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SUNDAY STAR

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2019



'Is that going to be me next?'

Elaine Bellevue's husband is in prison for fatally stabbing her. It's a shocking story, but one that echoes across the GTA, where dozens of women have been killed in domestic incidents in recent years

Bob Bellevue killed his wife Elaine with their daughters in the house. Calls to 911 gave a harrowing account of her murder.

ALYSHAH HASHAM
COURTS BUREAU

If you ever needed something, you could count on Elaine Bellevue.

She was fun, a great friend, an exceptional mom and a devoted daughter. The kind of person who'd visit her 89-year-old mother's nursing home almost daily with a muffin and coffee, who did everything she could to give her two beloved daughters every opportunity — "you should have seen their schedule!" said friend Diane Gowans, who had known the 61-year-old since their teens.

It stunned everyone when, at 1 a.m. on Jan. 13, 2018, Elaine's husband of 18 years stabbed her to death in their Mississauga home.

But the fact that another GTA man had killed his partner was not surprising. Elaine Bellevue was the fourth of 14 women and children allegedly killed by

current or former intimate partners in the region last year.

And even as Bob Bellevue, now 63, was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 15 years in a Brampton courtroom last Tuesday afternoon, Peel police were releasing the name of another woman killed in a nearby murder-suicide.

Elaine and Bob's marriage began to deteriorate soon after he retired from his job as a vice-president at RBC in September 2017, according to an agreed statement of facts filed with the court.

His depression returned, and the couple started fighting over money and the need for him to keep working.

There was no history of abuse or violence, but Bob was repeatedly hospitalized for suicidal thoughts involving a knife and, after the murder, Bob told police Elaine had talked about moving out with the girls.

On Jan. 12, 2018, the wife of Elaine's brother called Bob, hoping that news he didn't have a respiratory illness had cheered him up — but it hadn't.

He asked her repeatedly if she'd "take care of the girls for me."

It was a strange request, one he'd never made before.

Around 1 a.m. that night, after Elaine and the two teen girls had gone to bed, Bob got a butcher knife from the kitchen, went upstairs to their bedroom and began stabbing his wife.

Elaine's screams woke up the girls, and she told them to call police. Ultimately, both Elaine and the girls got through to 911 and those calls gave a harrowing, real-time account of the murder — among the most shocking Superior Court Justice Bruce Durno said he'd ever heard.

HOMICIDE continued on A10

Cyclists hit by car doors caught up in red tape

Because provincial law doesn't count 'dooring' as a collision, compensation can be slow

BEN SPURR
TRANSPORTATION REPORTER

Dan Hayes was riding along Queen Street West on his way to deliver a pizza when he became the latest Toronto cyclist to win the "door prize."

As he passed a parked car just before Brock Avenue, the driver opened his door into Hayes' path, causing a crash that flung the 40-year-old part-time bike courier into the street and left him with cracked ribs and other injuries.

"Luckily there were no cars coming too when I got sent flying into the road. It was pretty brutal," Hayes recalled of the July 25 incident.

In the brief moments before an ambulance arrived, Hayes was too dazed and in pain to ask for the insurance information of the driver who "doored" him.

If he'd known the ordeal he'd face following the crash, he might have made a point of getting the man's policy details.

Hayes' attempt to file an accident claim with the driver's insurance provider has left him entangled in a months-long bureaucratic mess stemming from how the provincial government deals with "dooring" — the term used to describe a crash caused by a driver opening a car door into a cyclist.

The Ministry of Transportation says to meet the definition of a motor vehicle collision, a crash "must involve a motor vehicle in motion."

Because vehicles involved in doorings are typically parked, the incidents aren't considered motor vehicle collisions — and therefore police don't provide dooring victims with motor vehicle accident reports, which record the parties' insurance information.

That can leave an injured cyclist with no easy path to access benefits they may be entitled to from the driver's insurance provider.

