

State temperance leader has dream of dry country

By Patty Pryor

There is a place in Canada called Prince Edward Island, where the abolition of alcohol in 1900 has been upheld ever since.

That is Helen Patzel's dream for this country. Patzel is the state president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a national organization which has existed for nearly 107 years.

Prince Edward Island, with a population of 90,000, has 13 policemen, no penitentiary, virtually no unemployment and very few divorce cases, Patzel said.

Furthermore, she said, there have been no reported cases of family desertion, wife abuse or child neglect since 1957, and during some of those years, there were only two automobile deaths for every 1,000 automobiles owned.

"We'd like to see prohibition, because it's the only real answer," the 70-year-old Patzel said.

She said alcohol's addictive qualities make it nearly impossible to drink responsibly or only moderately.

"Our bodies are so constructed that it takes increasingly higher levels to reach the same state," she said.

Alcohol is responsible

The flow of alcohol is chiefly responsible for many of society's ills, she said.

Alcohol is responsible, she said, for the majority of incarcerations, child abuse cases and instances of mental retardation, which is believed to result from drinking during pregnancy.

The union also works against drug and gambling-related issues and "anything that hurts the family," Patzel said, but she considers alcohol the main source of most problems.

"There's a whole building of kids at the Lincoln Regional Center (where Patzel worked for 14 years) who started out on beer, and then progressed onto harder things," she said.

Patzel also worked for a time at Bryan Memorial Hospital as an RN supervisor,

where she became involved with the WCTU in 1964.

She recalled the story of a premature baby born at the hospital who went home on a Tuesday, but was brought back in on the following Saturday, after the parents' car was involved in a head-on collision with a drunk driver.

The baby, whose skull was crushed, lived for three hours.

After sitting with the baby during those hours, Patzel, who has four children, nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild, said she wondered if anyone was doing anything about drunk drivers.

It was at this time that a fellow nurse told her of a neighbor who was involved in an organization, WCTU, that was doing something about it.

Education is a target

Patzel went to the WCTU world convention in Chicago that year with the neighbor woman, and has been involved ever since.

One of the prime targets for WCTU work is education, she said.

"We furnish films to schools through the State Health Department Library," she said. "All the school has to pay for is the return postage."

Otherwise, Patzel said, she spends the majority of her time in the legislature, lobbying on behalf of the WCTU's interests.

"I go to the hearings, and follow through on the (senators) who are not voting the way we think they should," she said. "It involves a lot of correspondence."

The amount of time she devotes to lobbying efforts depends on the number of proposed bills that concern the WCTU, she said, adding that there were about 10 such bills this past legislative season.

Among these bills was LBI29, which proposed to levy a higher tax on liquor to help pay for alcohol treatment programs.

"If a cigarette tax built the Devaney Sports Center," she added, "an alcohol tax can just as well build the new jail."

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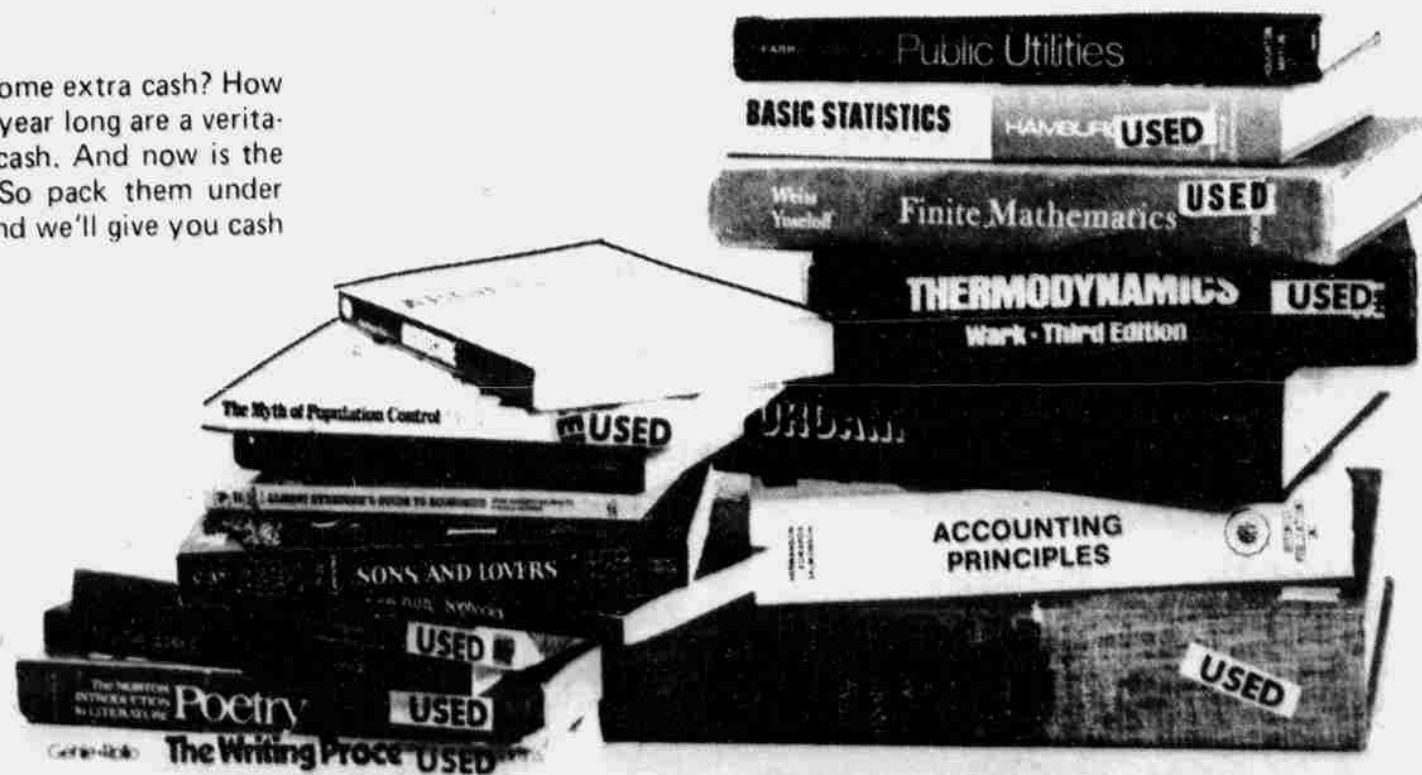
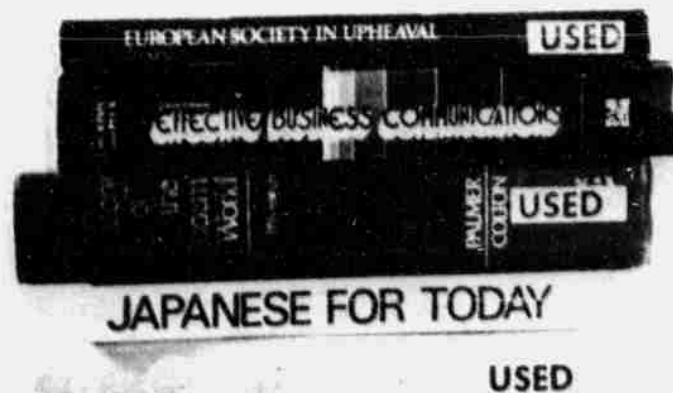
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Helen Patzel

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