

# Martha's Monthly

July 2005

## Martha's away and Henry is at play

*Editor's note:*

*Martha's on a brief vacation this month so Henry decided to write this month's Monthly for her. It seems that summer brings out a playful attitude from Henry. The Alberta government also used the warm, summer months to suddenly make a change to the Employment Standards that will now allow 12 and 13 year olds to work in restaurants. Now children can go from working at their elementary school's School Patrol straight into working at their local McDonald's. This new rule came into [effect June 3, 2005](#) but did not even warrant a news release from the Minister of Human Resources. Weren't they proud of their decision?? Henry's thoughts follow:*

Greetings people. It's not Martha. It's me, Henry. Martha's been visiting the relations in Saskatchewan for the past few days. Her sister's sick. She got herself a bad case of the shingles. I'm laid up too. My hip's acting up again. Still don't know when that operation is. Anyway, turns out her sister's shingles trump my bum hip, and Martha picked up and went. Now, the TV keeps me company at night. I like the quiz shows, myself, and I can actually watch them now. You see, I can't when Martha's around: she doesn't like the quizzes, or the stories even, imagine that - all she likes to watch is the news, then she gets all fired up. Let me give you a for instance. For instance, the other day, she was watching something on the CBC, and it was about some law in Alberta being changed that would let kids as young as twelve be allowed to work in restaurants. Let me tell you, smoke was coming out of her ears. Well, for the life of me, I couldn't see why Martha got so worked up about *that*. And now that she's gone, I got to thinking more about it, and because I've watched what she does when she gets all worked up and thinking, I've decided to do likewise. So, I'm writing this on her computer and I'm sending it to you people, like she does, don't know why. Whoever wants to read it, go right ahead. Pass it on if you like, if you know how to pass things like this on. I sure don't.

Here goes...

What Mr. Klein and his good people want to do is a *modest proposal*, really. Getting twelve-year-old kids to work in restaurants seems to be a good start as far as I'm concerned. There are too many kids in this province who are a burden to their poor parents, just playing in parks all day, hanging out in malls, going to school ten months of the year to make them believe they're smarter than the rest of us - losing all that earning potential in the meantime. That's got to stop. And it would be a way of making all these kids beneficial to society. I read somewhere - in the Readers' Digest, I think - that in England almost two hundred years ago, kids were allowed to work in factories. They were in great demand, actually, because they were smaller than regular people and had small hands, and they could reach way into the machinery and fix things that regular size people couldn't. So, they *must* have been well paid, and I can just imagine the benefits packages they got: teeth, eyes, fingers... I'm sure that there are jobs in

restaurants that only little kids can do too, like scraping gum from underneath tables - the smaller the better for that one -, checking for gas leaks in crawl spaces, and really, really cleaning the inside of greasy ovens by climbing inside them. That would be beneficial to society as a whole too, because all that extra grease on food would be gone and everyone would have lower cholesterol. Kids in restaurants could also solve part of our garbage problem: I know my grandkids aren't fussy eaters, they eat food right off the floor sometimes, even when it's not theirs, so why not let them eat table scraps as part of their wages. I really can't see why Martha thinks this is such a big deal. I think kids should be allowed to work anywhere, not just in restaurants. It's all a part of growing up. The sooner they realize what makes the world go around the better. For goodness' sake, in many countries, kids are allowed to make shoes and clothes for big companies to sell to us over here. They learn very early in life the value of an honest day's work. Sometimes, these kids work right alongside their parents, so it keeps families together, which is very nice too. Nowadays, families don't do enough together anymore. They complain about not having "quality time." In some places, kids are even allowed to do the greatest thing of all - to fight and die for their country. They contribute a lot to society and their parents must be so proud. Sure, working in restaurants isn't as glorious as that, but it is still a way for kids to participate in something greater than themselves, to be a small part of a bigger, more important system, or scheme - or something like that. Martha always says to "think globally, act locally," and I think this is what she must mean.

Well, that's all I have to tell you, whoever you are. I could go on, but I'm sure you see my point. Mr. Klein and his good people should be congratulated for taking such a leadership role on this. They rushed right ahead and they didn't even waste taxpayers' money by having a silly old debate in the silly old Legislature. That's what I call a real take-charge, "can-do" attitude. And *that's* what this good province is all about. You people should all write your elected representatives and tell them how great you think Mr. Klein's modest proposal is.

It's getting late. It's *Jeopardy* now, and I have to watch it because I may not get to watch it next week. I think Alex Trebek is a good-looking fellow, but he should never have shaved his moustache. I really liked him when he had that full head of hair too, like when he hosted *Stars on Ice*... Which reminds me, I have to remember to take out a casserole tonight, otherwise I'll be eating beans right out of the can again tomorrow.

Henry

**If you think 12 year olds should be playing in parks instead of working at restaurants then send a letter to Premier Klein at [premier@gov.ab.ca](mailto:premier@gov.ab.ca), Minister of Human Resources Mike Cardinal at [donna.ballard@gov.ab.ca](mailto:donna.ballard@gov.ab.ca), Opposition leader Kevin Taft at [edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca), Liberal HRE critic Dan Backs at [edmonton.manning@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:edmonton.manning@assembly.ab.ca), NDP leader Brian Mason at [alison.crawford@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:alison.crawford@assembly.ab.ca), NDP Labour critic Ray Martin at [edmonton.beverlyclareview@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:edmonton.beverlyclareview@assembly.ab.ca) and back to us at [marthasmnthly@yahoo.ca](mailto:marthasmnthly@yahoo.ca)**

July 8, 2005

Dear Premier Klein:

The Marthas of this province were stunned this month to hear that the Director of Employment Standards approved restaurants as an acceptable worksite for 12 and 13 year olds. I am writing to you to ask for your intervention in this unacceptable situation.

I do not believe that young adolescents of 12 and 13 should be holding employment in the food service industry. I believe that these young people need to be given the opportunity to **not** be employed and to focus on their education and their leisure. If there is a shortage of adults to work in these sites then the market needs to respond by raising wages so that adults will take these positions. Bringing children into adult worksites is not the proper response to a shortfall of employees.

My biggest concern with this move is that young people are being seen as employees and consumers, rather than as growing, maturing citizens. If we only want consumers then we just need to teach them to work, buy, get in debt, and work some more. But we do not want to create consumers; we want to create citizens. Citizens need to think, volunteer, participate, discuss, read, engage, create, and to do nothing at all sometimes. Twelve and thirteen year olds will have plenty of time to work and consume in their future. They need time now to do nothing at all.

Please remove this change to the Employment Standards immediately.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your address