

Witness provides harrowing account of fatal robbery

BY JEFF MITCHELL

Clutching his own bullet wound to stem the bleeding, a Richmond Hill jeweler fought desperately to save the life of a wounded employee after a botched robbery, a Superior Court jury heard.

An anguished Mark Lash described the horror of coming face-to-face with two armed bandits in his store in January of 2000 and of helplessly watching as his friend and employee Niv Erez, 23, died of gunshot wounds.

Mr. Lash, who sobbed openly at the trial Thursday, held jurors and courtroom spectators spellbound as he recalled the events of Jan. 16, 2000.

He mourned for Mr. Erez, whom he called a talented salesman who quickly earned a trusted role at Mark Lash Enterprises.

'I started to run. I heard a shot. I looked down and realized that a bullet had gone through me.'

Mark Lash jeweller

"Nobody should ever have to go through what I went through, Niv especially," he said, weeping.

Mr. Lash was testifying at the trial of Joe Marini, who is charged with manslaughter, aggravated assault, robbery and conspiracy.

Mr. Marini's trial is being held in Whitby because of a lack of space at the Newmarket courthouse.

Mr. Lash was severely injured and Mr. Erez died of wounds inflicted when the masked bandits opened fire after being surprised during a break-in.

The men fled without stealing anything, leaving more than \$2 million worth of diamonds, gems and jewelry in a vault, the jury heard.

The witness said he had planned to go alone to the shop on East Beaver Creek Drive the night of the robbery.

The custom jewelry business was being moved to a new location just a block away and Mr. Lash wanted to box up paperwork and other items in his office.

Mr. Erez volunteered to come along and help.

Nothing was amiss and the alarm system showed no signs of trouble when the two men arrived around 11:30 p.m., Mr. Lash testified.

But soon after they entered the office at the back of the shop, they heard loud noises coming from the duct work overhead. The left the office to investigate.

"The ceiling came crashing down and two men in masks were in front of us," Mr. Lash said. "It was unbelievable."

The bandits attacked the two surprised men, pistol whipping them to the floor.

Mr. Lash, fearing he was about to be shot in the head, desperately fought back, biting his assailant on the arm in hopes of making him drop his gun.

He leapt up and ran for a nearby display counter, reaching for a panic button that would alert his security company.

"I started to run," he said on the stand. "I heard a shot. I looked down and realized that a bullet had gone through me."

Mr. Lash succeeded in pushing the button and retreated to another office, where he called 911.

He said he heard more shots from outside the office before the intruders fled through the roof.

Clutching at his abdominal wound to stanch the profuse bleeding, he found Mr. Erez on the floor, moaning. He started CPR in a desperate attempt to keep the young man alive.

"I kept breathing into him, holding my wound, talking to him," Mr. Lash said, his words punctuated by wrenching sobs. "Telling him it would be OK."

When police and paramedics arrived, Mr. Lash was reluctant to let them through the locked front doors, fearing his assailants were returning to finish him off, he told the jury.

As emergency personnel gathered and Mr. Lash was put on a stretcher, Mr. Erez drew his last breath.

"I looked back at Niv," Mr. Lash said. "I knew it was the last time I'd see him."

The trial, presided over by Superior Court Justice Robert Clark, continues.

Victim was from B.C.

The man struck and killed by an SUV while walking down Ninth Line early Wednesday has been identified.

Tyrone James Leppard, 19, had no fixed address, but was originally from British Columbia.

Mr. Leppard was just north of Bloomington Road when he was struck by the northbound Chevy Blazer.

Police do not know why he was on the street. The driver, a 43-year-old Stouffville woman, was not hurt.

Police are still looking for witnesses. Anyone with information is asked to call police at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 7703, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or leave an anonymous tip online at www.crimestoppers.ca.

Taxi driver charged

A Markham cab driver who does contract work for WheelTrans in Toronto has been arrested by Toronto police in connection with the sexual assault of a handicapped woman.

