

HALIFAX COMMONER

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FREE

Armed robbers 'didn't impress' store owner

By Bea Vongdouangchanh
The Commoner

Alexey Yugin sits behind the counter of Andy's Grocery and Gifts Store in Dartmouth. It's 4:30 in the afternoon on Wednesday, Nov. 5 and the store is dead. No customers, no other employees. Yugin is alone reading Douglas Adams' *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*.

Suddenly, a six-foot man, in his mid-40s, enters the store with a moderate carpenter's hammer. He's undisguised. He takes a swing at the lottery display on the front counter. The glass plate breaks and falls to the floor. Lottery scratch tickets spill out.

The man demands money. "Empty your till! Hand me your till," he shouts.

"I think he was trying to impress me," says Yugin. But Yugin's not impressed. Instead, he takes out a baseball bat from under the counter and charges at the robber. The robber is as surprised at Yugin's reaction — as Yugin was when the robber first walked into the store.

The robber runs outside to a big, red van. "It wasn't a mini-van," says Yugin. "It was a big van. Big." Waiting is a getaway driver.

Yugin pauses: "I was thinking, 'What am I going to do?'" he says. "My first reaction

was to smash the windshield, but I thought it was stolen and I didn't want it returned to the owner with a broken windshield."

So he thinks of an alternative. "I thought about hurting them. I thought I could break his limbs," he says. It's hard to tell if he is serious. He laughs a little and then says, "But I saw a swinging hammer."

He tries to dodge the hammer, but it hits him near the top of his head, leaving a minor cut and bruise above his right eyebrow.

For most, this would've been enough to give up. But Yugin brushes it off and continues trying to tackle the robbers.

He approaches the van. Trying to stop it from getting away, he reaches into the open driver side window and grabs for the keys. But the getaway driver lies down and starts kicking him.

Yugin tries his hardest not to give up, but the driver wins and the robbers get away. While all this is happening, Yugin's 19-year-old daughter Alyona hears what is going on. Alyona, a Saint Mary's University architecture student, calls the police from the Yugin's house, which is attached to the store.

The police are on it immediately. "They did a wonderful job. They were professional, fast, quick and they got the people."

Please see POLICE, page 2



INGRID DEON

Alexey Yugin chased away two armed robbers from his Dartmouth store and says he would do it again.

Taxi driver bests stubborn, bungling robbers

By A.K. Steele
The Commoner

Aleksey Osipenkov is one taxi driver who thieves should think twice about before robbing. He resisted two men in an attempted robbery on his taxi Oct. 30, and as a result, one man was arrested at the scene and police are looking for the second.

Osipenkov first learned to defend himself "Russian style" when he was a boy growing up in Belarus. "My father teach me when I was ten years old," he says. Men need to know how to protect themselves so they can be ready for any situation, says Osipenkov. It was this attitude that helped

him the night before Halloween.

He picked up the two men who called for a taxi from the IGA in the Dartmouth Shopping Centre around 9 p.m. They asked to go to the Oxford Street School in Halifax. It was dark, and both men climbed into the back seat and kept their faces down so Osipenkov didn't see them.

Osipenkov suspected that he might have some trouble when the men told him to turn left off Oxford Street, and to go behind the school parking lot. "I was looking in my mirror," he says. "I already guessed the situation."

Osipenkov stopped at the corner of

Chebucto and Dublin for a stop sign, the man who sat behind him grabbed Osipenkov in a headlock. He pulled him back as the other man rifled through Osipenkov's jacket for money.

They asked him how many hours he had worked that day and where he kept his safe. He answered seven hours and that \$20 dollars was all the cash in the car.

Then something made Osipenkov, who once served in the Russian army, fight back. "I didn't like it," he says, as he stops smiling and recalls the incident. He didn't know if the men had weapons or intended to hurt him. He says that if he didn't fight back this

time, then there would always be another time when passengers could think they could steal from him.

He slammed on his gas pedal. This made the man who was holding him fall back and lose his grip. Then him slammed on his brake pedal, swung around, and hit him with his elbow. He pulled the lever under his seat and slid his seat back as far as it would go, trapping him.

The second man at this point was out of the cab and running up North Street, while the first was trying to figure out how to unlock the cab door. Osipenkov got out of

Please see FIGHT, page 2

Taxi driver: 'I could have been killed 10 times'



INGRID DEON

Alexsey Osipenkov: 'It was two against one.'

FIGHT *continued from page 1.*

the driver's seat, opened the back door, and hauled him out. He says the first man tried to punch him when he got out of the taxi, but Osipenkov dodged the punch and hit the man's jaw in defence.

The second robber saw this happen and started running back to help his partner. Osipenkov decided to use him as a human shield to defend himself against the second, who had his hands in his pockets and looked like he was going to pull out a weapon.

"Maybe knife, maybe gun, maybe nothing," says Osipenkov. If the second robber had a gun, Osipenkov figured, he wouldn't try to shoot him in case he missed and shot his partner.

But Osipenkov wasn't going to take that chance anyway. He grabbed the first man by the throat and yelled to the second robber not to move. Osipenkov warned him he would kill his friend if he moved.

"But that man, he don't understand, maybe he don't believe me," says

Osipenkov. "He moved, so I broke him and push him at the other man and they run."

Sgt. Don Spicer, the media relations officer for Halifax regional police department, says there were no treatable or serious injuries in the robbery, and no one was taken to the hospital.

The first robber and his friend both took off running, but Osipenkov says the former returned to fight. He grabbed Osipenkov's jacket and tried to hit him, but Osipenkov stepped away. He didn't want to fight him anymore. "To me, fighting Canadian drunk man is like fighting children," he says.

