

MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2007

## Orato's big idea

At first, I shared the skepticism of my colleagues when I heard that Orato had hired two former Vancouver sex trade workers to cover the Pickton trial.

Was it just a sensationalist grab for media attention on the part of the upstart citizen journalism website?

Indeed, the site's "Serial Killer Trial" graphic is fit for Fox News, although even they might raise eyebrows at its libelous implications.

But Orato's ethic of letting real people tell their own stories is providing a much-needed antidote to the largely sterile mainstream press coverage of the unfolding trial (a notable recent exception is Robert Matas' thoughtful piece in the *Globe and Mail*).

For those who aren't in the courtroom day in and day out, the case is an increasingly abstract and buried part of daily news. Orato's correspondents give a personal, often rambling, but ultimately human perspective on what its like to sit through the trial.

"If you've wondered why this case is taking so long it's because the pig pen, slaughterhouse, doors, walls, freezers et cetera were all separated and divided by investigators into smaller grids in order to swab each and every inch of these items. The grids are 1"x1" to 3"x3", " writes Pauline VanKoll in "Swab by Swab."


"In reality, it is not really like the sensational quotes you hear on the news. Even the astronomical numbers and macabre finding of body parts all come out in a very factual non-sensational kind of way. Reporters are usually there all day long, and walk out with only a small handful of newsworthy bits. That is a lot of hours of sitting in a chair. I am off to put the kiddos to bed. Back to court for me tomorrow and I will write soon," writes Trisha Baptie in a recent recap of the trial so far.

I'm impressed by the honesty of these women, by their tenacity -- they are writing at least once a week -- and by the way they intertwine issues like racism and the plight of sex workers in their coverage.

It's not the first place I'd look for breaking news. But mainstream media could learn something from Orato's use of citizen journalism and personal reflection to make sense out of such an incomprehensible case.

Posted by Catherine at 8:50 PM

**1 comments:**

 Trisha.... said...

Hello,  
It's Trisha Baptie here again and I just wanted to point out that me and Pauline were not "hired" we receive no wage from www.Orato.com.

I have daycare covered so I can attend daily and we have our meals covered and that is it. I am doing it because I thought it was and is an amazing opportunity, not because I would receive a paycheck.