CYCLING continued on A11

Why experts worry about future of legal aid

Ford government's proposed changes to law don't mention the term 'low-income' at all

JACQUES GALLANT
LEGAL AFFAIRS REPORTER

Neither the term "access to justice" nor "low-income" appears in the Ontario government's new bill to revamp the legal aid system.

That's just one of several key differences between the current act that governs legal aid and the new one proposed in the legislature this month that have some critics concerned the Tories are watering down legal aid, rather

than improving access to it. The new bill grants significantly more power to Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) — the independent body that manages the system — to determine who can provide legal services, which services and in what areas of the law, and who is eligible to obtain them.

The organization is currently responsible for paying private lawyers to represent individuals who qualify for assistance, such as in criminal or family law cases, and employs lawyers known as duty counsel who work in courthouses and can assist unrepresented people. LAO also provides funding to the province's 73 community legal clinics,

which provide legal services to low-income individuals in areas such as housing and income security.

The province cut \$133 million from the organization's budget this past spring. Last Monday, Attorney General Doug Downey confirmed that the province would not go ahead with a previous plan to cut a further \$31 million.

The Star has compared the proposed new act with the one in the books now, passed in 1998 during the tenure of Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government.

LEGAL AID continued on A8



Deep roots

The city is a step closer to saving what may be its oldest tree, A3

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The 28 victims of domestic homicide in the GTA this year

Lorraine Kerubo Ogoti, 30: Ogoti had lived in Toronto for a year, moving from Kenya for work. She was planning a trip back home to see her four-year-old son before she was killed on Jan. 11. A man police identified as Ogoti's boyfriend was found dead on the sidewalk outside the apartment building. It is believed he fatally stabbed her in a Scarborough apartment.

Riya Rajkumar, 11: Rajkumar was found dead in a Brampton home on Feb. 14 after she was the subject of an Amber Alert prompted by her mother reporting her father didn't bring her back after their day together. Her father, Roopesh Rajkumar, 41, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after being charged in hospital with deliberately killing his daughter.

Michael Johnston, 54: Johnston was found dead in a Mississauga apartment on March 8. Mary Ljubanovich, 48, who police said was in a relationship with Johnston, has been charged with second-degree murder.

Sara Cimerman, 68: Cimerman was killed on March 11, two days after her husband Efraim Cimerman was charged with assault and ordered to stay away from their home. He was found dead by suicide in the home.

Jennyfer Lachappelle, 42: Lachappelle was a dedicated and beloved volunteer at The Stop community centre, near her Pelham Park apartment where her body was found by police on March 13. A man identified by those who knew them as her boyfriend, Andrew Gerber, 38, is charged with second-degree murder.

Helen Fronczak, 79: Fronczak was described in her obituary as "a beautiful, generous person

who was caring, kindhearted and loving. Everyone that ever knew you, (were) so lucky to have you in their lives." She was found dead in her Etobicoke home on March 18. Her husband, Larry Fronczak, 80, is charged with second-degree murder.

Chiou-Shuang Susan Chen, 40: Chen's husband Mansour Jalali, 53, was charged with first-degree murder four months after she was found dead in a Scarborough home on April 3.

Rae Cara Carrington, 51: Carrington's 19-year-old son Duncan Sinclair is accused of fatally stabbing her at the sandwich shop where she worked in the PATH on April 10. Carrington was living at a shelter for victims of domestic violence at the time she was killed. Prior to her death, her husband Paul Sinclair was charged with several offences involving multiple complainants whose names are under a publication ban.

Kent Wilfred Truman, 77: Truman, a retired firefighter, was found with life-threatening injuries in his home near Black Creek Dr. on April 15. The avid outdoorsman, known as "Bones," spent three decades as a firefighter. His son Kyle Truman, 49, is charged with first-degree murder.

Shubangi Amin, 41: It has been reported that Amin was fatally stabbed in her Brampton home by her husband Navdeep Pratap on May 1. Pratap was found dead by suicide in the home and the couple's 12-year-old son was hospitalized with serious injuries.

