

MISSION RECORD



Glenn Flett and Sherry Edmunds-Flett feel some relief and closure after Sunday's conviction of Robert Pickton, who murdered Georgina Papin, along with five other women. JASON ROESSLE PHOTO

Women were all victims before being murdered

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themselves, calling it the final indignity they suffered.

It's not totally the police's fault either, especially because of the nomadic nature of some residents on the Downtown Eastside. But regardless, the couple feels the case was mishandled.

Remembering a valued friend

Glenn and Sherry Edmunds-Flett were close to Georgina Papin, and after Sunday's conviction of Pickton, the couple reflect on who she was

By JASON ROESSLE
Mission Record

The First Nations woman whipped out her guitar and sang a song.

Her clear, strong voice immediately enthralled all who listened, painting vivid pictures with her words and melodies.

She had spent some time in and out of jail, and lived for a time in Mission, just off Home Street, with her four children and common-law husband. But despite her troubles, she fiercely loved her kids and was determined to do what she could to care for them all.

Her former lifestyle and addictions kept coming back to haunt her. The cycle of addiction changed this charming woman, and eventually led to her being number 17 on a list of missing women, and one of the people a serial killer was convicted Sunday of murdering at his Port Coquitlam pig farm.

Georgina Papin would have been 44 this coming March.

Georgina was last seen in March 1999, when she suffered a drug overdose and was treated for pneumonia at St. Paul's. She was 35.

In 1997, she'd been living in Mission with her children, mak-

ing aboriginal crafts and attending pow-wows. Two years later, she was back in the thrall of her drug addiction, and would disappear for days, her friend Evelyn Youngchief recalled for jurors. She loved jewelry, and the colour red. The last time Youngchief saw her friend, she was wearing three silver rings she'd given her and a pair of black, size-five heels. Three years later, some of her hand bones were discovered at the Pickton property.

Georgina was born in Hobbema, south of Edmonton. She grew up in foster homes, separated from her eight siblings.

Sherry Edmunds-Flett and husband Glenn shared their home with Georgina twice in the late 1990s, trying to help her through her problems so she could get her life back on track.

The women Robert Pickton killed were victimized long before he got to them, the couple asserts.

Every one of the women, without exception, Glenn notes, had suffered through some type of traumatic, life-altering event or series of events that put them on their path of self-destruction.

And they were all human beings. The Fletts criticized the media for putting too much emphasis on Pickton, and not enough on the women

The Fletts saw how hard Georgina tried, so they worked their hardest to give her a chance. She stayed at the Mission couple's home in 1995 and 1996, for one month and then four, respectively. The Fletts are well-respected for their work with inmates in the community, along with the formation of LINC (Long Term Inmates Now in the Community).

Friends remember a very outgoing person, who simply had too many kids too fast, and allowed the pressure to overwhelm her.

The Fletts are godparents to Georgina's children, but Sherry went one step further, sharing her breastmilk (she had a newborn at the time as well) when Georgina's babies reacted to formula.

They tried to stay in contact with her children after Georgina went missing, but it has been years since any family had phoned the Fletts with news.

Even with the Fletts help, it wasn't enough, says Glenn, as he looked down at the church floor. Georgina had four kids, three of them under two at the time. She was living on social assistance, and didn't get much help from anyone else.

The Fletts were in Abbotsford a few years ago this month, getting ready for a Christmas event they were hosting when officers from the Missing Women's Task Force visited.

They showed Glenn and Sherry a list — one with no names, only numbers — and asked if they knew any of the people depicted.

They pointed to 17. It was Georgina.

Once excavations started at the pig farm, Sherry said she knew in her heart that their friend was there, something that was confirmed several months later when definitive DNA evidence was located. Investigators told them they were one of the last people to have had any contact with her, and that was in 1998.

While Pickton's conviction Sunday brought some measure of closure for the Fletts, they are determined to remember her as they knew her.

The loving mother of four who adored her children, and could touch your soul with her music.

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Read Georgina's own words >>>

In her own words

This is a brief article written by Georgina Papin in the LINC newsletter in October 1996, detailing her struggles and hopes for the future:

Warm hellos to my brothers and sisters within the walls and to those who are making it in a good way out in the free world. Georgina here to share with you my personal struggles, and now my success. For starters, I have nine years on the inside. You know, a little bit here, a little bit there, a bit everywhere.

My last was three years which I did in the BCCW in Burnaby. And you know what? I grew to be sick of those bits! There had to be a way out of the vicious circle that I had created for myself, physically, mentally and emotionally. But how? How could I regain my self-worth and self-respect? The answers were waiting for me with open arms.

When I first started my journey out here in the community of Mission, I had those awkward feelings of rejection, helplessness and you know, those self-defeating old negative thoughts! Much to my own surprise, I made it through Round Lake Treatment Centre, so I now had a few tools that I could use.

Native spirituality has been a big part of my growing years and a real healer in helping me to find me! So, I prayed to the Creator for help in my confusion. The answers followed from within myself.

With the help of Native elders and drug and alcohol counsellors through Mission Indian Friendship Centre and LINC, I have my son, husband and my life back. And a new papoose coming. Seek it — it's there! Write to me. Thank you. All my relations.