

ZACHARY ROGERS INQUEST

Sitter sticks to story, contradicts witnesses

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
Staff Writer

Mount Albert babysitter Cynthia Taylor stood by her story at an inquest probing the death of seven-month-old Zachary Morrison Rogers, debunking witnesses who contradicted her.

Zachary died on April 17, 1997, 16 days after Taylor found him hanging from the seat-belt straps of a car seat the 45-year-old caregiver used for the baby's naps.

Lawyers for Evenflo, the car seat company, and Zachary's parents, hammered away at Taylor's credibility, pointing to several inconsistencies between her testimony and other witnesses. Those witnesses include:

- An ambulance attendant who testified Taylor told her Zachary had been choked by a seat-belt clip by "slumping down" in an infant carseat. Taylor said she screamed "hanging, hanging" as she ran upstairs to retrieve the car seat.

- A hairstylist who said Taylor didn't have small children within her view for about 30 minutes while her hair was being coloured in her kitchen. Taylor said she could see the toddlers she cared for during the "10-minute" hairstyling.

- A neighbour who claimed Taylor told her she was on the phone with her husband just before she discovered Zachary's lifeless body.

- An audiotape that shows Taylor told police nine times

Zachary was left alone in an upstairs bedroom for 10 to 15 minutes. She later told an insurance investigator it was only five minutes.

Frank Gomberg, Zachary's parents' lawyer, questioned some of Taylor's babysitting practices, suggesting she wasn't as watchful of the five toddlers in her care as she claimed.

"You would agree it's not an optimal practice?" Gomberg asked, referring to the in-home hairstyling.

"It was a slow day. (The hairdresser) even brought her own daycare child," Taylor replied. "It was a safe environment."

Zachary's grandfather, Gordon Rogers, who has official standing at the inquest, reminded Taylor that only she could help the jury determine how Zachary died because she was the only adult in the home.

"There are a lot of ambiguities," Rogers said. "The truth has to come from you. Somehow we have to come to some con-

clusion that whatever you are saying is the truth."

During their testimony, Taylor's adult son and daughter both downplayed statements they made to police following Zachary's death.

Andrew Prebul, 20, told police in a videotaped interview that he saw babies in car seats left alone in a bathroom on the toilet seat, in the tub and on the floor.

But when he testified Thursday he said the statement was unreliable because, "I was completely hung over in that videotape."

Prebul's older sister, 23-year-old Marilyn, told the inquest a call to the Children's Aid Society in January 1997 was mistaken as a complaint about her mother's unlicensed daycare.

She said she made the midnight call to look for counselling to put an end to fighting between her mother and stepfather. The inquest continues Monday.

