

Apology helps to heal one terrible moment of past

Reformed killer, victim's daughter share their stories

BY BRIAN LEWIS, THE PROVINCE - APRIL 26, 2009



Barry Goertzen/ahaideas.com

"As a Christian I had this huge desire to tell the Van Sluytman family how sorry I was for ruining their lives."

Mission resident Glen Flett, 58, says he doesn't think Margot Van Sluytman will ever truly forgive him. But at least she's accepted his apology and understands the kind of person he is today.

After all, Flett was very different that day in 1978 when he shot and killed Van Sluytman's father Theodore during a robbery of the Toronto store where he worked.

As Flett recalls, he was fleeing when the victim grabbed his arm and tried to stop him. "Give it up, son," were Theodore Van Sluytman's last words.

Margot, now a highly regarded Calgary-based poet, was then a tender 16-year-old. The bullets shattered her life, and that of her mother, two sisters and brother.

Flett was handed a life sentence for second-degree murder following what at the time was the longest murder trial in Canadian history.

By his own admission, Flett was one bad dude. He'd been in trouble since he was an 11-year-old in his native Oak Bay, B.C.

Fast-forward to this Tuesday in Mission, where Flett and Van Sluytman will sit side-by-side and share their stories at a special public forum for National Victims of Crime Awareness Week (Clarke Theatre, 33700 Prentis Ave., 7.30 p.m., free admission).

One of the event's sponsors is the Long-term Inmates Now in the Community (LINC) group, co-founded by Flett and his wife to help

recently released prisoners adjust.

How these two were drawn together from opposite ends of a tragedy is a remarkable story.

Flett began his sentence in Ontario's infamous Kingston Penitentiary ("Alcatraz North") but was subsequently transferred to B.C.

It was at Kent Maximum Security Prison near Agassiz in 1982 that Flett let go of his bad ways. "I became a Christian, found a meaningful life even in prison and realized I must help others," he told me.

The change also helped Flett to meet and marry the love of his life, Sherry, while he was still in prison, where he also began work on the bachelor's degree in anthropology and sociology from Simon Fraser University that he now holds.

However, Flett's resurrection came freshly wrapped in strong guilt over what he'd done. "As a Christian I had this huge desire to tell the Van Sluytman family how sorry I was for ruining their lives," he says.

Out on a temporary pass the year before his full parole in 1992 to see his wife's family in Ontario, Flett visited his victim's grave "to pay my respects."

After several failed attempts, Flett established Margot Van Sluytman's whereabouts in May 2007. On learning she was a renowned poet, Flett's wife sent what she thought was an anonymous donation to help Van Sluytman with her career.

But a curious Van Sluytman managed to uncover her benefactor's name and e-mailed her asking if she was related to Glen Flett. "He's my husband," the reply said.

Immediately, Van Sluytman asked Flett for an apology for his terrible actions almost 30 years previously. She got it the next day, and the two began corresponding regularly.

They met for the first time in July 2007 and attended a ceremony honouring her father at Mission's Westminster Abbey.

This incredible experience inspired Van Sluytman's poem *The Other Inmate*. "We were both in jail for many years," she says. "I've now come out from behind my bars and, I believe, so has Glen."

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The L.I.N.C. Society

<http://www.lincsociety.bc.ca/learning.html>

Vancouver Association for Restorative Justice

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