

Acton women claim leaving 97-year-old in SUV 'an accident'

JASON MISNER and LISA TALLYN
Special to The IFP/Staff Writer

The daughter and granddaughter of a 97-year-old woman facing charges after allegedly locking a frail senior in a sweltering SUV for about an hour in a Burlington parking lot on the weekend say it was an "accident" and wished it never happened.

Bonnie Bouclair, 60, and her daughter Kimberly Bouclair, 36, said they stopped at the SmartCenters plaza Saturday afternoon and went into Wal-Mart to purchase Tylenol for Phyllis Arnott's headache. With Arnott locked in the 2003 GMC Envoy, the Acton women said they also shopped for some dog food, clothes and shoes and spent time in a checkout lineup.

They estimate they were gone no more than 30 minutes while Halton police say it was almost an hour.

"It was a mere accident," Bonnie said Monday from behind the locked iron-gate at the front of her Acton home.

"We weren't expecting to be in there that long."

The Bouclairs have been charged by Halton Police with failure to provide the necessities of life. They are scheduled to appear in Milton court Aug. 25.

As part of the bail conditions, Arnott will not be placed back in the custody of her daughter and granddaughter, but it wasn't clear where she would stay, said Sgt. Tim Fredo.

The temperature in the 2003 black GMC Envoy rose to a stifling 50C (122 F) by the time paramedics raced to the scene at

around 4 p.m.

Arnott was rushed to Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital with severe dehydration, said Fredo.

As of yesterday (Tuesday), the senior remained in hospital. A spokesperson for Jo Brant said Arnott will stay in the hospital until her health improves.

Arnott—described as "very frail" and completely dependent for help—was seen by passersby at the plaza at Dundas St. at Appleby Line, suffering in the SUV's back seat with the front windows rolled down about three inches, Fredo said.

Arnott was seen trying to raise her head high enough to reach and gasp for air from the slight window opening.

The temperature on Saturday afternoon hit 36C including the humidex, police noted.

Kelsey's waiter Jake Stasuk was among the first to help Arnott.

He said he was shocked when he saw tiny Arnott struggling in the back seat of the blistering locked SUV during the hottest weekend of the year.

Stasuk rushed into the restaurant to fetch three bottles of water for the dehydrated senior. He did his best to keep her attention as she quickly drank all of the bottles in about 15 minutes.

The restaurant's owner called 911 as Stasuk decided to try to reach into the window of the Envoy. He said he managed to unlock the door and help Arnott get out, reassuring her until emergency crews arrived.

"It's a terrible situation," he recalled Monday afternoon. "Just like a kid, she was helpless."



PHYLLIS ARNOTT



Bonnie Bouclair, 60, and her daughter Kimberly Bouclair, 36, say it was an "accident" that they left Bonnie's 97-year-old mother, Phyllis Arnott, locked in an SUV while shopping in Burlington this past Saturday.

Photo by Harrison Smith, Toronto Star

The Bouclairs came out of the plaza to see paramedics helping Arnott. They identified themselves to police.

Shoppers at the plaza on Monday expressed outrage that an elderly woman would be left in an over-heated car.

"I don't know how someone could do something like that," said Wendy Dunston.

"It's shocking," said Shannon Robichaud, out with her six-month-old Kylie.

According to research, it doesn't take long for youngsters in a hot vehicle to begin suffering heat stress, dehydration, shock or even death. According to Safe Kids Canada, the temperature inside a parked car can exceed 50C (122F) within 10-20 minutes on a typical sunny summer day.

"Within 40 minutes, it will get so hot that a child inside the car could die. Opening the window slightly does not keep the temperature at a safe level," the website stated.

The Bouclairs, however, said Arnott is fine with the heat.

Kimberly said at the time they didn't realize how hot it was, but added that her grandmother "doesn't mind the heat so much."

"It's just a stupid thing, if we could take it back (we would)," said Kimberly.

She stressed that her grandmother is "well loved" and they are eager to bring her home.

"We were intending to help her get something for her headache," said Bonnie, who was shocked police charged them with failing to provide the necessities of life.

She thought they would have received just a strict warning.

"That's for somebody that starves people as far as we're concerned," said Bonnie. "I feel that everybody is going to think we're cruel, and that makes us sad."

The Arnott case has Fredo puzzled. He described the SUV as a "vehicle sauna." She is weak enough that she can't open a car door on her own, Fredo said.

"You really have to feel for the woman," he said. "She's 97 and she needs the support of her family to take care of her."

Never leave vulnerable people alone, he said, and take them with you wherever you're going.

"It seems so basic not to leave anybody unattended in a locked vehicle."

The case has generated considerable national media and international attention.

—With files from Torstar News Service

Etobicoke man drowns while swimming in Fairy Lake

LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

An Etobicoke man drowned in front of horrified family members at Fairy Lake Saturday afternoon.

Harvey Sheppard, 32, of Dixon Rd., died in hospital early Sunday morning.

He was pulled out of about eight feet of water across from the Prospect Park beach at approximately 3:30 p.m. by emergency personnel who immediately began CPR.

Sheppard had vital signs when he was rushed to Georgetown Hospital, but later died at Oakville Hospital.

Judy Townsley, who lives directly across from the beach on Cameron St. said she was sitting on the deck with her husband Jeff and heard people in the water, but she didn't pay a whole lot of attention to them.

She said she had just walked into the

house when her husband yelled at her to call 911 because someone had gone under.

Her husband jumped in his boat to see if he could help find the man as Townsley watched from the shore.

She said the woman swimming with Sheppard, who police identified as a family member, later said they had swam to roughly the middle of the lake when she stopped for a second to look back at their kids on the beach.

"She turned back and just saw him go under. He never cried out," said Townsley, who believes the family were the only ones on the beach.

She said the woman and a man, who Townsley believes was Sheppard's brother, were frantically searching the water with their feet, trying to find Sheppard.

"The brother was just beside himself. I finally had to say to him, 'get this lifejacket on' because I was afraid he was going to go

down."

By the time the woman finally located the man in the water police and paramedics had arrived and dove in to rescue him.

"He had been in the water for about 15 minutes," said Townsley. "His kids were just screaming for him (from the beach)."

"There are weeds in areas of the water that are on the surface," said Halton Regional Police Acting Detective Greg Casson, who added that the bottom is also "quite weedy."

He said Sheppard was described to police as an "average" swimmer and whether or not he had been drinking before the accident is still under investigation.

Casson said it has not been determined yet what caused the man to go under and he would not release results of a post mortem done Monday.

The area is clearly posted with "No

Swimming" signs, and people are not supposed to go beyond the buoy line at the Prospect Park Beach, said Casson.

Halton Region's health department posted notices last week indicating the lake was unsafe for swimming—as it usually is during the summer—because of high bacteria levels.

Townsley said the accident was "absolutely tragic" and brought back upsetting memories of the swimming accident in the lake four years ago, nearly to the day, that claimed the life of her brother-in-law Douglas Neary of Hornby.


She said she and her husband have come to realize that people are going to continue to swim in Fairy Lake, so Sunday she bought lifejackets and life rings to keep on their deck at all times in case there is ever another accident like the one on Saturday.

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