

Teen striker gets column-writing job

For duration of city strike Tamie Dolny, 16, to write for the Star

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After my article, "My name is Tamie. I'm 16. And I'm on strike," appeared in the *Star* and thestar.com yesterday, I was surprised by the response. The article's purpose was to provide a different perspective on the strike, a striker's opinion. I wrote it to generate not sympathy for us but understanding.



Getting garbage out of Chinatown As the city strike continues, the Toronto Chinatown Business Improvement Area is providing weekly garbage removal for members. Video by Randy Risling. (July 15, 2009)

I soon learned, after reading the comments on thestar.com, that I was either the worst journalist alive or a decent one. Either a childish teenager who should be strictly disciplined by her lax parents, or just a girl with an opinion.

I was, to be honest with you, thrilled that more than 200 people cared enough to stroke or, more often, poke at my ego. I enjoyed reading every well-placed stab.

I believe in freedom of speech as much as any teenager does. As a group of individuals, we are infamous for our Facebook blabbing and complete lack of discipline when informing others of our personal lives. If you ever decide to comment on me, never censor yourself. State your true opinion – why be someone you're not?

However, I feel inclined to clear up a few rampant rumours.

My father, a manager for the City of Toronto, does not practise nepotism and did not, under any circumstances, get me a job with the city. I applied for work as a wading pool attendant two summers ago and have worked hard to get good performance reviews to rise to the position of instructor guard this summer – without any help from him. In addition, I've been part of CUPE Local 79 for more than two years.

I am not experiencing "Stockholm syndrome" in supporting my union. Nor am I showing signs of loyalty to some anonymous hostage-taker. After completing more than 300 hours of volunteer service, I've realized the true



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

Tamie Dolny, outside her Old Mill home, is on strike with CUPE instead of working as a lifeguard. Her father works as a manager for the City of Toronto. (July 14, 2009)

meaning of sympathy, kindness and consolation: understanding.

My opinions are my own. I have not been brainwashed by the union or my parents. The article published was in my own words, plain and simple.

I also file my income tax return, in case anyone cares, although, to be honest, I get all the money back because of my minuscule yearly income. Some commenters at thestar.com thought I wasn't entitled to an opinion because I don't pay property tax. Does that mean people who rent shouldn't have views either? I also do my own laundry, thank you very much.

I may not be part of the "real world" yet, but I certainly have a pulse. I may not be technically an adult, and so you may all stigmatize me as a naive and stupid teen with little right to talk about "adult" issues. But maybe you should try to be a bit more open. Don't dismiss my arguments merely because you consider yourself to be better and more experienced than me just because you're older. Don't you remember what it's like to be 16? Sixteen-year-olds have opinions, too, sometimes carefully thought-out ones.

Most important, many commenters claimed firefighters and police officers were far more important than lowly, uneducated and stupid garbage workers/child-care staff, and deserve their 3 per cent annual pay raise. I do not think they don't deserve it by any means.

But consider this: If a city councillor making approximately \$97,000 receives a 2.4 per cent raise, their pay goes up by \$2,328. If a senior-level police officer makes \$90,000 and gets a 3 per cent pay raise, the increase is \$2,700. If a child-care worker making approximately \$40,000 receives a 1 per cent increase (as offered), the pay rises by \$400.

Take from that what you will.

Second, if garbage workers and child-care staff are so unimportant and unnecessary, why is the strike causing so many problems? Why is the city beginning to lose tourist dollars, and why is there an outcry from many citizens about the piles of garbage and lack of daycare? Why then, when CUPE locals 79 and 416 exercise their right to go on strike, does the international reputation of our city slide?

I know I have an unpopular opinion, and I really hope I haven't offended anyone. I look forward to hearing from you – it's invigorating to hear adults express what's really on their minds.

In other words, bring it on.