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Serial abuser jailed again

'Next time it could be murder,' one victim says after sentencing

LIZ MONTEIRO

KITCHENER (May 30, 2007)

A Kitchener man who has been convicted five times of assaulting a partner or former partner since 1989 was sent to jail again yesterday.

This time, Stephen Vankat-wijk's sentence was 14 months and three years probation.

His former girlfriend, Melissa Lorentz, who was assaulted and bullied over a five-hour period by him, said the sentence is not enough.

"What will it take for the courts to realize he is a long-term offender?" she said after the sentencing outside the courtroom.

"Next time it could be murder."

Vankatwijk, 40, was convicted of assault, forcible confinement and breaching probation. He has been in custody since his arrest on Jan. 19 and the jail time is viewed as two-for-one credit for time served.

Vankatwijk has a lengthy criminal record, convicted of 21 offences since 1989, including assault, assault causing bodily harm and forcible confinement involving women. In one incident, he also

ALL LATEX MATTRESSES

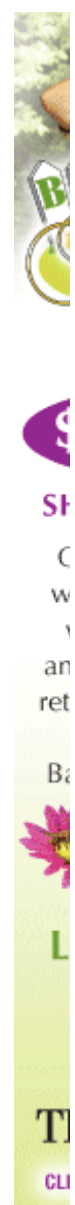


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assaulted an infant son.

In 2005, before Vankatwijk's relationship with Lorentz, he was sentenced to 22 months in jail and three years probation after pleading guilty to assault causing bodily harm in a jealous attack on his former common-law wife in a washroom at a McDonald's restaurant.

The couple's four-year-old daughter watched as Vankatwijk punched the woman in the head.

When Vankatwijk was sentenced two years ago, the Crown attempted to have him designated as a long-term offender because of his disturbing history.

But the judge at the time said the most recent crime did not warrant a two-year prison term, the minimum required for such a designation.

Long-term offenders are placed under strict community supervision for up to 10 years after they get out of jail.

Crown prosecutor Mike Murdoch said he didn't ask Justice Walter Gonet to consider the designation this time because he didn't think Vankatwijk would get a two-year sentence.

Murdoch did ask the judge to consider making it a condition of Vankatwijk's probation to tell his parole officer when he was involved in a relationship with another woman. Gonet did not agree.

Sara Casselman, community relations co-ordinator of the Kitchener Waterloo Sexual Assault Centre, said abuse of women continues to be treated in a casual manner.

"If this man had assaulted five doctors, five teachers, five lawyers, he would be considered pathological," she said.

"We need to put equal value on women as we do on other groups."

Casselman said it's disheartening that the justice system doesn't seem to be on board in the fight against domestic abuse.

Yesterday, Lorentz read her victim impact statement to the court.

In it, she said she is scared to be in her home alone at night. She often looks behind doors, repeatedly checks the locks and sleeps with a cellphone in her hand.

"I constantly look over my shoulder," the 22-year-old mother said.

She cried as she described the potential danger she felt she put her 2 1/2-year-old son in during the Jan. 18 attack. The boy was sleeping in an adjacent bedroom while Vankatwijk repeatedly punched Lorentz and wouldn't let her leave her bedroom.

"I'm a wreck. I find myself crying for no reason," she said. "I fear for my life."

In earlier testimony, Lorentz told the court Vankatwijk hit her between eight and 15 times on the left side of her body. At one point he tied a pillowcase around her mouth to prevent her from screaming.

She begged to go to the bathroom, but he refused. He eventually let her go but stood in the doorway of the washroom as she used the toilet.

Lorentz said he insisted on staying the night and the next morning went to work. She called the police.

At the hospital, a doctor found she had a bleeding left ear drum, a swollen left eye and bruises to her rib cage.

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