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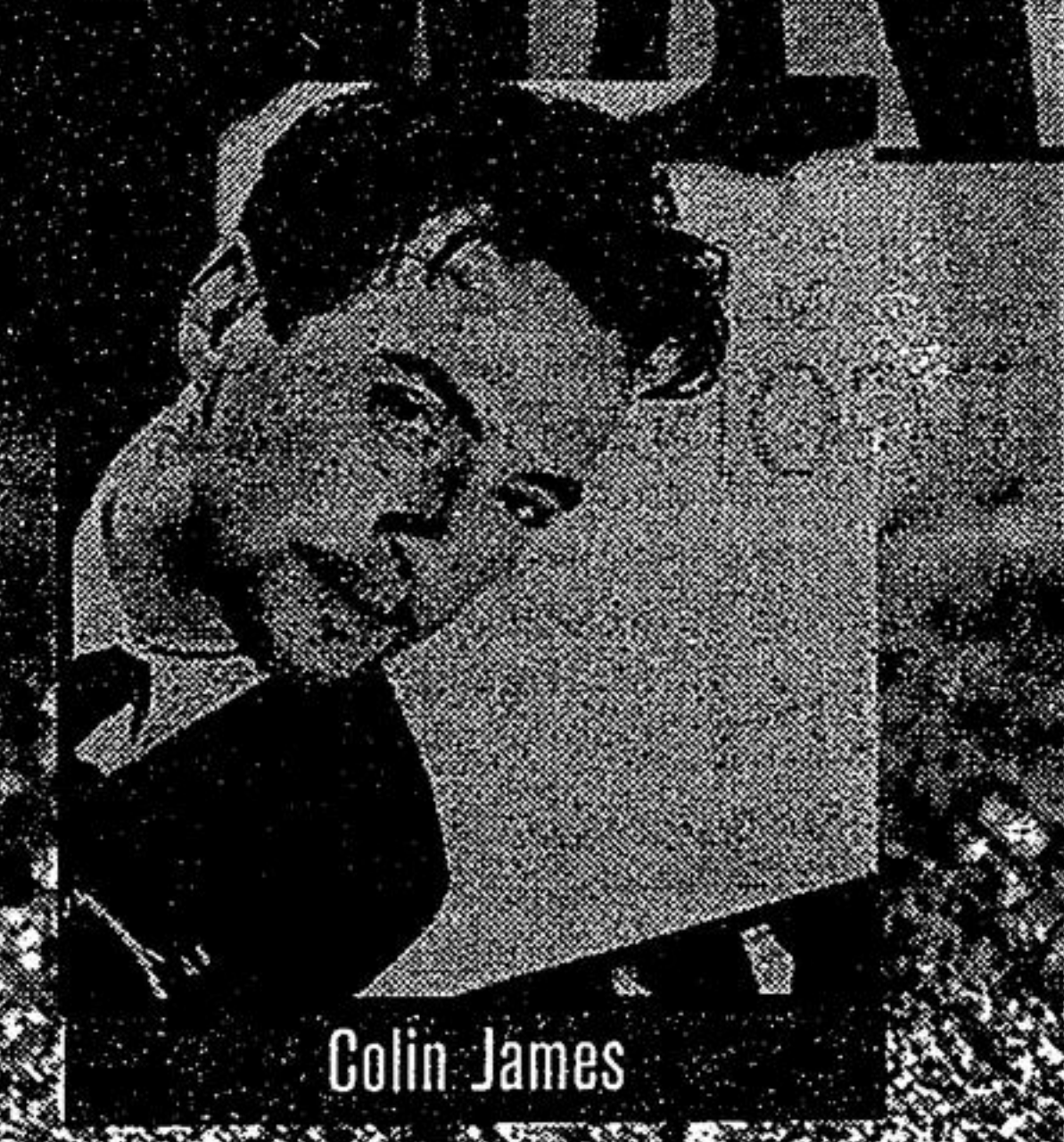
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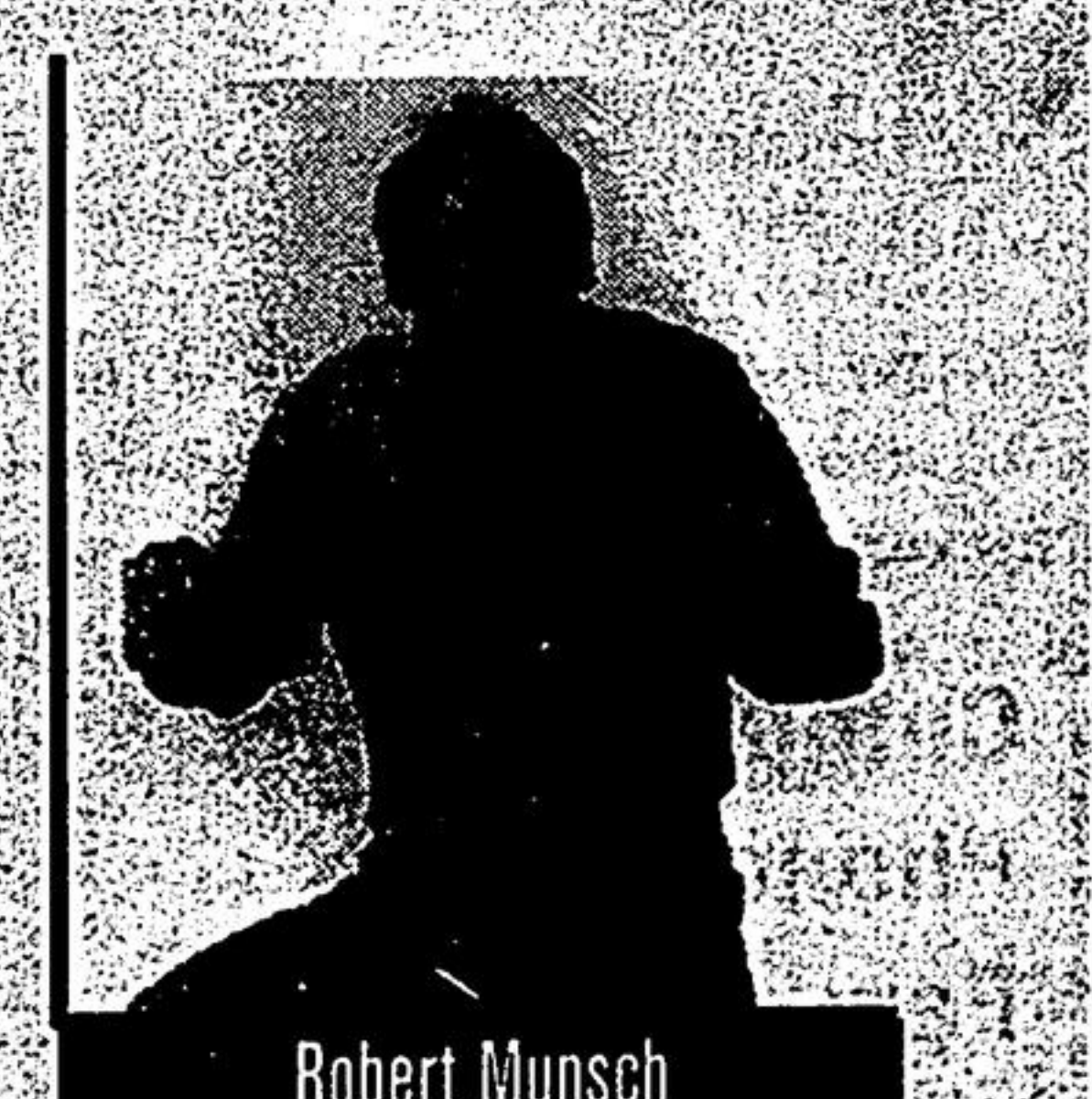
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