

# Slain tot's dad not satisfied

BY JOANNE STEVENSON  
The Acton Tanner

Stories like this aren't supposed to happen in towns like Acton.

That might have been your reaction as the details of 6-month-old Daniel Spencer's death, and the subsequent conviction and sentencing of his babysitter, Heather Holmgren, unfolded.

Holmgren was convicted of manslaughter after shaking Daniel so severely, he died of a brain injury in Jan. 1993. Holmgren was also convicted of aggravated assault after shaking 6-month-old Colleen Maslen.

And despite remarks from Justice James H. Clarke on Jan. 23 of this year, that Holmgren is "a menace to society" who needs psychiatric counselling, Clarke only sentenced her to seven years for her crimes, and she may be eligible for parole in 28 months.

In the two years following Daniel's death, his parents, June and Neil, have done their best to get over their loss. According to Neil Spencer, with time you can turn those negative emotions into positive action... "and you keep busy."

The 33-year-old is reluctant to talk about his personal life, saying "we've been pretty much public property up until now."

But he is very proud of his two children — a 17-month old son, and a new daughter, just 8-weeks old.

And he'd like to focus on the positive things that have happened since Daniel's death.

For starters, the Spencers donated the play equipment at the Emergency Department of Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital. Spencer's sister-in-law designed and painted the mural in the waiting area.

And donations made at the hospital on behalf of Daniel, which total \$5,000, have purchased two cribs for the neo-natal wing of the hospital.

There is also an increased awareness of Shaken Baby Syndrome among health care professionals, and emergency rooms are better equipped to treat it.

"If you didn't know, you'd think it was the flu," said Spencer in a recent interview. "Doctors know the symptoms to look for when

they didn't before."

Spencer wasn't satisfied with the lenient sentence he feels Holmgren received.

"Seven years for taking a life — that's no deterrent. And the three years she got for assaulting the Maslen baby is concurrent — it's a freebie!"

The Crown Attorney's office hoped to have Holmgren re-sentenced — a longer sentence and a longer time before being eligible for parole. But on Feb. 21 the Crown's appeal was denied by the Appeal Board in Toronto.

Spencer finds this frustrating. "With this lack of punishment," he says, "people are literally getting away with murder."

Prior to the sentencing appeal, Spencer circulated a petition, stating the seven year sentence imposed on Holmgren was neither adequate nor appropriate considering the serious nature of her offenses.

In just six days, Spencer had

collected over 1,200 signatures. He hopes it will make a difference when Holmgren is up for parole.

"A judge is supposed to act on behalf of the community. If the community disagrees, then that voice should be heard. I hope the Parole Board hears."

Spencer continues to circulate his petition. He also plans to contact MPs, MPPs and the Justice Minister.

"Prison won't help her — it will only harden her. No one knows what sets her off. We need to protect this community, and the community she eventually goes to when she gets out."

If you'd like to show your support for the Spencers as they campaign for stricter sentencing, fill out the coupon beside this article. You need to include your name, address and signature.

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## Rognvaldson was councillor

### OBITUARY

Clarence Rognvaldson passed away March 24, 1995 at St. Joseph's Hospital in Guelph after a valiant battle with Parkinson's disease.

Rognvaldson is mourned by his wife Dorothy and two daughters, Janet Taylor (Robert) of Elliot Lake and Nancy Coquard (Gerard) of Waterloo, Quebec, as well as four grandchildren: Michelle and Jennifer Taylor and Catherine and Christopher Coquard.

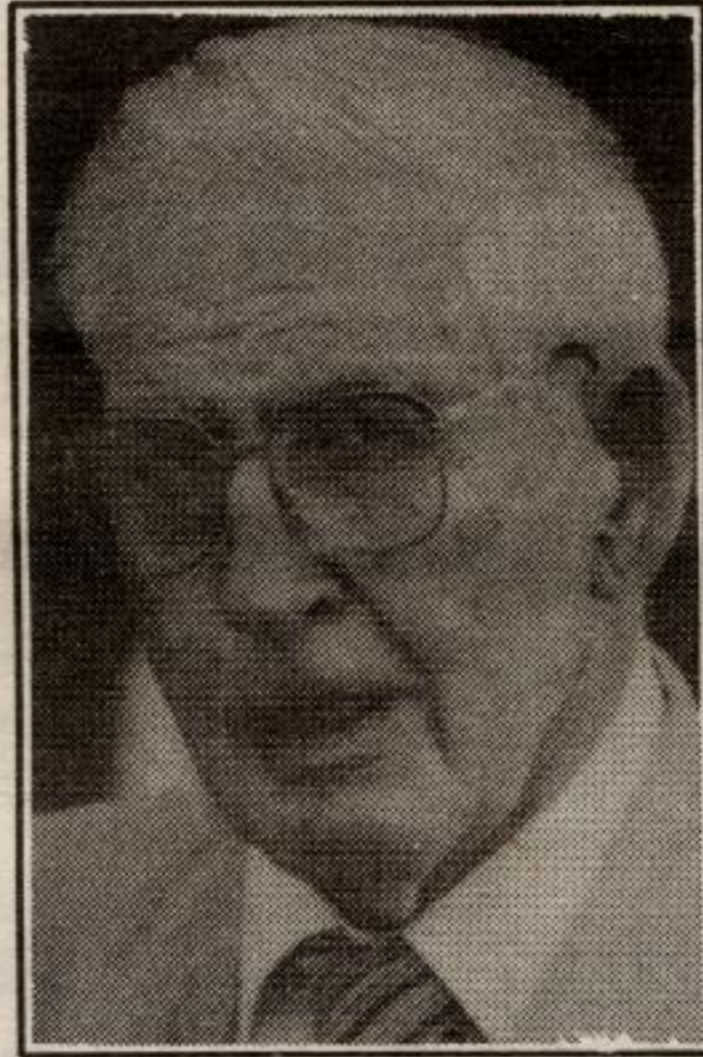
He also leaves his sisters, Mabel Doll, Manitoba; Laura Guay, Trenton; Vera Bailey, Guelph and brothers Douglas, Alberta and Ellis, Acton.

