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Won Awards for First Inmate Self-Help Program in Canada, Now He's Back In Prison **Flett's Rise to Fame, Fall from Grace**

By TRUDY BEYAK
Abbotsford News Reporter

The face of a young dad with four children is etched forever in Glenn Flett's memory.

Glenn killed Theodore Van Sluytman, 39, a Hudson's Bay manager, almost 30 years ago during a bungled robbery in Toronto in 1978.

That dark moment triggered a lifetime of remorse for Glenn, who turned his life to God while he was at Kent Institution in 1982 and decided to make his life count by giving selflessly back to the community.

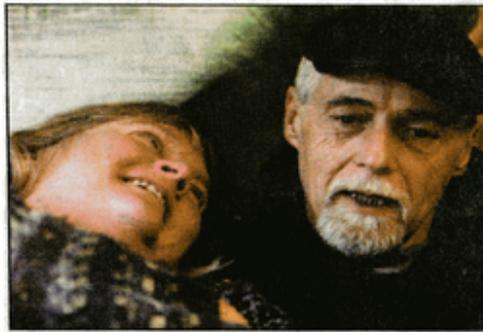
Glenn whispered two words that would be two of the most meaningful words he would ever speak and he would repeat them often: "I'm sorry."

With those two words on his heart, he started to pay his personal debt to the man who would never live to see his children grow up.

In 1992, Glenn and his wife Sherry co-founded the non-profit volunteer-based program called Long-term Inmates Now in the Community (LINC), which is currently located at 32463 Simon Ave. in Abbotsford.

It is the only peer-support program of its kind in Canada, helping cons to break free of their crime cycle and reintegrate into the community.

LINC and Associates – of which Sherry is the director – is under contract with the Correctional Service of Canada to provide numerous services to offenders in jail and in the community.



JOHN VAN PUTTEN / The Abbotsford News

"Love overcomes all evil." That's the motivation that drove Glenn Flett, 55, who was convicted of murder almost 30 years ago, to co-found, with his wife Sherry, the first self-help program in Canada helping cons turn around their lives.

'You have an opportunity again, Mr. Flett, to take a different path that can mirror people like Chuck Cadman.'

JUDGE RONALD CARYER
B.C. provincial court

Glenn said his mission in life "is to increase public safety and to help others."

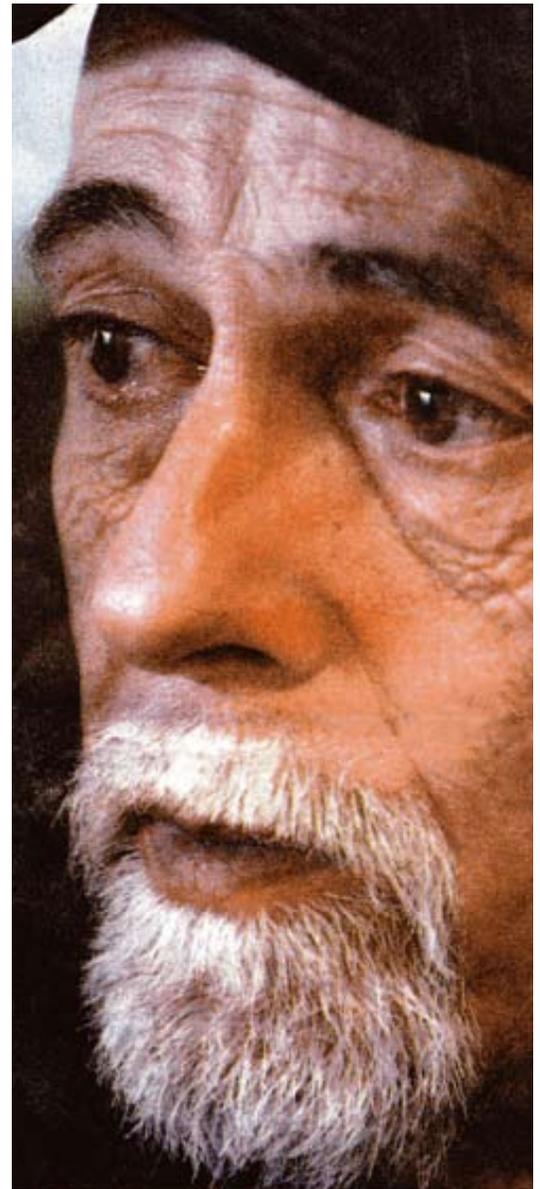
And, he has earned awards for his nationally renowned work with offenders, earning public praise across Canada as a "success story."

But then came "the fall."

Glenn tenderly holds his wife's hands, speaking with a deep thoughtfulness and Sometimes with tears in his eyes at the Kwokwexwellhp Institution on Thursday, a minimum-security federal prison near Hemlock Valley.

The ex-con who turned his life around is doing hard time again on his roller-coaster "journey of pain."

The National parole Board revoked Flett's parole on Wednesday, meaning he'll be in jail for the next one to three years.



Glenn Flett, 55, rose to national public acclaim for his efforts during the past 13 years. But he's back in jail for possession of a handgun. What happened? Today, he shares the story behind the story.

