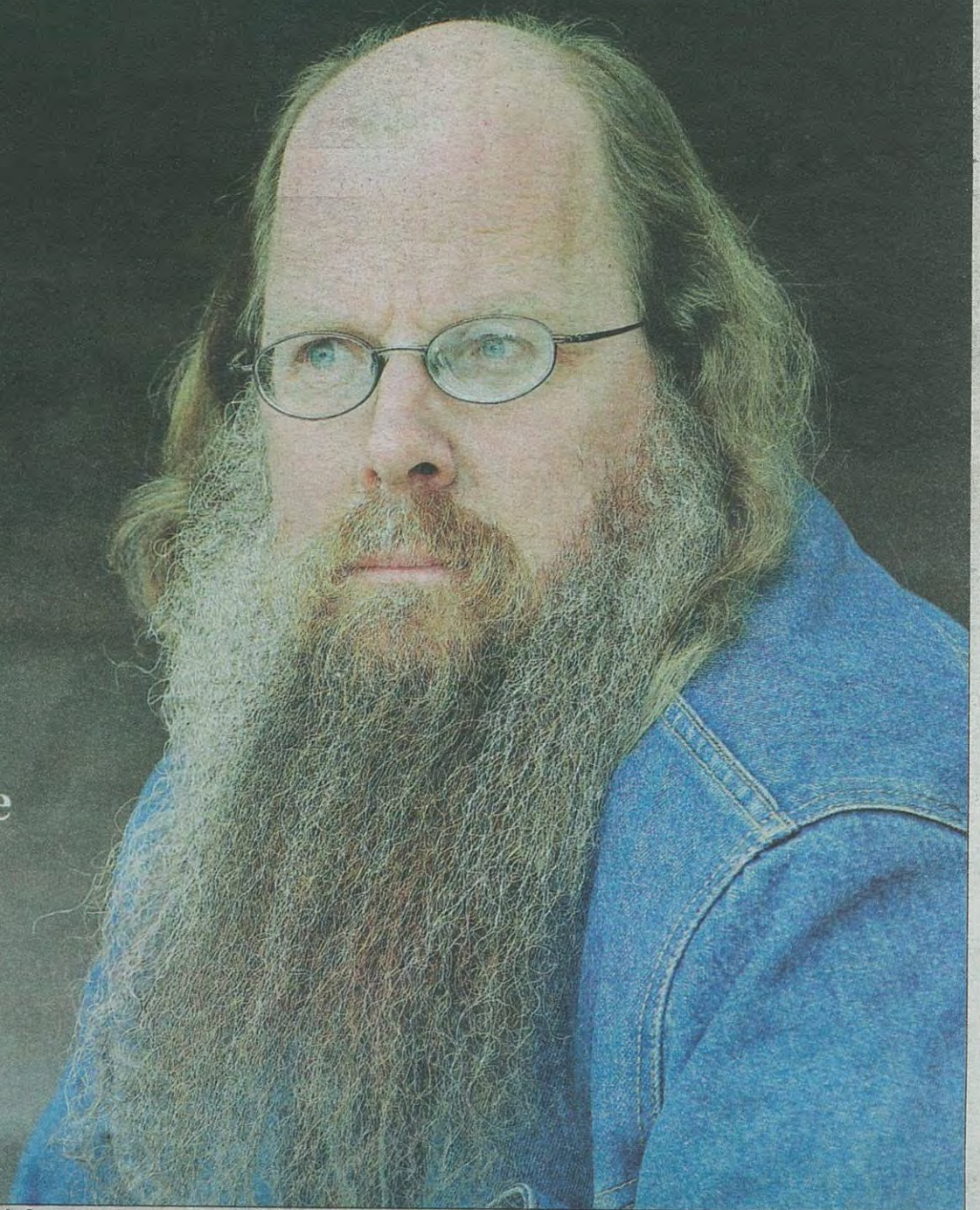
\$1.00 PLUS
GST

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009 | VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA | WWW.THEPROVINCE.COM | A DIVISION OF CANWEST PUBLISHING INC.

