

PROVINCE

Murrin not guilty of Tran murder



CP photo
Shannon Murrin gives the thumbs-up outside the courthouse after a jury said he was not guilty in the murder of eight-year-old Mindy Tran.

VANCOUVER (CP) — Shannon Murrin gleefully clapped his hands, exclaimed "oh, man" and flashed a thumbs-up Tuesday after a jury found him not guilty of killing an eight-year-old girl in 1994.

Murrin, 49, was charged with first-degree murder in the death of Mindy Tran in Kelowna, B.C.

Her body was found two months later in a shallow grave in a park, but Murrin wasn't charged until January 1997.

Murrin, who's spent the last five years in jail, strolled out the front door of the Law Courts building in downtown Vancouver with one of his lawyers. He got into a car driven by his other lawyer, intending to go home to Newfoundland.

"Just happy to get out," he said, grinning and giving another thumbs up. "I can't believe it. Jury's right on."

Defence lawyer Peter Wilson said Murrin, who has a lengthy criminal record and has spent between 15 and 20 years in prison for bank robberies and assaults, would likely take a plane to Newfoundland right away and be reunited with his mother.

"I always believed in him ... because I knew he was innocent," Laura Murrin said from her home in St. John's.

"He was always around children, all of his friends had children, he was always around them."

She also expressed sympathy for Mindy's family.

"My heart goes out to that family and I hope and pray to God that they find the one who did that."

In Kelowna, RCMP Cpl. Greg Heck read a prepared statement from Mindy's family — parents John and Annie and older sister Mimi.

"The past five years have been extremely difficult for our family," Heck read. "She is in our thoughts every day and we will honour her memory," said Heck, his voice breaking with emotion.

Kelowna RCMP spokesman Const. Garth

Letcher said police believe the "appropriate person" was charged in the case because the criminal justice branch of the Attorney General's Ministry reviewed the evidence.

He suggested the RCMP will not be pursuing the case any further at this time. Former RCMP sergeant Gary Tidsbury, who led the investigation of the killing, left B.C. Supreme Court quickly after the verdict.

Tidsbury, who the defence said mishandled the investigation, said he was disappointed but had faith in the jury system.

After the verdict, a spokesman for the Attorney General's Ministry in Victoria confirmed that Tidsbury was investigated by the RCMP and a special prosecutor.

It found no grounds to lay charges against Tidsbury, who now works in security for a large company in Calgary, said Geoff Gaul.



TRAN

The Crown has the right under Canadian law to appeal an acquittal, but Gaul said that hadn't been decided.

The jury began deliberating last Wednesday and was two days short of tying a record for the longest deliberation for a criminal trial in B.C. About 90 witnesses testified, although Murrin was not among them.

The jury began hearing evidence in the trial, which likely cost taxpayers million of dollars, Aug. 3, 1999. But a six-month voir dire preceded jury selection.

The trial had been scheduled to begin in May 1998 but was postponed when a British lab completed DNA tests that linked Murrin to three hairs found in Mindy's underwear.

The jury knew of his criminal past, but were told by the judge to not take that into account.

Mindy had lived in a quite Kelowna neighbourhood, near a house where Murrin was a boarder and where a friend of Mindy also lived.

The Crown's theory was that Murrin killed and sexually abused the girl, stuffed her body into a suitcase and then took it to the park where he covered it with leaves and twigs.

Kelowna shocked by verdict

KELOWNA (CP) — Residents expressed surprise and disappointment Tuesday over the not guilty verdict handed Shannon Murrin, who was accused of murdering an eight-year-old local girl.

A B.C. Supreme Court jury delivered the verdict after weighing the evidence of a first-degree murder charge in the 1994 death of Mindy Tran.

Several people noted the unusual elements that developed as the investigation and prosecution wore on, suggesting that helped to raise some doubts in the jury's mind about Murrin's guilt.

The length of time it took police to lay a charge — more than two years from the time

Mindy's body was discovered — was mentioned by several people as a curious aspect of the case. Others said most of the case against Murrin appeared to be circumstantial and that the type of DNA evidence presented was relatively new and not yet widely accepted.

"By the sounds of it, the evidence was screwed up quite a bit by the authorities," said Dennis Ayre.

Billie Jo Jonasson, 33, said he heard "the cops botched the case up, but I do think Murrin was guilty."

Another woman, Eleanor Bond, 48, said the verdict surprised her.

"I wanted him to be guilty, just for Mindy's family," said Bond.

Save on, and on, and on, and on, and on

Cardholders Price
Robin Hood Flour
White, Unbleached or Whole Wheat,
10 kg, Limit In Effect F6952-6
5.69 ea

Cardholders Price
Campbell's Tomato Soup
284 mL 101-6
.39 ea
Save up to .50

Cardholders Price
Western Family Pasta
All Varieties, 900g F2647-6
.99 ea
Save up to 1.00

Movie hinged on dock battle

Southam Newspapers

The movie was in jeopardy. Filmmakers needed a ferry dock for the movie Double Jeopardy, which was partly filmed in Prince George, but B.C. Ferries wasn't budging because the dock was for emergency use only. So the B.C. Film Commission moved into action.

"We became embroiled in that big time," says the commission's acting director Mark DesRochers, recalling the battle over the dock at Porteau Cove, just off the Squamish Highway.

After pressing on despite several provincial rejections, the commission finally met with Ferry Corporation brass and delivered the dock to the filmmakers.

Those who saw Double Jeopardy know the ferry-dock scene is one the more memorable in the Paramount picture, which starred Ashley Judd and Tommy Lee Jones and topped last summer's box office.

Recently, the commission escorted Sean Penn around the province. He had sent the script for the movie The Pledge and the commission took him on a whirlwind tour, showing off Manning Park, Princeton, Penticton, Merritt, Cache Creek, Lillooet, Fraser Canyon, Litton, Whistler and Squamish.

Driver gets jail for fatal crash

VICTORIA (CP) — A former tour-bus driver who struck a newly married Saskatoon couple, killing the husband, then drove away has been sentenced to nine months in jail.

Herman Willemse is remorseful and poses no threat to the public, but drivers must be stopped from fleeing accident scenes, provincial court Judge Michael Hubbard said Tuesday.

But Hubbard recommended Willemse serve the sentence on electronic monitoring.

Willemse, 64, who now lives in Vernon, pleaded guilty in November to two counts of criminal hit and run.

Michael Misanchuk, 27, was killed and his wife Samantha, now 30, was seriously injured when they were struck while in a Victoria crosswalk during a rainy night last Feb. 18.

Teachers block computer grant

VANCOUVER (CP) — A rich technology grant intended to help poor students was lost last year by the cash-strapped Vancouver school board because the teachers' union objected to IBM's involvement.

The IBM contribution would have been \$1 million but the union blocked it because "it's big business, it was a philosophical, ideological sort of thing," former board chairman Bill Brown said Tuesday.

The Vancouver Elementary School Teachers Association said only \$500,000 would have come from IBM, with the other \$500,000 being supplied by the B.C. government.

But association spokeswoman Dawn McMillan admitted the union's objections were tied to philosophy.

The Mega Sale Event

Prices in effect until Saturday, January 29, 2000.

SAVE ON MORE
SAVE ON MORE
SAVE ON MORE
Believe it.

Overwaitea
B.C.'s very own food people.

Locations: Hart Hwy. (Pharmacy) 962-2662 9am - 9pm | Spruceland (Photo Centre) 563-3243 8am - 11pm | Parkwood (Pharmacy) 563-3243 9am - 9pm | College Heights (Pharmacy) 964-3839 9am - 9pm



SIMC04120