



PEI Murdered Women 1989 - 2009



Women Murdered on PEI 1989 - 2009



Introduction

On December 6, 1989, fourteen women were murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal.

On Prince Edward Island, just weeks before the Montreal Massacre, a 27-year-old mother of three was shot dead by her estranged husband in Summerside. Since then, seven more women have been murdered by men on P.E.I.

It is important to remember and honour the eight women on P.E.I. who have lost their lives to male violence since 1989.

The stories of murder are difficult, but in examining the circumstances of their murders we can learn a great deal, perhaps dispel some myths about violence against women, and hopefully prevent another murder from happening.

- The murders took place in all three P.E.I. counties and in both urban and rural areas.
- The murder victims ranged in age from 23 to 77.
- Two women were murdered by men they were living with, three by ex-partners, and three by neighbours and acquaintances.
- All of the murderers were known to police, all but one for committing acts of violence.
- Violence against women can happen at any age, anywhere.



Blue Lady painting by Sandy Kowalik, PEI

Using court records and media reports, the circumstances surrounding the eight murders are described. Also included and summarized are some of the warning signs of potential violence, the legal proceedings, and in some cases, a follow-up on the offender's continued involvement with the system. Personal notes about the women have been added, thanks in large part to the work of Eileen LeClair, coordinator of UPSE's Silent Witness project.

These women did not deserve to die. We must all continue to work to prevent any further tragedies.

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women - February 2010

Sherwood Business Centre (161 St. Peters Road)

PO Box 2000, Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8

(902) 368-4510

peistatusofwomen@eastlink.ca

www.gov.pe.ca/acsw

peiactsw.wordpress.com



Carrie Ellen (Crossman) McMurrer April 1962 – October 26, 1989

At approximately 1:50 pm, on October 26, 1989, Kevin Kenneth McMurrer, walked into Midway Auto in Summerside where his estranged wife Carrie Ellen McMurrer worked and shot her in the head three times. He was arrested at approximately 3:20 pm and charged with first-degree murder.

Background

The day McMurrer killed Carrie, he staged a phony car problem in order to get Carrie's coworker out of the workplace leaving Carrie alone in the Midway Auto office. He waited a few minutes until her male coworker left and then walked into the shop carrying a .22 calibre rifle wrapped in a blanket. As Carrie sat at her desk he walked up to her, shot her, and fled the scene.

Warning signals

- Carrie and Kevin had separated, for a second time, in May 1989. Their three children lived with Carrie. Kevin fell behind in his support payments, prompting Carrie to limit his visitation rights.
- Summerside Police and the RCMP were notified after Kevin assaulted Carrie and created disturbances at her house.
- In July, Kevin was found guilty of uttering a threat to kill his wife, fined \$500, placed on probation for 18 months, and ordered to avoid contact with Carrie except in relation to visitation of the children.
- In August, he was admitted to the Prince County Hospital following an overdose of sleeping pills.
- Carrie informed police that on October 4 Kevin borrowed a gun from a friend and that she was very afraid. He told her he would "blow her f-ing head off." Although Kevin was found in breach of his probation order, he was not apprehended.
- Throughout the fall he turned down work, neglected his child support payments, failed to return the children on time after visits, and drank heavily.
- He continued to stalk and threatened to kill Carrie and her father.

Legal proceedings

Kevin McMurrer was found guilty of second-degree murder and on July 4, 1990 was given the minimum sentence of life imprisonment with no eligibility for parole for ten years.

Postscript

Immediate community outrage prompted the government to hire retired judge Hon. Charles McQuaid to hold an inquiry into the handling of domestic violence cases by the police and Department of Justice.

In 2001, McMurrer was granted full parole. That was revoked in November 2003 after he was convicted of assaulting a former girlfriend and possessing stolen property. Both offences took place on P.E.I. during his parole.

In January 2006, McMurrer's request for both full and day parole was denied. In 2007, he was granted day parole and it was revoked a year later.

In early 2009, McMurrer was involuntarily transferred from minimum security to medium-security after stealing money from the inmate canteen while working as the canteen operator, a job he held for two months. A psychological report completed in May 2009 indicates he presented a moderate risk of re-offending and was at a high risk of "re-offending in a domestic context."

