

Burglar had his hand in proverbial cookie jar

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A Hamilton burglar with a heroin habit was caught because his hand had been in the proverbial cookie jar.

Darren Crooks, 33, has a lengthy record for property offences and one prior residential break-in. Crooks pleaded guilty Wednesday to an Aug. 25, 2011, early morning break-in at a King Street East home while the homeowners slept in their beds.

Assistant Crown attorney Lidia Narozniak said the homeowners had been victims of a prior break-in. She said to improve their home security, the couple installed nails with their heads snapped off on their nine-foot back fence.

The male homeowner woke on the day in question to the sound of the automatic coffee maker starting in the kitchen.

But he realized his home had been burglarized when he saw cupboard doors opened and several objects relocated to the back yard.

Narozniak said among the items moved into the yard was a snow globe and a ceramic cookie jar. Both were marked with Crooks' fingerprints, leading to his arrest in June.

"This has to be every homeowner's nightmare: to be asleep in their home when someone is breaking in and going through their possessions," Narozniak told court.

Defence counsel Beth Bromberg, who joined the prosecutor in seeking a nine-month sentence for his client, said Crooks has no recollection of the incident.

But Crooks apparently was scared off during the crime and badly injured one of his hands while fleeing over the exposed fence nails.

Bromberg said her client appears to be sincere in his desire to seek help for his heroin addiction.

An articulate Crooks, who received 106 days of pre-sentence custody credit, expressed both remorse for and revulsion against his actions.

"When I think of what I did, it just overwhelms me. I feel terrible about it," he said.

Ontario Court Justice Fred Campling, who agreed to the joint submission, recalled a break-in case from the past when a homeowner, who had been previously victimized, shot and killed a burglary suspect.

He said the homeowner was subsequently acquitted.

"I don't want to see that happen to you," Campling told Crooks.

Campling added three years of probation to the sentence and told Crooks not to come within 100 metres of the King Street East residence, even if passing it in a car.

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