

Armed robber hits Castleton General Store

By Eileen Argyris

The last thing that Keith Olan of Castleton General Store was expecting last Wednesday morning was an armed hold-up.

"I was planning to be in Oshawa, I wasn't even going to be in the store that morning, but when we got up my wife told me she wasn't feeling well that day, so I stayed in Castleton. I guess God was looking over my shoulder," said Olan in a later interview.

The friendly Castleton store owner is grateful that, if his store had to be robbed, he was the one staring down the barrel of the robber's gun; not his wife or any of the ladies who work there.

According to Olan, the store had just finished looking after a number of customers, "you know how business seems to come in spurts, and there was

a lull. That was about 11:15 a.m.

The quiet was broken by the ring of the bell on the door, announcing the entry of a white male, about six feet tall, medium build, wearing a balaclava and wielding a 12-gauge double-barrelled sawed-off shotgun, which he pointed at Olan behind the cash desk and demanded, "Give me everything."

Olan had been taking advantage of the lull to catch up on some paperwork, but he reacted quickly, opening the till and taking out all the bills.

"Then he noticed Jane (Mutton, a store employee) who was about 20 feet away from him, bagging buns in the bakery section."

The gunman warned, "Don't anybody move."

Olan said the man apparently knew of storeowners' usual practice of storing large denomination bills under the

cash till, because when he handed over all the bills in the upper drawer, the robber repeated, "Everything."

Olan says he then lifted the divider section and allowed the gunman to see that there was nothing but cheques in the lower section of the drawer.

"I've preached at the girls for the last three years, 'If there's ever a robbery, don't be a hero, just do as you're told,'" Olan recalled.

Practising as he had

preached, he did exactly as the gunman demanded, but kept his eyes open. He hurried to the door as the robber exited and observed the getaway car, driven by another male who appeared to be of heavier build than the gunman.

"But I really couldn't tell, since he was sitting down and was farther away."

He also got an accurate description of the getaway car and a licence plate number.

Olan phoned police and he

says, by the time the squad car arrived at the scene, police were able to tell him that the vehicle used in the robbery had been reported stolen in Hastings.

Police are withholding a description of the vehicle as the investigation continues.

All told, the robbers got away with about \$270; "not worth their while," Olan comments, reflecting that armed robbery carries a much stiffer penalty than simple theft.

"The police worked tremendously hard and very quickly set up roadblocks," says the impressed storekeeper.

"Only five minutes after the robbery happened, they knew the car had been spotted going east on County Road 21."

Although he could give a general description of the suspect, Olan was not able to see his face because of the ski mask he wore, "But I won't forget his eyes for a long, long time," he said.

"It all happened so quickly, I don't know whether I had a chance to be scared," he admits. "When somebody points a gun at you, you do as you're told; it's automatic."

Olan's guess coincides with the OPP's about the nature of the thieves. The storeowner said they probably didn't dare attempt a robbery in a populated area.

"But, here in Castleton, we just curl up and die for a little while. They probably figured on a quick grab and an easy getaway, but for the money they got, it's stupid; just crazy."

Police are investigating the possibility that these are the same men who held up a Mac's Milk store in Brighton two days before, escaping with \$19, after terrorizing the clerk with a handgun. They could also be linked to other robberies that have occurred lately outside the Brighton

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