Sources

Sources used are public documents including PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs McMurrer (1990); Hon. Charles R. McQuaid, Inquiry into Police and Dept. of Justice Policies and Procedures in Cases of Inter-Spousal and Intra-Family Violence, (November 15, 1991); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (1989 – 1990 and 2007 -2009); UPSE Silent Witness project.

Elaine Edith (Meney) Myers
1955 – April 7, 1991



On April 7, 1991, 36-year old Elaine Myers was found murdered in her bed. She had been stabbed multiple times in the chest, and her throat had been slashed with a kitchen knife.

Background

Roger Lee Burke, age 37, Elaine's downstairs neighbour and acquaintance, was charged with second-degree murder and pleaded not guilty at the pre-trial. He later changed his plea to guilty and elected to be tried by judge alone. Although Burke testified he couldn't remember the murder, the sole account of the events of that April day at the Valdane Avenue apartment in Sherwood came from Roger Burke.

His account of what happened the night Elaine was murdered was accepted by the judge. He spoke about Elaine asking him over to her place and offering wine. Burke and Elaine consumed two quarts of wine and then he returned to his own apartment.

Several hours later, around 9 a.m., he went back to Elaine's apartment. Burke alleged that following an argument about his sexual prowess, Elaine infuriated him by saying he wasn't "man enough" to have sex with her. He went back to his apartment, got a paring knife and went back to Elaine's apartment, where he found her in bed. He stabbed her in the chest and slit her throat.

He went back to his place, stripped off his clothing, and soaked them to remove the blood. He stuffed the clothes in a bag and dumped them in a culvert. He then buried the knife.

Warning signals

- Burke suffered from depression, personality disorder and multiple drug and alcohol abuse.
- According to Dr. Pamela Forsythe's testimony, Burke had a long psychiatric history, having been admitted to the Hillsborough Hospital 41 times.
- Burke had married in the fall of 1990 and within months was charged for threatening to kill his wife and was given a restraining order. They separated early in 1991.

Legal proceedings

Burke pleaded "not guilty" at his pre-trial in June 1991. In December he elected to be tried by judge alone and changed his plea to guilty of second-degree murder. The presiding judge and defense lawyer cited Burke's intoxication and Elaine's sexual taunts as mitigating factors in the murder. He was sentenced to life in prison with eligibility for parole after 10 years.

Notes

Elaine "Lainy" grew up in Little Sands, PEI and was a talented musician who loved to play guitar and sing. She was remembered by her step-sister as a caring person who "loved everybody...she wouldn't hurt a fly."

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Burke (1991); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (1991); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Shirley Ann Duguay Oct. 11, 1961 – Oct. 3, 1994 (last seen)

On October 7, 1994, Shirley Ann Duguay's abandoned car was found in a field on Highway 169, near Tyne Valley. Shirley was last seen on October 3, 1994. RCMP did a large search of the area, using 120 members of CFB Gagetown and students from the Atlantic Police Academy. The search was called off as winter moved in.

On May 6, 1995, Shirley's battered and partially decomposed body was discovered in a shallow grave in a wooded area of North Enmore. Her hands were tied behind her back and she had been strangled.

Background

Douglas Leo Beamish, Shirley's estranged husband, was the primary suspect in Shirley's disappearance. Foul play was suspected from the start but without a body, it was difficult to investigate. RCMP found a plastic bag near the body containing a leather jacket with bloodstains and two strands of white hair. The blood proved to be Shirley's and the hair was from Snowball, a cat belonging to Beamish's parents. Douglas Beamish was staying with his parents at the time of Shirley's disappearance.

Warning signals

- Beamish was known to police for his violent behaviour both in Toronto and PEI. Toronto Metro Police served him with a peace bond in 1991 and Shirley returned to the Island to get away from him.
- During the trial, evidence in the form of a letter (written during a separation in 1992), revealed his state of mind. In the letter, Beamish wrote that if he couldn't be with Shirley he would kill her, their three children and himself.
- It was also revealed at trial that Beamish had a history of violence towards women. His former common-law spouse described an incident in the mid-1980s, in which she was beaten, raped and threatened death at knifepoint in front of her children.

