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1 No ending But Death

No Ending But Death

Stalking Victim Will Share the Story of Her Terrifying Ordeal At Symposium

By Shelly Decker

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After years of being stalked relentlessly, Katherine Whitbread believes death will be the only way to end her terror.

The 36-year-old is so terrified of the deluded man who wrongly believes she's his wife, and mother to their child, that she fled Canada and will not reveal where she lives.

Whitbread, who will share her brutal ordeal at Monday's Stalking Symposium in our city, speaks without emotion when predicting the end of her assailant's pursuit.

"Not until either we're all dead or he's dead," says the former Edmonton woman. "Some kind of other ending would be a little too Hollywood."

CTV's W-Five is filming a documentary on her saga, which will also feature the free symposium, held in Greenwood Inn Hotels, 4485 Gateway Blvd.

A Crown prosecutor, a stalking expert, two police officers and Whitbread's mother will discuss stalking, its dangers, and resources available to victims from 1 to 4 p.m. At 7 p.m., a separate two-hour session will focus on stalking and relationship violence, but it is only open to teens and guests.

Whitbread, who wanted to hold the symposium to bolster awareness about the topic, will moderate both sessions.

RELEASE HEARING SLATED

The next day, a release hearing is slated for Whitbread's stalker, Simon Gagnon. He's been in Alberta Hospital for the past two years for terrorizing the Whitbread family.

Gagnon's two criminal convictions for harassing the Whit-

bread family were overturned because he was considered not criminally responsible.

Officials can keep him in Alberta Hospital until he's deemed fit for release. A jail sentence could have seen him already freed.

While Whitbread doubts Gagnon will be released Tuesday, he's been on escorted passes and Whitbread worries he may soon be permitted to take unescorted visits from the mental institution.

"I'm terrified. I don't think people understand the danger that he poses to us because he isn't a danger to everyone," says Whitbread, who worries Gagnon may see her parents as blocking their supposed relationship.

She gets agreement from stalking expert Heather Gray, who will be at the symposium.

"She's not safe as long as Simon is out. It's not just Katherine who's at risk here. There's a number of people around Katherine who are at as much risk as she is," says Gray, referring to Whitbread's family.

Whitbread's story is extremely rare and one of the worst in Western Canada seen by Gray, a former RCMP officer for two decades, who also studies workplace violence and does threat assessments for her company TAMA Inc.

Gagnon, two years older than Whitbread, firmly believes the two are in love and wed several years ago. Even before Whitbread gave birth to a daughter, Gagnon was telling people they'd had a son, court heard.

A TWISTED OBSESSION

But in reality the two never even dated. Gagnon's twisted obsession began in high school after Whitbread, then aged 15, was polite to the scrawny, greasy-haired, unpopular teen who was often bullied by peers.

Gagnon's bizarre conduct included leaving Whitbread Christmas presents for 14 years, following her to Greece, constantly patrolling her parents' home and once showing up in her bedroom while she was sleeping nude.



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2 No ending But Death

He's been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and suffers from erotomania, a disorder in which someone wrongly believes they're in a relationship.

Whitbread doesn't believe Gagnon will ever be cured of his feelings for her. She fled our city and then the country several years ago and, because of the threat he can be released, she doesn't feel it's safe to live here.

Whitbread's paid a heavy price for being a victim. She must always know who's around her. Just a few people know her whereabouts. Whitbread's had to teach the same tactics to her daughter, whose name is being kept private so Gagnon won't learn it. She struggles financially.

"It's so intense this way, I don't really have much time to sit down and romantically imagine what life would be like without (him). When I do, it's heartbreaking," she says, stressing that despite all Gagnon's done, she wishes no harm to him.

For years, police could do little to help. Whitbread had a restraining order, but it did no good. In 1993, the law changed to include criminal harassment. Gagnon was arrested and charged in July 2001.