

'I told him when I grew up, I'd become a cop and arrest him.'

Const. Anandvir Gill referring to his father before receiving the Rob Plunkett outstanding service to the community award



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Troubled upbringing helps award-winning cop excel

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As a young boy, Anandvir Gill would often sit in his room and cry as he listened to his father fight with his mother.

At age six, he mustered up enough strength to confront his dad.

"I told him when I grew up, I'd become a cop and arrest him," Const. Gill said shortly before receiving the Rob Plunkett outstanding service to the community award at Tuesday night's York Regional Police appreciation night in Vaughan.

Although his threat wasn't enough to stop the attacks, he would never forget that moment and others that would foretell his future.

Born to an Indian father and Guyanese mother, his life growing up in Brampton was fairly average, other than the domestic battles that would scar the family on a weekly basis.

"We were well off as my dad was a very good real estate agent," Const. Gill said. "But he was very traditional and expected my mother to be home, cook and clean and look after him and his friends when they came over to drink. But my mom, coming from Guyana, didn't have the same values."

Disaster struck the family when his father secretly mortgaged the home to invest in two ill-fated gas stations.

"I just remember all of our stuff in garbage bags at the side of the road," he said. "We didn't even have enough for a moving van."

This was the last straw for his mother, who moved her two children to a high-security domestic abuse shelter.

"We were in lockdown. I remember having no toys, no friends and worrying (if) my dad would come and find us," he said.

Although memories from that time are hazy, he remembers being given a small

box of toy police cars with which to play.

After moving to a friend's Rexdale basement, the family was accepted into government housing, where they lived for much of the children's formative years.

To keep the young family clothed and fed, his mother worked two jobs, at a doughnut shop and doing data entry.

"I remember her coming home at 11 p.m. every night," he said.

At age 16, his mother reunited with his father, after the strains of raising a single family on her own became too much to bear.

"I remember her saying how she didn't want us being without a father and with no financial support," he said. "I was a bit bigger by then, so even though the arguments kept going, there were no more beatings."

DRINKING IN PARK

Despite their reunification, the resentment toward his father, who is still with his mother, remained and there was little to prevent Const. Gill from falling in with the wrong crowd.

After returning home following a night of drinking in a local park with friends, a police officer knocked at their door.

Terrified of what his father would do, he asked to speak with the officer in the hallway.

"I think the cop knew just how scared I was," Const. Gill said.

Although he was investigating reports of drug dealing by the teenagers, Const. Gill told him they had only been drinking.

"I fessed up to what we had been doing, but he still warned me about the troubles we could have got into," he added.

The talk had a lasting impact.

After failing out of his first year at the University of Windsor, he jumped at the opportunity to work mall security, where he was quickly promoted four times in three years.

Soon, he began volunteering and attending college, graduating with a 98-per-cent average.

He joined York Regional Police as a patrol officer responding to calls, about 40 per cent of which, he estimated, were the result of domestic abuse.

"You just feel bad for the victim, but when you see the kids and remember what you went through, your heart just goes out to them," he said.

It wasn't long before Const. Gill was snapped up by the service's guns and gangs prevention unit, where he works with at-risk youths and their parents to keep those headed for trouble out of it.

"There's this one kid that made a really bad choice, but I knew deep down he was a good kid," he said.

"He wants to become a cop so I have been helping guide him and keeping him on the right path."

His supervisor said he knew right off the bat Const. Gill was his kind of officer.

"It didn't take long to realize that Const. Gill is a strong role model," Sgt. Anthony Torresan said.

"He carries himself with pride and distinction and is always thoughtful in his actions. He's a leader who sets a positive example."

His work in the unit has allowed him to see crime for what it is — more often the result of bad circumstances and choices rather than bad characters.

"My perception of the job has changed," he admitted. "When you're on the road dealing with these kids, you just see the bad action instead of the mitigating circumstances. Now that I get to know kids on a personal level, more often than not, you see there is either poverty, alcohol or violence going on at home and that's why they fell into the bad action. The same path I was headed for."

There's always hope for redemption, he added.

Mayor sees sales, gas taxes ahead

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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A 1-per-cent sales tax and a five cent gas tax is how Mayor Wayne Emmerson thinks Metrolinx will raise the money it requires to unclog roads and get goods moving.

Mr. Emmerson does not know if this is in fact the route Metrolinx will take. But if it is, he is also unclear if the hikes would only be within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area or provincially.

"I can't support anything until they tell me what it's on," he told The Sun-Tribune.

No matter which revenue generating mechanism gets put in place, the mayor wants it to be done across the province.

"I don't believe that's fair (to only tax the GTHA) because people from Peterborough and Barrie come into the GTA," he said.

Earlier this year, Metrolinx released a short list of 11 revenue tools that range from tolls on major highways and parking space levies, to more taxes on fuel and general goods.

"There has to be some kind of ... more revenue coming from somewhere," Mr. Emmerson said.

On Monday, the mayors of Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan and members of their respective councils descended upon the Richmond Hill Centre bus terminal to add their support in calling on the province to implement new and dedicated revenue tools to expand the GTHA's transit and transportation infrastructure.

The mayor admitted development charges need to increase. Where he does not want the money to come from is increased property taxes.

"We do need dedicated funding and they need to do it now," he said, noting other countries and New York have dedicated road and transit funding.

Whatever the solution may be, Mr. Emmerson said the federal government has to also be involved.

"The City of Toronto is the engine of Ontario, if not Canada" and goods need to be moved in and out of that city and because of gridlock, nothing moves and millions of dollars get lost, he said.

A Metrolinx report is expected to be released May 27, according to Mr. Emmerson. He hopes the region, then the town will take a position.

"I don't know if they'll listen to us or not," he said.

with files from Sean Pearce