Clarence was born in Winnipegosis, Manitoba and joined the RCAF in 1939 serving in Manitoba, British Columbia, Alaska and England. He met his wife Dorothy in 1941 and they were married Aug. 29, 1942 at North Parkdale United Church. In November 1945

they moved to Acton where Clarence worked for Baxter Laboratories for 11 years. In 1956 he enrolled McMaster University, graduating with a B.A. in 1959, followed by his Bachelor of Education. From 1959 to 1978 he taught history and geography and later, industrial arts as well as driver education at Acton High School.

At the time that Ben Racklin was mayor, Clarence was a council member. He was a Past Master of the Masonic Lodge, Acton, and the Rose Croix in Guelph, as well as a 33rd Degree Mason. He was also a member of the Acton Legion and of the Y's Men Club.

Rognvaldson's hobby was making spinning wheels in the Scottish upright tradition which have been sold to spinners across Canada, the United States and overseas. His two remaining brothers, Douglas and Ellis, will carry on the family project of the Rognvaldson spinning wheel.



## 7 Years Is Not Enough!

On Jan. 23, 1995, Heather Holmgren was convicted and sentenced for the shaking death of 6-month-old Daniel Spencer and for the aggravated assault of 6-month-old Colleen Maslen. I do not believe the seven-year sentence imposed on Holmgren was adequate or appropriately reflects the views of the community, considering the serious nature of her offences.

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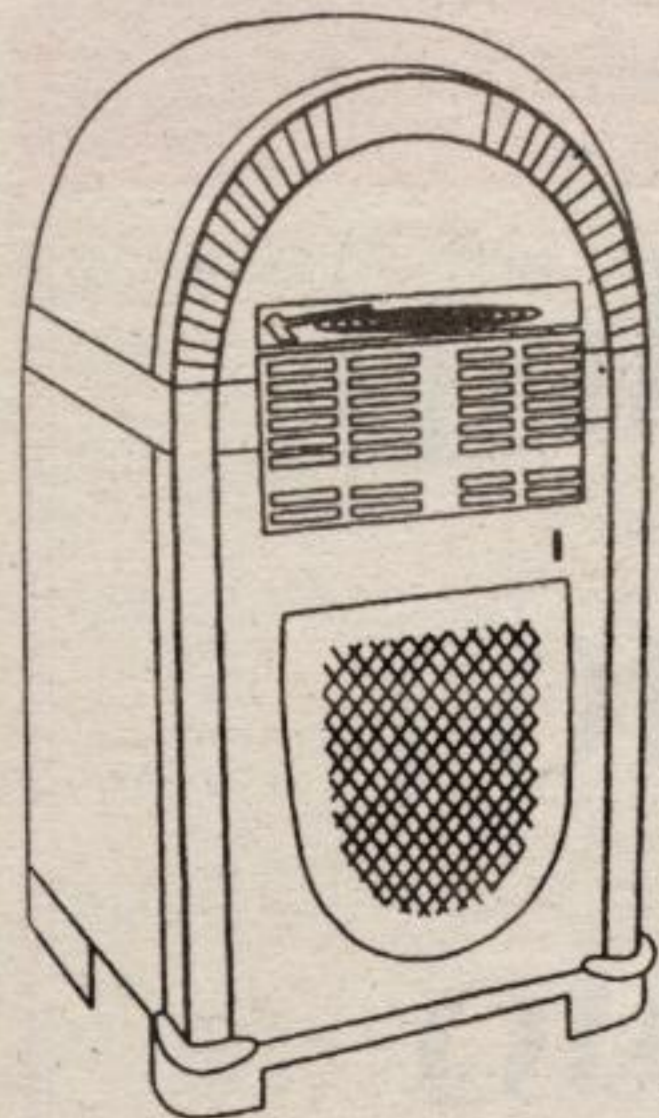
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