

## A Chance to Apologize

By Jason Roessle -  
Mission City Record Reporter

March is normally a pretty dreary month in Toronto, but on this day it was sunny.

The crew had enjoyed some great luck over the past six months, successfully pulling off armed robberies. In March 1978, instead of hitting up individual sites, they decided to knock over a Brinks shipment of cash.

The three-man team held up the Brinks guard in the furniture section of the Eglinton Square Bay at gunpoint, snatching the money and making a break for it down the escalator towards the front doors.

Ever the committed Hudson's Bay employee, Theodore Van Sluytman grabbed one of the men.

Two of the men shot him.

Van Sluytman was dead.

Every day since, and likely for every day to come, Mission's Glen Flett has regretted that moment, and always wished he could get the opportunity to apologize face-to-face to the family for the immense hurt he brought crashing down upon them.

Tuesday he gets that chance.

The Fletts are well-known in Mission. They have lived here since 1988 and co-founded LINC (Long-term Inmates Now in the Community), helping recently released cons.

Glen was born in Victoria, but wound up living in Ontario, where he became involved in the criminal lifestyle early, and progressed quickly to violent crimes — including the one that put him where steel bars were the first and last thing he saw each day for 14 years.

Glen had actually got away clean from the Brinks hold-up. He left Toronto and ran to Montreal for two months. He went back to visit his partner in crime, when the police swooped in and arrested them both. Initially, the police didn't know who Glen was, but

once the background checks started, his life was about to change.

After Glen's conviction and sentencing, he spent four years in Ontario jails, including Kingston and Millhaven, before being transferred to Kent Institution in 1982, spending eight years total in maximum security facilities.

He stayed briefly in Matsqui prison for about six months, until he was moved again to Vancouver Island's William Head in 1986 to be closer to family.

Glen met and married Sherry while inside; their lives first intersected while Glen was in Millhaven, and they courted for eight years before marrying in 1987. In 1989 he was moved to Ferndale Institution where he served the remainder of his sentence.

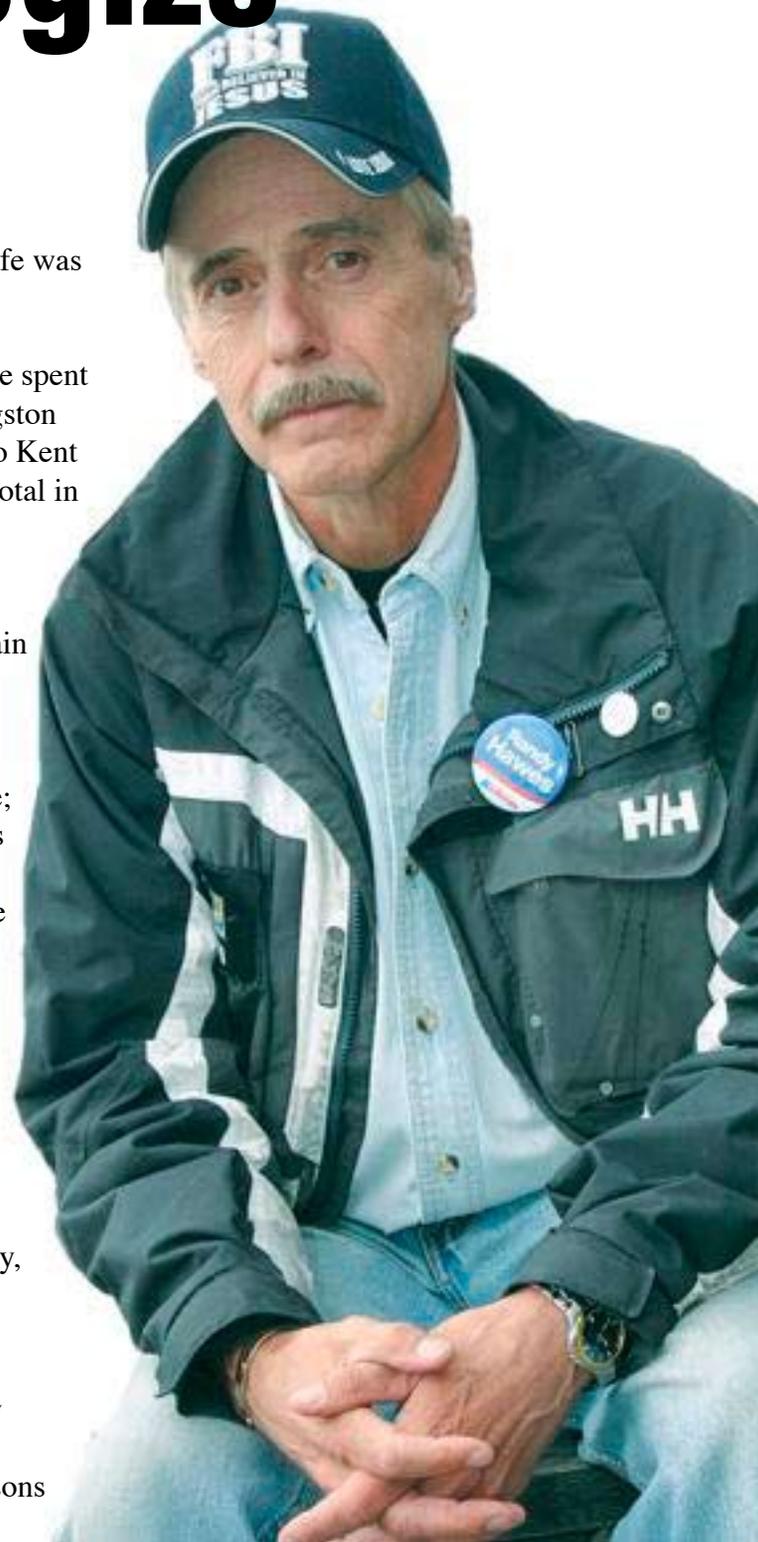
It was from inside this federal facility that he started to become involved in the outside community. Glen worked in the administration offices at Ferndale, and through that work, made contacts with Mission Community Services Society, eventually tasking himself with volunteer projects.