It's a huge blow to him and his wife, but they're not angry.

Glenn knows he did wrong.

He explained what led to his conviction for possession of a loaded handgun.

Glenn is quiet-spoken and he wins the hearts of almost everyone who meets him.

In fact, he counts as friends such highly esteemed people in the justice system as Brenda Marshall, retired Kent Institution warden, and Sgt. Matt Logan, a renowned RCMP psychologist.

Glenn is "an outstanding man" according to all who know him well, said Darryl Plecas, head of the criminology department at University College of the Fraser Valley.

What caused him to fall from grace?

Even though Glenn was free on the outside, he was actually still doing hard time, he said, working long hours every week "on the front lines" trying to help hard-core offenders in the unnerving and sometimes brutal atmosphere of Kent Institution.

Tensions surrounded Glenn in prison like a noose tightening around a neck.

And a few violent, blood-curdling incidents led to burnout, he said.

About two years ago, Glenn helped an inmate, Darrell Shanoss, who was in the segregation unit, to move back into the general population.

When a riot broke out at the maximum-security prison, Shanoss, 39, was viciously murdered and his eyes ripped out.

"That was very traumatic for me," he said, noting that he was involved in negotiations to try to restore calmness at the prison.

There was more anguish in store for him.

He assisted another inmate to get a transfer to Saskatchewan Penitentiary and this offender, Amie Simard, was also murdered, possibly by gang-members.

Glenn said his self-confidence was shaken to his inner soul and he went back smoking pot to ease his anxieties.

But he has a good heart and he pushed on with his work.

When a convicted murderer named

Eric Fish wanted to get on parole in the worst way, he convinced Glenn he was ready.

Sherry testified on Fish's behalf and the parole board released him to a halfway house in Vernon.

About a month later, Fish invaded the home of a senior couple and killed a 74-year-old-man, Bill Abramenko, in cold blood in front of his elderly wife.

That family's tragedy broke the hearts of Sherry and Glenn – especially Glenn, who had a close and respected friend die in a similar type of crime.

He was crushed.

The conflict and contrast between Glenn's typical civilian life with his adoring wife and gorgeous daughter and then working with brazen criminals – many of whom didn't appreciate all of his sacrificial efforts to help them – hit Glenn like a brick one day.

It was nothing but it was everything.

"My daughter Victoria (8) hugged me around my legs one Saturday and begged me to go for a walk to the park with her," Glenn said.

But he turned aside her pleading because his regular practice was to go to the seg unit at Kent on Saturdays, he said.

And so he went. Miserable, Stressed to the max. And Fish happened to be there this particular day.

Glenn was feeling intense pressure and had a blow-up at the institution that sent him into a tailspin.

He was fried mentally and snapped.

A psychiatrist ordered him to take time off work and he started on anti-depressants.

After several months, Glenn felt guilty about not working and started right back where he ended – at Kent Institution helping mixed-up cons.

Additional fears cascaded into his life.

Glenn was subpoenaed to testify at Fish's trial, resulting in some veiled gangland threats, creating deep paranoia and anguish for him.

To top of all these events, one of Glenn's closest friends, Eddy Ramsay, was struck by a train at Lake Errock and

died in March.

When Flett went to sort Eddy's belongings, he found a 9 mm handgun. He pocketed the firearm.

That was one mistake that would trip him up.

Some time later, on April 12, he testified at Fish's gruelling trial in Vernon, where he was cross-examined for more than six sweat-inducing hours. Afterward, Glenn was a ball of tension and popped a few too many prescription meds and smoked pot to steady his nerves and started driving home to Mission.

He weaved all over the Coquihalla Connector towards Merritt and police pulled him over, charging him with five offenses, including possession of a handgun without a license.

The lifer was back in the slammer.

When Judge Ronald Caryer sentenced Glenn to one year, he noted the unique character of the man in front of him.

The Judge said Flett was an outstanding man with "a tremendous strength of character" who had paid back to the community far more than the majority of people in society will ever do in a lifetime.

In fact, Glenn gave too much, essentially burning himself out, the judge noted.

Caryer kindly suggested that Glenn forgive himself and move beyond the guilt of the murder he had committed three decades ago that was driving him so hard to help others.

The judge compared Glenn's unselfish life to Chuck Cadman.

When Cadman's son was murdered, he "could have sunk into an abyss, but he didn't," said the judge to Glenn.

Instead, Cadman advocated for victims' rights and he sought to change the legislation, Caryer said.

"He was a very, very fine man...You have an opportunity,, again, Mr. Flett, to take a different path that can mirror people like Chuck Cadman. You have already done that. You can do it on a different path."

Glenn said the judge's word really

inspired him.

“I have never felt so personally affirmed in all of my life than when I heard the judge speak those words to me.”

During the past half year, Flett has come off his medications.

And, though his work with hard-core cons has ended for now, he said he intends to help his community wherever he is, and to one day continue working with youths and survivors of serious crimes.

“I haven’t given up on my vision. I do care a lot and I believe love overcomes all evil. Like Hurricane Carter said: ‘Hate put me in jail, love sets me free.’ ”