

DOCUMENTARY » CONFESSIONS OF AN INNOCENT MAN

# Tale of torture makes for a powerful program



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Saudi Arabia, we're told, holds the world's largest oil reserves. U.S. President George W. Bush was there the other day, being chummy with King Abdullah, arranging for the Saudis to get high-tech arms technology and talking about oil prices.

Not a harsh word was spoken, it seems. Hardly anyone says a harsh word about Saudi Arabia. And yet, it's a place apart. In fact if you go online searching for info about "human rights" in the country, you'll find the U.S. State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights

Practices, and this about Saudi Arabia: "The government's human-rights record remained poor overall with continuing serious problems, despite some progress.

"The following human rights problems were reported: 1) no right to change the government, 2) infliction of severe pain by judicially sanctioned corporal punishments, 3) beatings and other abuses, 4) arbitrary arrest, 5) incommunicado detention, 6) denial of fair public trials, 7) exemption from the rule of law for some individuals and lack of judicial independence, 8) political prisoners, 9) infringement of privacy rights, 10) significant restriction of civil liberties - freedoms of speech and press, assembly, association, and movement."

That's just 10 on a list of 15. In the story of what happened to William Sampson, Canada got a glimpse of the visceral reality behind that list,

a glimpse we initially didn't want to see. Falsely accused of a bombing that killed a British man, imprisoned and sentenced to death, Sampson went through a horrific experience that took a long time to come to light.

**Confessions of an Innocent Man** (Saturday, CTV, 7 p.m.) is Sampson telling his story to the camera, describing in grim detail what happened to him. Today, Sampson lives in a remote part of England, still struggling to come to terms with the experience. This is very powerful television. Sampson acknowledges that he was not an easy man to like when he went to Saudi Arabia, nor is he now. Blunt and irascible, he went to Saudi Arabia to make money and lived the life of many expats there, breaking laws about alcohol and feeling exempt from those laws. When Sampson appeared on TV, confessing to his crimes, most Canadians

shrugged. We knew little about the situation inside Saudi Arabia. It was only much later that we discovered Sampson had been tortured and held in solitary confinement while diplomats dithered over his case.

This program, made by David Paperny, pulls together the many threads of Sampson's story. We hear Canadian government officials, journalists and Sampson's father, as well as the other expats who were held and tortured. Mostly, however, it is Sampson himself speaking. His description of torture and rape in prison is deeply disturbing. His rage is unforgettable. His description of how he developed mental strength to survive is extraordinary. But it is the appalling suffering that stays with the viewer, as it should.

**MVP** (Friday, CBC, 9 p.m.) is as nifty in its second episode as it was in its first. What do NHL players do in their copious free time? Well, on this

## Also airing this weekend

**Is America Ready for a Black President?** (Sunday, *NewsWorld*, 4 p.m., 8 p.m.) is a last-minute addition to the CBC schedule. It's a BBC *Panorama* program about Barack Obama. Made last fall, it has reporter Hilary Andersson assessing the presidential credentials of the Democratic candidate, mainly in the context of race relations. This is a very British approach to the subject - skeptical about U.S. politics and transfixed by what it sees as ingrained prejudice. It is also deeply curious about Obama's appeal to whites. The central question, it seems, is this: "Why is Obama a hit in the well-heeled white suburbs of the United States?" It is keenly skeptical about those well-heeled whites. Obama is dreaming of an America that does not exist, according to the BBC reporter.

» J.D.

show, two of them, Damon (Peter Miller) and Gabe (Lucas Bryant), engage in three-way sex with a female fan. Charges are laid when the woman in question says she was raped by Damon. His arrest and trial have disastrous consequences on Gabe's relationship with Connie (Kristin Booth). You see, Connie thought Gabe was a nice guy. If you haven't already, check it out this mad, entertaining take on behind-the-scenes life in the NHL.

**Test the Nation** (Sunday, CBC, 8 p.m.) is back. Hosts Wendy Mesley and Brent Bambury will, they say, "challenge you on the past seven years of politics, trends, scandals and, of course, everyone's guilty pleasure - celebrity." And that's not all: "Cab drivers, chefs, flight crew, bloggers, backpackers and celebrity look-alikes will all battle it out for century supremacy." Oh, Lordy.

» Check local listings.