When he was released in 1992, the family decided to stay here, rather than return to Victoria, where Glen's parents and three sons resided. Mission had accepted Glen as a person, and while they saw his faults, he was allowed to contribute.

Now, in 2009, Glen works with MCSS, but in a more formal capacity as an outreach worker, helping the homeless find shelter and get help.

He's getting a special chance to aid others next week during National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Glen will be speaking on stage at the Clarke Theatre right next to the daughter of the man he killed 31 years ago.

Margot Van Sluytman was 16 when her father was murdered, more than old enough to comprehend the situation, which made it just that much



Kevin Plastow photo

more painful.

She pulled inward. Her grades dropped from As to nearly Fs, and often her emotions were out of control. There was no counselling offered in the late 1970s that she knew of, and life quickly became dreadful.

Creating prose helped immensely. Margot has always loved writing and always read, but ultimately it was through kindred spirits, and kind, gentle people whom she knew who helped her through the healing process.

Margot is now a successful poet and creative writer, and teaches others how to mend emotional scars through writing. But it wasn't until a donation came through her website for her independent press in 2007 that the healing truly began.

Margot was scrolling through the benefactors, and noted a person named Sherry Edmunds-Flett had donated some money. Margot crafted an e-mail asking if she was related to Glen Flett. Sherry responded that he was her husband.

Margot replied, requesting an apology from Glen for the violent act that churned up three decades of her life.

The next morning, she opened the apology e-mail from Glen. They began corresponding regularly, and talked on the phone, at which point Margot realized the veil of pain that had been draped across her life was finally lifting. While she accepted Glen's apology, she expressed the need to see him in person so she could truly believe his words.

On April 28, Glen and Margot will sit together and share their story in front of a crowd.

Both admit to being nervous about the experience, but are excited at the possibility of jointly sharing their stories. They have met in person before, in July 2007. Margot made the

journey to British Columbia, and the two went to Westminster Abbey for a ceremony to honour the memory of Theodore Van Sluytman, and so Glen could again ask for forgiveness.

It was a powerful moment.

For Glen, this is the fruition of a dream — the most significant opportunity yet to apologize. While the crime was terrible, the former criminal says it inspired him to be a better person than he ever could have hoped.

Next Tuesday's event aims to show people how one event can bind you for years, or decades, and how people can eventually be released from the burden of emotional trauma.

As Margot witnessed how much Glen's crime has pained him over the years, she has attached deep importance to the dialogue, and the meetings.

The two firmly offer a message that individuals are more than one critical mistake or a series of misjudgments, and it is possible to move on with life in a positive fashion, regardless of the circumstances — whether forced or self-inflicted.

The forum is co-sponsored by LINC Society and the Pacific Region Victims Advisory Committee, and funded by the national Department of Justice. The Clarke Theatre is located at 33700 Prentis Ave. The event begins at 7:30 p.m. and there is no charge for admission.