

# Prelude to a child's tragic death

BY CHERYL MISTELBACHER

"Could the life of one child have been saved and the lives of five others been improved if the Children's Aid Society had acted sooner?"

This is the question that Mrs. Carol Simone keeps asking herself after the drowning on Monday of her neighbor's child, Betty Lowder, aged 12.

The drowning is the final tragedy to occur before the children were removed yesterday from the custody of their mother and from an existence that Carol Simone describes as "unbelievable."

Mrs. Simone, of Graham Sideroad in Holland Marsh, lives less than two thousand feet from the scene of the drowning and has been concerned about the welfare of Betty Lowder and her five sisters and brothers since shortly after they moved into the home across the street from her in September.

Lack of supervision, poor food and clothing, the children playing with oil and matches, poor school attendance, and all the children smoking (including the three-year-old); all of these things made Carol Simone angry enough to call the Public Health Unit, the local school board, and the York Regional Children's Aid Society.

The Lowder children, ranging in age from three to 14, have been left on their own almost every weekend and twice have been left unattended for periods of two weeks, says Mrs. Simone. They were alone in the care of the 14-year-old the weekend the drowning occurred.

Mrs. Eleanor Lowder, the mother of the children, and her common-law husband, Archie Souls, left on Wednesday to spend the weekend in Picton.

"The children, when they were alone, never seemed to have enough food", says Mrs. Simone "They were always borrowing from me and all the neighbors"

Mrs. Simone says she has been in the house several times when there was no food at all in the place

The house has been described as little more than a shack with only a couple of rooms and two televisions but no telephone. The plumbing in the house has not been in working condition for over two weeks

When Mrs. Simone noticed that the children were missing school more often than they were attending, but were still outside playing, she called both the local public school and the school board.

Truant officers were sent over but with little noticeable success.

Mrs. Simone says that the Public Health nurse has been visiting the home for several months. She wonders how the nurse could leave the children in such conditions without notifying the Children's Aid Society

The thing that bothers Mrs. Simone the

most is the lack of responsibility on the part of the mother. Even when Mrs. Lowder was at home, the children would make gasoline bon-fires, have picnics in the middle of the road and go swimming in the canal, where none of the other local children were allowed to swim and where their own father had drowned less than two years before

Mrs. Simone has called the Children's Aid Society several times over the last few months and was told they would investigate. They also told her they would have to see for themselves any hardship done to the children

The York Regional Children's Aid Society admitted that they had had "third party complaints" but that no action had been taken as yet.

If the Children's Aid Society had investigated the original complaints, would those children have been living in slum conditions for all those months and would little Betty Lowder still be alive today?

These are the questions of the concerned neighbors who saw these children every day.