Farook Khan, 57, lives in

Markham and is a self-employed taxi driver hired by WheelTrans on a job-by-job basis picking up handicapped passengers.

On Wednesday, a 27-year-old handicapped woman who had called WheelTrans looking for a ride was assaulted in a cab, police say.

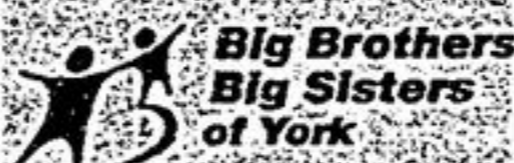
Investigators believe there may be more victims and are asking anyone with information to contact police at 416-808-3104, or Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477) or online at www.222tips.com.

—Martin Derbyshire

SHARE a little MAGIC

A little time can make a HUGE difference in a child's life!

With several volunteer programs to choose from, one is sure to suit your schedule.



905-727-1251 www.bbbsy.ca

This message brought to you as a community service of The Economist/Sun-Tribune

Annual Winter Sale

January 18-21 & 25-28

Quality Clothing Designed & Made in Markham for:

- Your Comfort
- Your Style
- Your Colour
- Your Fit

SHOWROOM HOURS: Wednesday thru Saturday 11 am - 5 pm

905-471-0096 Unit 1-91 Anderson Ave. Markham (Hwy. 48 & Bur Oak)

YOUTH FITNESS • 10-18 YEARS OLD

FIZZED'S

2006 WINTER SCHEDULE

PROGRAM	DURATION	COST	START	END
Self Defense	5 Weeks	\$79.00	Jan. 16	Mar. 27
Basketball	10 Weeks	\$99.00	Jan. 16	Mar. 27
Yoga	9 Weeks	\$119.00	Jan. 16	Mar. 27
Strength Training Introduction	6 Weeks	\$89.00	Jan. 16	Mar. 27
Body Toning	6 Weeks	\$89.00	Jan. 17	Mar. 28
Lacrosse	10 Weeks	\$99.00	Jan. 20	Mar. 31
Salsa/Cardio	8 Weeks	\$99.00	Jan. 17	Mar. 28
Floor Hockey	9 Weeks	\$99.00	Jan. 20	Mar. 31
Hip Hop	7 Weeks	\$109.00	Jan. 17	Mar. 28
Spinning	8 Weeks	\$89.00	Jan. 17	Mar. 28
Boot Camp	8 Weeks	\$89.00	Jan. 18	Mar. 29
Body Wave	8 Weeks	\$89.00	Jan. 17	Mar. 28
Weight Loss (3 times per week)	12 Weeks	\$199.00	Jan. 28	Apr. 22

* No Classes week from Friday March 10 to Saturday March 18 inclusive.

Become a member for \$49.99 per month and enjoy unlimited access to all programs and facilities. All Programs include: Unlimited cardio circuit, gymnasium access, homework/internet lounge, work out towel and e-mail access to our nutritionist. Drop in for more details.

The first 200 kids to register receive a free Fizz Ed's T-Shirt and cap.

FREE PASS

Present this Ad for a free tour and visit.

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK
9078 Leslie Street, Richmond Hill
Tel: (905) 881-8555 • www.fizzeds.com

SCIATICA ???

Sciatica may be an irritation of the sciatic nerve. However, it may also be caused by dysfunction of the joints in the low back or pelvis or from muscular problems.

Research shows that chiropractic care is the most effective and the most cost effective treatment for low back pain and sciatica.

Call Dr. Moore or Dr. Thomas for your no obligation consultation.

We also treat patients with conditions such as headaches, neck pain, golfer's/tennis elbow, rotator cuff problems, carpal tunnel, plantar fasciitis, etc.

905-471-1336



www.moore-chiropractic.com

We provide up-to-date, research based chiropractic techniques along with acupuncture, Active Release Technique (ART), Trigenics, custom made orthotics, ultrasound, and electrical therapy.

Moore Chiropractic Clinic
121 Main St., Markham,
905-471-1336

Relieving pain one patient at a time