

Murder took place on Valentine's Day

Daughter opposes parole for mother's killer

By Eileen Argyris

Newly married in November, 1984, Michelle Gillespie, like any bride, looked forward to the first Valentine's Day she would spend with her new husband.

She could never have guessed the horror it would bring.

On Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, 1985, Michelle's mother, Betty Hart, 46, was murdered — stabbed 53 times — beaten, and left in "a pool of blood" in the basement of her home at 41 Church Street East, Colborne.

Charges were laid April 28, 1985, against Donald Moran, 46, also of Colborne, a longtime fami-



Convicted murderer: Donald Moran is seeking release from prison. File photo

ly friend who had once been the business partner, and claimed to have been the secret lover, of the dead woman.

The crime has been described as one of the most brutal in Canadian history.

Mr. Moran, was convicted of second-degree murder the following Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, 1986, and sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole for at least 10 years.

According to Sandra Pilgrim, information officer with the National Parole Board of Canada, Mr. Moran has been eligible for unescorted temporary absence passes since April 27, 1992.

He has been seen in Brighton where his wife, Lois, maintains a home.

He has also taken advantage of 60-day work release programs available at the discretion of the warden of Beaver Creek, the minimum-security facility where he is now serving his sentence.

Michelle and others call Beaver Creek, "the country club."

Mr. Moran applied last March to be released from prison and allowed to live in a half-way house. Michelle said she could not bear to attend that hearing, but members of



'It could happen to you' — Michelle Gillespie has led a crusade against parole for violent offenders, such as the man who killed her mother in 1985. She reminds people that living in a small town is no guarantee of safety.

Photo by Eileen Argyris

her family did. She sent a victim-impact statement and petitions and letters were sent to the board,

many at her urging, asking that Mr. Moran's application be denied. It was.

He has appealed that

decision and his case is being heard today, Feb. 15, the day after Valentine's Day.

If the panel sees things his way this time, he will be allowed to live in a half-way house, pending his eligibility for full parole in 1996.

Michelle has been gathering support for denial of permission for Mr. Moran to enter the half-way house. She says, "A life sentence should be a life sentence."

"I think he's a time bomb waiting to go off. He's a model prisoner, a smooth actor. He's used the system to the fullest, just like he's used me to the fullest. He's played the game."

Michelle says the impact of the crime on her family will never be overcome. "It's not like it used to be. It's ruined our family."

Her father and brother, Bryan and Michael Hart, still live in the family home where the murder occurred.

Michael, only 18 when his mother was murdered, was badly affected. "Michael was really close to my mother. So was I — my mother loved everybody — but it was really hard on Michael."

"The justice system doesn't work for the victim or the victim's family."

One man has mounted a crusade in Brighton,

mobilizing his neighbours to sign a petition to keep Moran in custody. The petition will be submitted to the panel at today's hearing at Beaver Creek near Gravenhurst.

Michelle thinks that's "awesome."

"I'm really pleased. People will be aware, he'll make sure of it. That's great."

Michelle knows she's prejudiced in this case, because the victim was her mother, but she points out it could happen to anyone. She never dreamed anyone in her family would be a murder victim.

"It's something you think happens in big cities, not small towns like Colborne. It could happen to you."



Murder victim: Betty Hart of Colborne was a woman who loved life. Courtesy photo

Murderer

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members.

Mrs. Gillespie waited outside the institution in her vehicle.

"I think it would be too upsetting for me to see him (Mr. Moran)" she explained.

When he becomes eligible for full parole in April, 1995, she says, she "might go (to the hearing) then."

She will be sure to hand in her victim-impact statement and she says she will be lobbying against Mr. Moran's release.

She said she understood that Mr. Moran was not successful in gaining day parole at last week's hearing because, "he is still considered a danger to society."

However, she wonders, "Why, if he's a danger to

society, is he out on weekend passes?"

Unescorted weekend passes

Mr. Moran has been receiving unescorted temporary absence passes up to a maximum of 72 hours monthly since April, 1992.

His right to the unescorted passes from the institution, issued last March by the parole board, was not revoked at last week's hearing, but will run out soon.

He reportedly spends the passes with his wife at her home in Brighton.

In the meantime the board is requesting more information about leave privileges for family visits before making a ruling about his leaves and implementing limited day parole. Ms. Pilgrim of the

parole board said.

Stay away from family

Mr. Moran must abide by three conditions as part of his parole: he must abstain from the use of alcohol; make no contact with the victim's family, and not come within five kilometres of Colborne, Grafton or Stirling, except for non-stop trips through the area on Highway 401.

Mrs. Gillespie's father, Bryan Hart, husband of the victim, did not attend the hearing and did not mince words when asked about his reaction to the board's decision.

"The son of a bitch . . . he shouldn't be alive. He should have been killed years ago. That's my reaction," he said. "And that's why I'm not allowed permission to enter a half-