

Sisters jailed in bathtub murder

Facing six years behind bars

Youth sentence protects names

Saturday July 1, 2006

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Two Mississauga sisters convicted of murdering their alcoholic mother will spend the next six years in custody after being sentenced as youths for a crime described by Justice Bruce Duncan as being carried out with "chilling detachment."

A youth sentence means the identities of the sisters, now 20 and 19, will remain protected forever.

Duncan yesterday ruled that a youth sentence would sufficiently make them accountable for the Jan. 18, 2003 drowning death of their 44-year-old mother.

But he didn't mince words in describing their actions, before, during and after the murder.

"Until they were arrested, their feelings about what they had done were at best ambiguous," Duncan told a Brampton court yesterday. "Remorse, assuming it is truly present today, was a slow train coming.

"They carried out the plan with chilling detachment. (The older sister) held her mother's head under the water in the tub for four minutes while the (younger sister) stood or paced nearby. As they had hoped, the death was treated as an accident by authorities for almost a year until (the older sister) revealed her secret to someone of conscience and character."

Duncan ruled the older girl would serve her time in custody in an adult provincial facility. For the time being, the younger girl will serve her sentence in the same youth facility she's been in since she and her sister were convicted of first-degree murder last Dec. 15.

She could be transferred to the same adult facility as her sister when she turns 20.

Both girls received the maximum sentenced under the Youth Criminal Justice Act — 10 years in total, of which six years is served in secured custody with the remaining four years to be served in the community.

Neither girl took the stand and neither showed much emotion yesterday other than to thank their respective lawyers afterward. But their thoughts were revealed for the first time in letters written to Duncan before he sentenced them.

"I'm no longer afraid of the truth," the older girl wrote. "The taking of my mother's life was the gravest and most defining mistake of my existence. It has affected more people than I thought possible. My actions have changed countless lives forever. Day to day, I will never escape from the truth.

"I'm not a monster."

The younger sister pleaded with the judge to allow her to serve her time in the same youth facility she has been living in so she can continue tutoring fellow inmates as a teaching assistant.

"My mom's death was the product of greed, pain and ignorance," the younger girl wrote. "There is no justice for what I've done. No matter how much I say I'm sorry, it won't bring my mother back. To me, that is the worst punishment that I will never be able to escape."

She said no matter what she does, she can't change the past.

"The only thing I can do every day is to help as many people as possible," she wrote. "... to spread as much love as possible. "

"No one should suffer the way my mother, my sister, my brother and I have ...The worst part is there are children going through much more pain than I and they don't resort to murder.

"I feel sick at what I've done. I'm not a bad person."

They were just 16 and 15 on Jan. 18, 2003 when they got their mother drunk and nearly unconscious with Tylenol 3 pills, helped her into the bathtub of their Mississauga townhome and then drowned her.

After the murder, they met three close friends at a restaurant as part of their carefully orchestrated alibi and then returned home later where they then made a well-rehearsed 911 call.

They were arrested Jan. 21, 2004. They got away with the crime for more than a year until a friend went to police.

Along the way, the girls also revealed details about the murder, and even sent provocative pictures of themselves to an American website. The older girl even sent several nude photos of herself, including one that was posted the day she and her sister were convicted.

Crown prosecutors Brian McGuire and Mike Cantlon contended during the sensational eight-week trial that the girls killed their mother, partly because she was ruining their lives with her alcohol use, but also because they stood to gain their share of her \$200,000 life insurance money.

Only about \$48,000 of the \$133,000 of their share remains, and the money has been forfeited under a proceeds of crime application. It will be given to the sisters' younger half-brother.

Had Justice Duncan sentenced them as adults, they would have received a life prison sentence and their names could have been published. They would have served their time in a federal women's penitentiary with no parole for 10 years for the older girl and five to seven years

of parole ineligibility for the younger sister.

Duncan noted the murder plan was carried out without "hesitation or falter" and without "abhorrence or revulsion" or a "flicker of moral compunction."

Duncan noted the defendants sought a "humane way to kill" and the act was carried out "without cruelty or unnecessary infliction of pain."

He said the older sister had enough conscience and was troubled enough that she felt "compelled" to tell others what she had done. He also praised the sisters for being open to those who prepared their pre-sentence and psychiatric reports and gave them credit for not trying to take the stand and "lie their way" out of their predicament.

During the sentencing phase, court heard how the girls sought help from the Children's Aid Society, their father, other relatives and their mother's friends about her increasing alcohol use that basically left them to run the family home and take care of their younger half-brother. They also repeatedly argued with their mother about her excessive drinking. But nobody offered any help and they eventually decided that killing their mother was the only way out.

Both girls actually viewed their mother's murder as a mercy killing, court transcripts indicated.

"These girls at one time loved their mother," Duncan said. "The circumstances that turned love to hate were not their making. The adults in their life created their environment and left them to cope and find a solution."

Duncan said both girls were of "superior intelligence" and remarked how one of their former high school guidance counsellors described them as being "the smartest girls he's ever met."

At the time of the murder, both girls had not only stopped attending school but had been smoking pot on a daily basis and also consuming alcohol.