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Fire rips through autobody shop

Spark quickly becomes inferno

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

"Thirty-seven years."

Those were Rudy Robnik's only audible words as he stared at the charred remains and floating ash that made up his Main Street auto shop Tuesday afternoon.

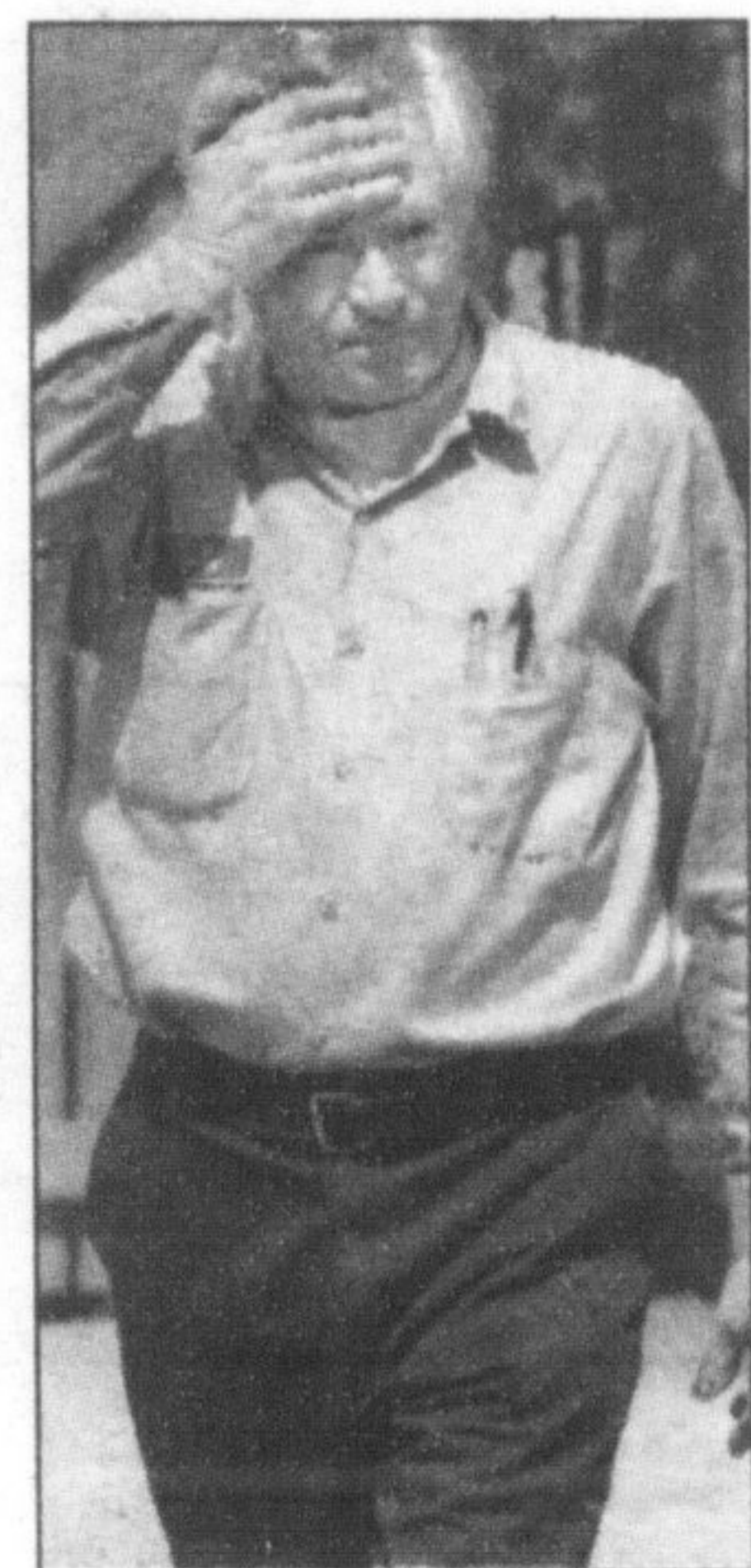
Shortly after 12:30 p.m., Robnik had watched almost four decades of hard work go up in smoke — literally — when Milton Import Car Centre ignited, damaged to the tune of almost \$1 million.

Robnik had tears under his eyes as he stood, transfixed, looking at the burned-out garage containing the shells of three blackened vehicles.

The air was thick with the smell of singed rubber.

"The building's a total write-off," said Milton Fire Department's Barry Kory, pegging the damage at between \$800,000 and \$1 million.

When firefighters responded to the autobody business, located between Ontario Street and Wilson Drive across from Milton Mall, they were greeted by a fully involved building, Kory said.



Milton Import Car Centre owner Rudy Robnik was devastated when fire destroyed his auto body shop Tuesday.

Observers heard a series of loud explosions.

The flames were knocked down quickly by about 30 firefighters who stayed on the scene for several hours to keep their eyes on hot spots.

Kory said the blaze started when the two clamps of a jumper cable touched, creating a spark that ignited gas vapours emanating from an open gas can. "It could've been a potentially deadly combination," he said.

Robnik tried unsuccessfully to put out the fire with an extinguisher, but it was just too big by that time, Kory said.

It took mere minutes for the initial spark to become an inferno, he added.

Fortunately Robnik, as well as an employee, escaped without serious injury, although Robnik had some heat burns to his face.

Kory said the incident could've been much worse, particularly since there were cans of volatile liquids in the garage. But fire crews were able to stop the blaze before the liquids were consumed, he said.

If there's a lesson for the public, Kory said it's to realize just how quick-



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Firefighters battle the Milton Import Care Centre blaze through thick smoke.

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