Legal proceedings

The introduction of Snowball's hair as evidence was the world's first use of non-human DNA in a criminal trial. Douglas Beamish was charged with first-degree murder and found guilty of second-degree. He was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole for 18 years.

Postscript

Beamish appealed his conviction in 1998 and 1999. Both appeals were rejected.

Notes

Shirley was the mother of five children (two from a relationship prior to Beamish). Shirley's daughter Shelley has grown up to become a passionate advocate of abused women, publically sharing her experiences as a child witnessing violence and keeping her mother's memory alive.

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Beamish (1996, 1998, 1999); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (1994–2000); New York Times (1997); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Della Waddell
1921 – August 18, 1998



On the morning of August 18, 1998, 77 year-old Della Waddell was found murdered in her Alexander Drive bungalow in Charlottetown. She had been bludgeoned by a vacuum cleaner and stabbed 62 times.

Background

Edmond John Aylward, age 21, was charged with first-degree murder. His fingerprint and palm print were found in Della's house and a kit bag containing both his ID and Della's was located in a Charlottetown park. Aylward knew Della, having grown up in the neighbourhood. He never said why he murdered Della. According to his lawyer at the trial, Aylward "can't answer why he committed such a crime."

Warning signals

- In 1994, Aylward assaulted a 77 year-old women with a broom handle.
- Aylward, the youngest of six children, was involved with the system from a young age, first with Child and Family Services, then with Mental Health after a suicide attempt at age eighteen.
- In 1996, he started a fire by putting eight aerosol cans in a microwave, causing \$25,000 in damages. Probation Services and Corrections became involved.

Legal proceedings

Aylward pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder but a week into his trial he changed his plea to guilty of second-degree murder. He was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 15 years. For the first time in PEI courts, family members were allowed to read their victim impact statements at sentencing.

Notes

Della, a widow living alone, was a slight 120 pounds and severely arthritic. The victim impact statements painted a picture of a dearly loved mother, grandmother, and great grandmother; a retired nurse caring for her cat, feeding the birds, and telling jokes. Della was a passionate Blue Jays baseball fan and a bingo enthusiast.

"She didn't die peacefully, so we have to live with that for the rest of our lives," commented her grandson at the sentencing. "I don't know if we'll ever be okay."

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Aylward (1999); CBC News (1998–2000); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (1998–2000); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Mary Elizabeth Waite 1955 - August 13, 2000

In the early morning hours of Sunday, August 13, 2000, police responded to a 911 call and found 45 year-old Mary Waite dead in the bathroom of her Carvell Street apartment in Summerside. She had been beaten to death. Mary suffered multiple blows to the head, neck, trunk, and extremities and died from blunt force trauma to the head and neck. Several days later, John William Fennell, Mary's estranged common-law partner was charged with first-degree murder.

Background

Around 1 a.m. on August 13, after a heavy night of drinking, an argument broke out and Fennell attacked Mary. Blood markings indicated that the assault took place around the apartment. After the assault Fennell left the apartment and went to a neighbour's, where he sat and rolled cigarettes, his demeanor apparently appearing "normal." After about an hour and a half he went back to the apartment where he indicated that he found Mary dead on the bathroom floor. He called 911 and tried to clean up the blood.

Warning signals

- Mary was no stranger to violence in her relationships with male partners. Mary's first partner, John Garfield Waite, and father of her three children was violent towards her during their marriage.
- Mary had endured five years of punches, kicks and verbal threats at the hands of John Fennell.
- After a severe beating in August 1999 and again in November, Fennell was convicted of assault, served two months, was put on probation, and ordered to stay away from Mary.
- Mary, having no place to live, moved back in with Fennell despite the efforts of family, police and probation officers to intervene.

Legal proceedings

On March 5, 2001, Fennell waived his right to a preliminary inquiry and his case was sent directly to the Supreme Court of PEI. The charge was reduced to second-degree murder and did not go to trial. Fennell pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to 14 years in a federal penitentiary.

Notes

Ironically, a year before Mary's murder, her ex-husband was murdered by his common-law wife Julie Cavell Hynes. In May 1999 Julie hit him on the head with a marble rolling pin while he slept in their East Bideford house. Julie pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and received a life sentence.