OUT OF LUCK

WOODLANDS: Victim of Woodlands School abuse misses B.C. government compensation cutoff date by a mere 10 days

NEWS A3



Bill McArthur, who suffered emotional, sexual and physical abuse at Woodlands from age five, says he lost sight in one eye from institutional neglect. LES BAZSO - THE PROVINCE

VANCOUVER 3, L.A. 1:

Kings dethroned at the Garage

SPORTS A45-48



Bill McArthur suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse at Woodlands from the time he was five. He won't be compensated. LES BAZSO — THE PROVINCE

Compensation for abuse denied

'ARBITRARY' CUTOFF: Bill McArthur, abused until age 14, fled 10 days too early

BY SUZANNE FOURNIER
STAFF REPORTER

To the B.C. government, it doesn't matter that Bill McArthur was "beaten to a pudding on a regular basis" or locked outside naked at the age of six at Woodlands School — he will not get a cent of government compensation.

McArthur was sent to Woodlands, the notorious New Westminster "school" that was a dumping ground for "difficult" children, when he was five years old in 1964. After years of harrowing physical, sexual and emotional abuse, he fled at age 14 in July 1974, just 10 days before the Aug. 1, 1974, cutoff for compensation.

"It may be legally right, but it is totally morally bankrupt and reprehensible that people like me should be denied compensation," said McArthur, who says he was left blind in one eye due to a treatable eye disease neglected at Woodlands.

He is among about 500 school sur-

vivors who will get nothing for their pain.

McArthur said he was repeatedly sexually abused by a male staff member who was known to be a serial abuser.

"We were only children and we could not defend ourselves — the provincial government wrapped its arms around us and told us they could be our parents, but they failed miserably, and we suffered terribly as a result," said McArthur, who works in a warehouse. "I can't have lasting relationships. I've had no therapy."

David Klein, lawyer for the Woodland survivors, said it's wrong that some will be left out of the settlement.

"It's really shocking that the provincial government could choose to ignore this very dark chapter in our history and refuse to compensate victims who were affected before 1974," said Klein.

B.C. Attorney-General Mike de Jong Monday announced a proposed settlement to a class-action lawsuit brought by former residents of Wood-

lands, in which compensation will be doled out to some survivors if the B.C. Supreme Court approves the deal.

"It's estimated there are about 1,100 former residents who suffered sexual, physical or psychological abuse or injury on or after Aug. 1, 1974," said Klein, who said each claim would be worth between \$3,000 and \$150,000 per person.

"It is totally morally bankrupt and reprehensible that people like me should be denied compensation."

— Bill McArthur, former Woodlands student

"But it's shocking that another 500 people will be excluded from any compensation," said Klein. "On ethical and compassionate grounds, Premier [Gordon] Campbell and his cabinet can

choose to ignore that date."

Klein noted that there is "considerable" precedent for both federal and provincial governments to set aside "arbitrary" cutoff dates, as in the federal compensation to victims of residential schools and a tainted national blood supply, as well as the Alberta government's compensation to women who were forcibly sterilized.

Bob Geddes, 73, who was sent to Woodlands at the age of 16 in 1952 "because I had too many epileptic seizures," says he was "terribly, terribly beaten. We all were at that place. The government knows who was in that place, and they should call them all up and let us all get compensation."

But Geddes, who is confined to a wheelchair partly because of the neglect and physical abuse at Woodlands, is not eligible for compensation.

DeJong said he couldn't comment because the case is "before the courts." The school closed in 1996.

sfournier@theprovince.com

School first was insane asylum

Woodlands School, once a complex of forbidding buildings in New Westminster, was opened in 1886 as an insane asylum and a home for the mentally disabled, but it became a notorious dumping-ground for neglected, abandoned or "difficult" children.

By the time the school closed in 1996, reports of horrific physical and sexual abuse of children had become so routine that a 2001 B.C. ombudsman's report found the abuse was "systemic" and included beatings, burnings, forced labour and locking up children outside or below ground in freezing temperatures. The report cited deaths.

The B.C. government called the ombudsman's report "flawed" and for years fought compensation to victims, until announcing on Monday a proposed settlement.

It's believed about 1,100 survivors will apply for compensation, as many other residents have died or are not mentally or physically able to file claims.

In 1996, Victoria closed Woodlands and sold the land to developers, who saved the centre block and erected condominiums.

— Suzanne Fournier

More on the web

Should the government compensate all victims? To comment, go to www.theprovince.com