

## Victim's mom forgives man guilty of 2006 manslaughter

*Hamilton Spectator*

Dorothy Stewart waited five agonizing years for police to find the man who stabbed her son to death — even as the killer sat in a jail cell not far from her home.

James Surette was found bleeding to death near a scrap yard on Ferguson Avenue the night of June 5, 2006. Police found a bloody knife in a nearby field, but the killer's trail went cold despite a public appeal for help coupled with a \$2,000 reward.

Scott Patrick Keels, a mentally disabled homeless man, confessed to the crime last November after his release from a robbery sentence at a Kingston prison.

The 36-year-old — who tried to confess to the crime while in psychiatric care in 2009 — pleaded guilty to manslaughter Friday in a Hamilton court and was sentenced to 10 years less time served.

That's enough for Stewart — so long as her son's troubled killer finally gets help.

"I can't hate him. It must be terrible, living in a mind that is so tormented," said the 74-year-old, who prompted tears in the courtroom with an emotional victim impact statement.

"Sometimes I'm angry ... But I've forgiven him. I hope he can find some peace."

Stewart said she can't believe her son's killer was living in a cell 25 minutes away from her Napanee home while she waited in vain for answers about the killing.

But Stewart added what upsets her now is thinking about how the mental health system "failed" both her son and his killer — and how it might again.

"He should never have been allowed out (of institutional care). They let him out and he killed my Jimmy," said a tearful Stewart. "My concern now is what happens if he gets out again without receiving the help he obviously needs."

A bushy-bearded Keels wiped at his eyes during the victim impact statement and later stood to offer a hoarse apology.

"I wish I could take (my actions) back, but I can't," he said, later mouthing the words "I'm sorry" to Stewart as he was led from the courtroom.

Defence lawyer Beth Bromberg told the court her schizophrenic client was in an out of hospitals in Brantford and Norfolk County right up until the day before the killing.

A medical report read out in court concluded Keels was suffering from paranoia and hallucinations, but was not a threat to himself or others.

Keels left a Brantford hospital June 4 against the advice of doctors and travelled to Hamilton, but never followed through on a plan to check into St. Joseph's Hospital. The next night, he stabbed Surette three times in the chest, convinced the Hamilton father was a member of the Hells Angels biker club.

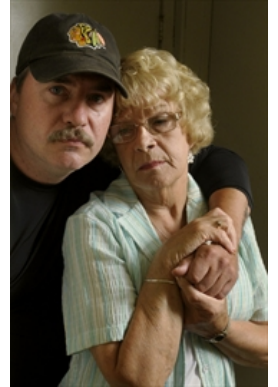
Bromberg said it was unfortunate no medical professional recognized the severity of her client's illness.

"This tragedy occurred while (Keels) was still very sick," she said.

Crown attorney Kevin McKenna labelled the crime "devastating" for Surette's family, including the victim's 21-year-old son, brother and sister.

But he also acknowledged the crime would likely have gone unsolved without Keels's confession. "He was not even on their (investigators') radar," he said.

Justice Marjoh Agro gave Keels two-for-one credit for time served, an option possible because the crime was committed



before new sentencing rules were introduced banning the sentencing practice.

Agro noted Keels tried to confess in 2009, but his claims weren't given any credence.

She said it was clear his paranoia contributed to the 2006 killing and recommended he receive treatment for drug and mental health issues while in prison.

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