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Fennel (2001); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (2000 - 2001); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Kimberly Ann Byrne
November 1, 1970 – December 10, 2000



During the early morning hours of December 10, 2000, 30 year-old Kimberly Ann Byrne was beaten to death in her Cardigan home by her common-law spouse Frederick Francis Sheppard.

Background

Sheppard had been drinking with a friend on Saturday, December 9. Kim and their son, seven year-old Culyer arrived at the friend's place late afternoon. Kim joined the men in drinking while Culyer watched movies. An argument between Kim and Sheppard broke out around 10 – 11 p.m., when he shoved her and grabbed her by the hair. Their friend broke it up and Kim left for home with her son, refusing to let Sheppard in the car. He began to walk the two kilometers home.

The friend called Kim to warn her that Sheppard was very angry and that she should leave. She went back to the friend's place, telling him that she planned to leave Sheppard right after Christmas. Although the friend tried to persuade her to stay for the night, she went home around 2 a.m.

When she got back home Sheppard was there and they began to argue. Culyer witnessed his father giving his mother a bloody nose and kicking her while she was on the floor. Culyer fled to his bedroom where he cried and covered his ears so he would not hear the "thumping and screaming and bad words" his father was saying.

Following the attack, Sheppard left and went to a friend's home looking for liquor. He told his friend that he had beaten Kim and that he planned to go after the man who he thought she was having an affair. He reported that he returned home and found Kim in a pool of blood and not breathing. He said he attempted mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. At 5:42 a.m. he called 911. When the paramedics arrived at 5:55, Kim had no vital signs.

Legal proceedings

Sheppard was charged with second-degree murder. His plea-bargain to the lesser charge of manslaughter sparked public demonstrations of protest. Weekly vigils were held at the courthouse in Charlottetown and over 2,600 Islanders signed petitions asking that Fred Sheppard receive a life sentence with no chance for parole. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in May 2001, with eligibility for parole after three years.

Warning signals

- Sheppard was known in the community and to police as someone who abused alcohol.
- Sheppard threatened to kill the person he thought was having an affair with Kimberly.

Postscript

Following the Sheppard decision, the PEI government held public and private consultations across the province to develop a family violence strategy that was implemented through the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence. A key component of the strategy is awareness, education and training in the area of domestic violence.

In January 2004 Sheppard was granted 3 day leaves. In July 2004 he was granted day parole. In July 2005 he was caught drinking alcohol (a parole violation) but kept day parole. His parole was revoked in August 2005 when he didn't return to his halfway house. In January 2008 he was given 6 months day parole.

In August 2008, Sheppard was ordered returned to a minimum to medium-security correctional facility in Alberta. The incident that led to this penalty was an altercation that occurred after Sheppard harassed a woman on the street. Police arrived on the scene and told Sheppard to leave the woman alone. Sheppard, who was drinking, yelled at the police and then tried to punch one of the officers in the head.

Notes

As a licensed practical nurse, Kimberly was a member of the PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (UPSE). In December of 2004 family, friends and co-workers constructed a life-sized wooden "silhouette" of Kimberly, through the "Silent Witness" project. This Minnesota project commemorates women who have been killed by their partners or ex-partners. UPSE sponsored Kimberly's silhouette, the first on PEI.

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Sheppard (2001); CBC News (2000-2009); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (2000 –2009); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Deborah Holmes 1955 – July 1, 2001

In the early morning of July 1, 2001, 46 year-old Deborah Holmes was murdered. James Barry Bradley, her ex-spouse used an axe to smash his way into her apartment building and then into her apartment. He hacked her to death.

Background

On the morning of the murder, Barry Bradley called Debbie's residence five times. At approximately 5 a.m., Barry drove to Debbie's apartment building and began pressing the buzzer to her apartment. Debbie called 911. RCMP arrived at Debbie's apartment within 15 minutes, but Bradley had fled.

While the police were there, Bradley again telephoned Debbie. The police answered the phone and challenged Bradley's presence earlier at Debbie's apartment. Bradley explained that his "stay-away order" had recently expired and he was allowed to be there. He told the police that he wanted to see his daughter. Police left Debbie's apartment but did not go to Bradley's residence or apprehend him.