Bao Lian Li, 82: Li was found dead in a Brampton townhome on May 13. A man believed to be her husband, 81-year-old Lu



Sharanjeet Kaur, left, was killed by Navdeep Singh, before he died by suicide on Dec. 9, police say. Lorraine Kerubo Ogoti was the first victim of domestic homicide in the GTA this year.



Hong Liang, was charged with second-degree murder.

Yvonne Mooney, 83: Mooney was found with serious injuries at an Oshawa apartment on Mother's Day. She was pronounced dead at hospital and police soon arrested her son, 56-year-old Timothy Mooney. He's been charged with second-degree murder.

Edmondo Samuel, 45: Samuel was fatally stabbed in his Brampton home on June 27. Kevon Samuel, 19, is charged with second-degree murder. Their relationship was not confirmed by police.

Kathryn Niedoba, 36: Niedoba was found with serious injuries at a Dovercourt Village home and died en route to hospital on July 18. Her boyfriend Matthew Larmon is charged with manslaughter.

Moniruz Zaman, 59; Momotaz Begum, 50; Malesa Zaman, 21; and Firoza Begum, 70: All four were found dead in their Markham home on July 28. Menhaz Zaman, 23 — the son of Moniruz and Momotaz, grandson of Firoza and brother

nio Biunno, 52, is charged with second-degree murder.

Tharshika Jeganathan, 38: Jeganathan testified 18 months before she was killed that her husband Sasikaran Thanapalasingam began assaulting her shortly after she moved to Canada from Sri Lanka following an arranged marriage. He was acquitted. While on a peace bond requiring him to stay away from her, Thanapalasingam allegedly killed Jeganathan with a machete. He was charged with first-degree murder. Her body was found in a laneway close to her home on Fishery Rd. on Sept. 11.

Lucja Wojtalski, 58: Wojtalski was found with serious injuries in her Brampton home on Sept. 18 and died in hospital. Her husband, 64-year-old Antoni Wojtalski, is charged with first-degree murder.

Bethelhem Geleta, 22: Police say Geleta's friend and flatmate strangled her to death on Oct. 26 in the Davisville apartment where her boyfriend also lived. Aborma Daba, 30, was found dead by suicide in the apartment. It was reported by Global News that when Geleta tried to end her friendship with Daba, he threatened to kill her and himself.

Jonathan Bastidas, 12; and Nicolas Bastidas, 9: The boys were found dead in their home on Nov. 6. Their father, Edwin Bastidas, has been charged with first-degree murder.

Sharanjeet Kaur, 27: Navdeep Singh, 35, killed Kaur and then himself in a Brampton home on Monday, Dec. 9, soon after their relationship ended, according to Peel Police. There was no reported history of domestic violence, police said.

With files from May Warren and Star Staff

'The girls would have no mommy'

HOMICIDE from A1

"Don't, Bob, I know you love me," Elaine could be heard pleading. "I know you love me. Don't, you're hurting me. The girls won't have anybody. And I'm bleeding to death."

"The girls would have no mommy."

One of the girls confronted her father, and he stabbed her three times, injuring her hands and arms.

She described barricading herself in her room and holding herself against the door to stop him from coming in.

When police arrived, Bob refused to drop the knife, so the officers Tasered him twice before arresting him.

He was charged with first-degree murder and attempted murder, but pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and aggravated assault earlier this year after a preliminary hearing in which both his daughters testified — an experience their guardian said was deeply traumatic for them.

Last Tuesday, Bob Bellevue listened as the judge retold the disturbing facts of the case, sitting in court, his eyes downcast. The hearing was broadcast by video so that family who could not attend in person, or didn't want to be in the same room as him, could listen.

In victim impact statements with the court, both girls, their guardian and other relatives described the enduring pain of losing Elaine; the girls described the lasting trauma left after they witnessed their father murder their mother.

The girls had to be shown how high and secure the prison fences were, their guardian wrote, urging the judge to pass the highest possible sentence.

