



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Jill Pallin, whose daughter Samantha Hunt, 19, was killed last summer by a drunk driver, is shown above with a picture of the victim. Next month will mark a year since the tragedy.

Drunk killed Milton teen, gets two years

By PAM DOUGLAS

Special to The Champion

A drunk driver who sped through a Brampton intersection killing a young Milton woman was sentenced to two years in jail and was ordered to undergo random urine and saliva tests for alcohol after he gets out of prison.

Raymond Gabriel, 29, of Brampton will undergo between six and 10 random tests for alcohol during his two-year probation, Justice Casey Hill ruled in Brampton Superior Court last Wednesday.

He has been banned from driving for five years after a high-speed crash that killed Samantha Hunt of No. 3 Sideroad, just six days before her 20th birthday.

Gabriel pleaded guilty to one count of criminal negligence causing death. The lesser impaired driving charges were dropped.

Justice Hill noted Gabriel had more than twice the legal limit of alcohol in his blood and was driving more than 100 km/h in a 60 km/h zone in the early morning hours of July 2, 1998.

Victim planned to marry

Gabriel sped through a red light at the intersection of Kennedy Road and Williams Parkway, smashing full force into the driver's side door of Ms Hunt's Toyota. She was killed outright.

The young woman, who grew up in Brampton and was engaged to a Brampton man, was on her way to her No. 3 Sideroad home from her job as a bartender at a pub in downtown Brampton.

Alcohol was described to the court as "the catalyst" for Gabriel's previous criminal record, which includes no driving offences, but does show break and enter and assault.

Gabriel, a father of two children aged 5 and 7 years, had previously admitted alcohol was a problem.

Gabriel was on probation at the time of the crash. A week before the collision he had been issued a second court order to abstain from alcohol.

Justice Hill acknowledged in his ruling that Gabriel had ignored previous court orders, and coupled his abstinence order with the random urine, saliva and breath tests.

Justice Hill dismissed the defence's suggestion that Gabriel be allowed to serve his sentence in the community.

"The community would be further endangered by the release of this offender because of the risk to re-offend," he said. "He represented an unconscionable risk just by pulling his car onto a public thoroughfare."

More than 30 victim impact statements were filed with the court Ms Hunt's friends and family.

"She was a friendly girl, very kind, very generous and outgoing," said the girl's mother, Jill Pallin of No.

3 Sideroad. "She lit up a room when she walked in."

Ms Hunt, who moved to Milton with her mother and three siblings three years ago, loved horses and had worked at area ranches. She also had a love for other animals and had a dog and several reptiles as pets. She previously worked at Kelsey's in Milton as a waitress.

Gift of sight

Her body was so crushed by the impact, her corneas were the only organs left intact, her mother said, and they were successfully donated.

"Two little boys now have full vision because of that," Ms Pallin said.

Ms Pallin, who has had a hard time focusing on her career as an office manager since the crash and now works part-time in a warehouse, donated the crushed car to Against Drug Driving (ADD).

The anti-drinking and driving group uses the car in education programs for students.

Ms Pallin said she believes Gabriel's sentence was too light and generally supports harsher punishments for the crime overall, but she doesn't blame the judge.

"I was quite shocked that the sentence came in at two years less a day, but in retrospect I understand what the judge was doing," she said.

"I don't feel the punishment was fitting of the crime but he (Justice Hill) did the best he could do under the circumstances."

A federal sentence (anything over two years) would not have allowed Justice Hill to impose probation conditions such as the alcohol testing, and rehabilitation of Gabriel is the main principle, "not retribution," Ms Pallin said.

Walks fine line

"I dare say dear Sammy would be turning in her grave if she knew her life was worth two thirds or one third of two years," she said.

Ms Pallin said she comes from a Mormon family that decided 43 years ago "to avoid the tentacles of alcohol, but it has a grip on us anyway."

She said her daughter's death has left her walking a fine line with her other children, James, 19, Christopher, 13, and Jessica, 11. She tries to ensure that they are aware of the dangers on the road, but she does not want to be paranoid.

On the first anniversary of the crash next month, Ms Pallin said family and friends will gather for a party — the best way they see to remember a young woman with so much zest for life.

Ms Pallin said it's been the support of family and friends that has helped her through the last year. Police and the Crown attorney's office have also assisted by keeping her informed.

Many of Samantha's friends come to see Ms Pallin. The visits help keep her strong, she said.

"Everywhere Sam went, she brought laughter and mischief," Ms Pallin recalled.

— With files from The Champion's Karen Smith

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