Approximately 90 minutes after Bradley's telephone conversation with the police at Deborah's apartment, Bradley drove to the apartment and smashed his way into the building using an axe and carrying a hatchet. The first of several 911 calls came in at 6:42:23 a.m.

Police entered the apartment building within two to three minutes after receiving the call and found Bradley standing in the hall with blood on his clothing. EMTs arrived but Debbie did not exhibit vital signs. The coroner pronounced her dead at the scene. Among other injuries, Debbie suffered four chop wounds to her neck and six lacerations to her head and neck. Her spinal cord was severed.

Warning signals

- Debbie endured over 25 years of violence from her common-law spouse, James Barry Bradley. She left many times but Bradley would convince her to return. In 1998, she left for good but the threats and violence continued. Bradley told many people that he owned her and if she didn't return to him he would kill her.
- There were seven occasions between 1998 and 2001 in which Debbie Holmes called the police or 911 to report that Bradley had breached the stay-away order. On April 1, 1999, Barry was placed on probation and ordered to stay away from Debbie's residence for one year.
- He also harassed her at her workplace, calling her constantly, driving slowly by or just dropping in, and threatening co-workers in spite of a "no trespass" order.

Legal proceedings

In March 2003, James Barry Bradley was found guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Debbie Holmes. The decision made legal history in two ways. This was the first conviction in Canada of first-degree murder on the grounds of stalking a victim (Stalking became grounds for a first-degree murder finding in 1997). This was also the first conviction for first-degree murder in Prince Edward Island. No one had been convicted of first-degree murder on PEI since the law was changed from the older crime of "capital murder" in the 1970s. Bradley was sentenced to life imprisonment (no parole for 25 years).

Postscript

Bradley appealed the verdict in May 2004. His appeal was postponed until December 2004 when a legal aid lawyer was appointed. In September 2006 his legal aid lawyer asked to be removed. The appeal was dismissed.

Notes

Debbie was a mother of two, a friend to many, and a long-time employee of the PEI Native Council. According to a friend's testimony at Barry's murder trial, "Debbie was concerned every minute of her life that I knew her. Debbie was always trying to appease Barry, and she did it in a manner that was just part of her life. She had to do it to survive. She told me quite plainly that Barry was going to kill her..."

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Bradley (2003, 2004, 2007); CBC News (2001-2007); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (2001 – 2007); UPSE Silent Witness Project.

Chrystal Dawn Bearisto
October 15, 1979 – July 28, 2002



Chrystal Dawn Bearisto of Charlottetown was riding her bike, on her way to visit with her son on the Saturday afternoon of July 27, 2002. The next day her battered body was found in a wooded area just off the Confederation Trail, near the Community Gardens on Mount Edward Road. Chrystal's hands were tied behind her back and she was naked below the waist. She had been raped, strangled and stabbed multiple times.

Background

On that Saturday afternoon, Chrystal rode her mountain bike up the trail to Wal-Mart to visit her partner Albert MacKenzie during his work break. Around 4 p.m. he went back to work and she left on her bike to go see her son. She never made it.

For years, Chrystal's boyfriend MacKenzie was the focus of the police investigation but there was no evidence to prove he had committed the crime.

In 2005, John David Rayner was found guilty of sexual exploitation and his DNA went into the National DNA Databank. Police were able to match DNA found at the scene of Chrystal's murder to Rayner's. As well as the DNA, fingerprints and other circumstantial evidence linked Rayner, an acquaintance of Chrystal's, to the crime. He was charged with the murder in December 2005.

Warning signals

Rayner is formerly from Charlottetown, but police picked him up after he was released from a detention centre in Toronto. He had just completed a prison term for sexual exploitation.

Legal proceedings

John David Rayner, 43, was found guilty of first-degree murder in June 2007. He was sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole for 25 years.

No motive was given at the trial and he maintained his innocence.

Notes

Chrystal worked in the mailroom of the Guardian newspaper office and had recently returned to school, earning her high school diploma.

Sources

Sources used are public documents and include PEI Supreme Court transcripts R vs Rayner (2007); CBC News (2002-2007); Journal-Pioneer and Guardian newspaper reports (2002 -2007); UPSE Silent Witness Project.