One of the teens described having nightmares of being attacked by her father, and of not having her mother be there for all her milestones and achievements.

In a handwritten letter addressed to her father, she wrote: "You took away my innocence ... You changed the way I look at the world ... You were my dad. You were supposed to protect

me. You did the exact opposite."

The sentence for second-degree murder is life in prison, with a maximum of 25 years before first parole eligibility. The defence asked for 11 or 12 years before Bellevue can first apply for parole, the Crown for 18.

"Any domestic violence is serious and a message needs to be sent," Durno said. Deciding that life with no parole for 15 years was a fit sentence, he also considered Bellevue's serious depression, that there was no prior history of domestic violence and that the violent stabbing was "out-of-character."

Elaine's friend Gowans said she was glad the court process was finally over and that the girls were spared testifying again. But, she said, the pain of losing Elaine — especially her children's pain — will never be over.

☆☆☆

There have been 16 GTA homicides this year in which a former or current intimate partner has been charged or died by suicide after the killing, two more than last year, according to a Star analysis.

The latest happened last Monday afternoon in Brampton.

According to Peel police, 27-year-old Sharanjeet Kaur was killed by her former partner, 35, at a home in the city soon after their relationship ended. The man, Navdeep Singh, killed himself after killing Kaur, police said.

The number of domestic homicides in the region shows a need for more services — especially in Peel Region and other growing communities — and a desperate need for affordable housing so that women leaving their abusers don't need to stay in shelters for long periods, say those who help women in abusive situations.

"Shelters are operating over-capacity in Ontario and across Canada," said Marlene Ham, executive director of the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH). "On any given night in Canada, hundreds of women could be turned away."



Elaine Bellevue's husband Bob pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in her death. Their daughters described lasting trauma at witnessing their father murder their mother.

Earlier this year, Sharon Mayne Devine, CEO of Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin and the Safe Centre of Peel, said they've seen a "dramatic" increase in murders related to domestic assaults over the last two years in Peel Region.

One piece of it is that they've seen an "enormous explosion of people" in the region, and "infrastructure and service delivery just has not kept up," she said.

"It's really frightening for women, because they worry, 'is that going to be me next?'"

Police typically classify domestic homicides as any killing in which a family member or current or former intimate partner is charged.

Twenty-eight women, children and men killed in the GTA so far this year fit that description.

The youngest victim was nine, the oldest 88.

Of that number, 14 women, one man and one child were allegedly killed by current or former intimate partners.

Seven of the 21 incidents were apparent murder-suicides.

In almost all of the cases, the bodies of those killed were found in their homes.

The OAITH also tracks the number of women and children killed in Ontario each year — 37 between December 2018 and November 2019. Across Canada, 119 women have been killed this year, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability.

But Ham noted those lists may be incomplete because police services are inconsistent in how they release information about these killings, if they do at all.

The Halton Regional Police Service recently announced they will periodically release information about domestic violence incidents in the area in order to boost awareness of available services and resources to victims, regardless of whether a police report is made.

The service says it responded to 3,300 intimate-partner domestic violence calls last year, noting that such incidents are overwhelmingly under-reported.

"We can't overstate how prev-

alent (domestic violence) is," Halton police deputy chief Jeff Hill said in an interview. Hill, who prior to being deputy chief oversaw criminal investigations, said the move towards increased transparency and openness about domestic violence came out of conversations with women's shelter operators and advocacy groups. They had explained that the typical police practice of not sharing information about these incidents, other than the most extreme and violent, downplays how common and widespread it is, he said.

He said this new approach is one small way to ensure the community knows how serious the problem is and how to access needed supports.

Ham said local shelters and rape crisis centres are excellent resources beyond providing a place to stay or emergency support. Family doctors are also a good point of contact.

If you or someone you know need help, you can call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-866-863-0511 (Toll Free), 1-866-863-7868 (TTY) or 416-863-0511 (Toronto).