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JUSTICE: Pair convicted of killing good Samaritan have sentences reduced

Father still forgives son's killers

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
STAFF WRITER

The father of Paul Semple, Newmarket's slain good Samaritan, says he has "mixed reactions" over an appeal court's decision to reduce the sentences of his son's killers.

David Semple said the "surprising news" was tempered by even more alarming news — the woman his son was rescuing when he was murdered in 1992 died shortly after the Ontario Court of Appeal overturned the sentences last month.

"It was a shock," he said of the woman's death. "I know it was difficult

for her, she was having a hard time coming to terms with it. The fact that someone would die protecting her, that was really bothering her."

Semple, a 22-year-old Ryerson student, was beaten with a baseball bat and stabbed in the back when he and two friends came to the rescue of the woman and her 11-year-old daughter who were being terrorized on a Toronto street.

In 1994, David Downey, 18, was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to eight years in addition to the 21 months he served in pre-trial custody. Co-accused Merrick Watson was sen-

tenced to life in prison for second-degree murder with no chance of parole for 17 years.

But three appeal court judges have now reduced those sentences, arguing they were too severe. Justices David Doherty, Michael Moldaver, and Stephen Borins recommended Downey be released after serving half of his eight-year sentence, while Watson's parole eligibility was reduced to 10 years.

David Semple said even though it cost his son his life, he still supports Paul's decision to save the woman and child.

"You have to stand up for what you believe in," he said. "He died the way he lived — he died in an act of love."

Semple said his son's death has been a "tremendous loss" but he still hopes for the rehabilitation of the men who killed him.

"When my wife called me the night he was killed, the first thing I did was pray for Paul, then I prayed for those young men and their parents. And I still believe in that," he said.

Paul's mother, Christine, died of cancer in 1996.

Man charged in crime spree

A 29-year-old from Hamilton conducted his own one-man crime spree in the Woodbine-16th Avenues area over the last two days, police say.

Arson, mischief and attempted robbery are a few of the charges facing the man, who has no fixed address, after he was arrested Friday morning, said York Regional Police Const. Keith Freemantle.

Police said the man entered Loeb's grocery store about 6:15 p.m. Tuesday and asked a clerk for some matches. She handed over two books and he promptly exited the store, went around back and began lighting cardboard cartons on fire.

The fire spread quickly, burning the rubber molding surrounding the bay doors, before spreading upwards into the roof.

Billowing smoke sent customers and employees running for safety outside, while the Markham Fire Department battled the blaze.

Damage is pegged at \$25,000. Loeb's was open for business Friday.

Meanwhile, the man was making his way to the Baskin-Robbins store on the other side of the plaza.

He entered the washroom and began damaging the door, eventually taking it off its hinges and causing \$300 damage. Then he demanded the 52-year-old female employee give him cash. She refused, and suffered a punch in the head. He pushed her against some tables and fled.

The suspect showed up in the same area Wednesday morning about 8 a.m. A Woodbine Avenue resident was in the driveway, seeing her daughter off to school. When she came back in the house, a man was standing in the kitchen. He had come in the back door.

The woman pushed him back outside and called 911. Police arrested a man wandering on Woodbine Avenue about a half-hour later.

He's charged with break and enter with intent, attempted robbery, mischief under \$5,000, arson — endangering life and arson — damaging property. He appears in Newmarket Provincial Court Monday.

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