

Connie tells court she's truly sorry for killing Frank

Hamilton Spectator
(Jun 2, 2009)

She is sorry.

For killing the man she loved.

For pain she caused his family.

For the suffering inflicted upon her own three teen sons, weeping quietly in the courtroom.

The boys sit, shoulder to shoulder, trembling. Wiping tears. Watching their mom plead guilty to manslaughter and be handed a sentence of five years and nine months in prison.

A social worker gently rubs one boy's back.

Lots of apologies are made in courtrooms. Some come off like excuses. Others are calculated. A few seem full of nothing but air.

Heartfelt apologies are uncommon. Especially in murder cases.

Rarer still is a genuine apology as eloquent as the one expressed yesterday by an uneducated, abused addict named Connie Scrivens.

Connie is no angel.

Her record includes fraud. Fail to stop at an accident. Impaired driving. Assault with a weapon. Aggravated assault. Uttering threats.

And there is no doubt that on Saturday, Oct. 25, last year she stabbed her husband, Ferenc (Frank) Pal, 48, with a butcher knife and killed him. Connie admitted doing so -- against the advice of her lawyer -- when she was charged with second-degree murder.

The guilt and grief of it has consumed Connie.

Her lawyer, Beth Bromberg, will be in New York next month talking to defence lawyers about the importance of apologies.

"You want to have a therapeutic experience for both victim and accused because it promotes healing and reduces recidivism," she says.

Ironically, Bromberg says she had nothing to do with Connie's apology. From the moment she was arrested, all Connie wanted was to say she was sorry.

Yesterday, in a mostly empty courtroom, she had her chance.

Wearing black pants and a black cardigan over a white blouse, her black hair pulled back, the 38-year-old Iroquois woman stood in the prisoner's box. She had hoped to address Frank's family, but they chose not to be in court.

"I would like to apologize to the family of Ferenc Pal," she began anyway, in a shaky voice. "I've thought of you a million times.... I think of the pain this has caused you all.... I cannot imagine the pain you have been through.... I take full responsibility for what I did.... I didn't mean for him to die, but I know that I am responsible. I want you to know that I loved him very much, and I know he loved me, too.... I pray that you can find it in your hearts to accept my apology."

She turns to her sons -- 18, 16 and 14 -- who cry harder.

"I know my actions have caused you pain, suffering and loneliness. I am very sorry for the shame and embarrassment you have to live with as a result of what I have done. I am sorry that I cannot be there for you. I know I can't bring this time back. I want you to know that when I am serving my sentence, I plan to use the time to do counselling for my addictions and other problems, and to get an education so that I will be able to change my life, both for me and for you. I want to tell you how much I miss you and love you. I am really, truly sorry."

Connie was born in Niagara Falls, N.Y., (she has dual citizenship) but spent her childhood in Hamilton and teen years at a reserve in Northern Ontario, according to court documents. Connie's mother admits to a difficult upbringing for her daughter.

"I wasn't a good mom. I was drunk all the time, and my men beat me, too," Connie's mother is quoted as saying. "All five of

my kids got different dads Connie was kinda (sic) wimpy kid, but now she's got the eyes of an angel and turns into Mighty Mouse when she drinks."

Connie left school in Grade 8. At age 15 she moved in with her elder sister because her mom was going "to dry out." At 18, Connie entered her first relationship, rife with heavy drinking. She is not sure who fathered her eldest child; she has had a miscarriage. She has been diagnosed with depression and has made many suicide attempts.

Six years ago, Connie took up with Frank. From Hungary, he had been an accomplished athlete in his youth. They drank and fought and beat the hell out of each other. At one point, there was a court order for Connie to stay away from Frank. Seven months before he died, Frank signed papers giving Connie permission to have contact with him.

Two days before the violence ended for good, according to an agreed statement of facts, Frank assaulted Connie. Her friends saw the bruises and were furious.

After drinking, Connie went to the Cannon Street East apartment she shared with Frank to pick up some items. She was accompanied by Melissa Anderson, her sister Bonnie Anderson, their cousin Cheryl Anderson and John Williams.

Frank had also been drinking. He and the Andersons fought about his assault on Connie. They punched and kicked him. Frank grabbed a butcher knife. Williams tried to grab it away and was badly wounded. He rushed to hospital.

Connie, meanwhile, stabbed Frank in the buttocks.

The women fled. And went drinking.

Frank was found face down on his kitchen floor, under a blanket. The knife had penetrated his bladder. He bled to death.

Frank's family knows Connie is responsible. And, if they are reading this, she also wants them to know how sorry she is.

Susan Clairmont's commentary appears regularly in The Spectator. sclairmont@thespec.com
(<mailto:sclairmont@thespec.com>) 905-526-3539