The police report didn't say if the robber was under the influence of alcohol at the time. The report indicates that it was at this point that a nearby officer on another call heard the screaming and caught and arrested one of the men.

Osipenkov says the police need to respond faster and pay more attention to the robberies, and that it took the police seven minutes to get to the scene, even though the police say they were already nearby.

"I could have been killed 10 times," says Osipenkov.

Kim DeMont, the manager at Blue Bell Taxi, says the robbers got more than they bargained for from Osipenkov — they got what they deserved. "It was two against one," she says. "People get robbed or ripped off all the time."

Osipenkov came to Halifax four years ago when he abandoned the Russian fishing ship *Bison*, in which he was a helmsman. He says he's had problems in the past with his taxi passengers, but this was his first robbery. He doesn't hesitate as he says he's not afraid to keep driving his taxi. He says he may drive in Dartmouth more because he knows it and likes it better than Halifax.

Police held Jeff Daniel Brooks, 20, of Halifax, overnight in jail and he was charged with attempted robbery. He was also charged with violation of an undertaking, which means that he allegedly ignored conditions the court put on him as he awaited trial on another charge. Police are still looking for the unidentified second robber.

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Victim: 'Robbery like really bad Hollywood movie'

POLICE *continued from page 1.*

A police report says officers chased the van and caught it at Harvey and Cameron streets, off Pleasant. The officers arrested the driver without resistance, says Sgt. Don Spicer of the Halifax Regional Police, and took him into custody. His partner was nowhere to be found.

Police charged Adam Joseph Peach, 42, of Dartmouth with armed robbery, assault and possession of a stolen vehicle.

All this doesn't faze Yugin. "It's nothing special," he says. "It was just like watching a really bad Hollywood movie." He just wonders why the robbers chose his store. "It's just a small little store, an Atlantic Lottery Corporation outlet," he says. "Maybe they were anti-ALC?"

Surprisingly, Yugin is not afraid to be in the store or neighbourhood. "Yes, of course I feel safe," he says. "This can happen any time, anywhere. It's still the best place to live."

But Yugin is not one to go unprepared. He now has a bat under his counter. "I got it just in case something else happened," he says, alluding to another time he disarmed a man who had a kitchen knife. He says he punched the assailant until he ran away.

"After the guy with the knife, I thought a bat would be better than using my fists."

The 47-year-old Russian immigrant lived in New York City for two years. He says he has a master's degree in inorganic chemistry and computer science and was a marketing director for a software firm before his family moved to Canada from St. Petersburg three years ago.

He's happy with his decision to live in Canada, even after two robbery attempts. "The people are nice in Canada. It's safe." Not like New York, he says. "There are lots of people with guns in New York."

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Crime reporting often forgets the victims' moving stories



ROBERTO A.R. ROCHA
viewPOINT

There's a convenience store owner in north end Halifax, a man pushing 70, who served in the Canadian forces, survived a triple bypass surgery and underwent chemotherapy. He walks upright, smiles at his customers and still has every last hair on his head. But he won't talk about the many times his store was robbed in his 30-plus years of business.

"I don't want to re-live the memory. I'm too bitter about it," he says.

His wife, normally cheery and chatty, is known around the neighbourhood for helping others. She prefers to keep silent about the robberies as well.

"Oh, there are so many stories," she says. Just as she gets into them, she stops herself. "But I don't want to talk about it. It won't help anything."

So much of crime reporting focuses on the technical details: how much money was taken, who was wounded, how many people were arrested. Accounts of robberies in the paper are laden with specifics on court proceedings, penalties and rulings recounted with the soporific efficiency of a stenographer's shorthand.

But what about the people who are robbed? How do robberies change their lives? What does it do to a person to return the next day to the place where his life could have ended?

Crime affects victims differently. As with our resilient convenience store couple

above, it can harden a person. Others may lose faith in society. Others just take it as part of life and go on. Yet we seldom hear how such victims cope with the experience. Their stories are reduced to property damage and cigarette packs.

It's understandable that in an age where the market value of things takes priority, the news tends to distill events to their basic monetary worth. Yet reporters seem to lose sight of their most fundamental function: they are modern-day bards, carrying tales of people and places to audiences far and wide.

And what is a story, if not a verbal extract of human experience? What is the value of a narrative if it lacks that one element universal to all people? To put it less pompously, would Shakespeare have struck such a chord among people had he written,

What does it do to a person to return the next day to the place where his life could have ended?

"Romeo, Romeo, how much doth thy cod-piece cost?"

It's our aim in this issue of *The Commoner* to bring you the stories that are often overlooked in crime. These are tales of fear, despair, heroism and perseverance that get lost in the colorless clutter of legal details. In our opinion, it's the only way to do this business.

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Robbers grab clothes worth \$10,000



ERICA SIMPSON

Melvin Aguirre shows the rod he used to fend off thieves at his store, Static Clothing.

By Carolyn Ray
The Commoner

Twenty-four-year-old Melvin Aguirre got a call at work on Sept. 9, warning him he might have a rough day. A friend tipped him off that a group of people were going to rob his urban clothing store, Static Clothing at 5215 Blowers St., which he opened in August. He says he didn't call the police in advance because he thought it might have been a prank.

At three o'clock, an hour and a half after the phone call, Aguirre decided to take his lunch break. As he was walking down the street, he noticed a group of people entering his store. Co-worker Jason Mombourquette says three men came up to the counter and started talking to him, looking for Aguirre. He knew who they were.

Mombourquette did his best to distract them until Aguirre's return, but they started picking up as many clothes as they could. They started laughing as they grabbed designer sportswear, jeans and T-shirts. Mombourquette says one man asked for a discount because they were going to buy so many clothes.

Aguirre says he saw three more men and one woman enter the store and he rushed after them. When he got there, he locked the dead-bolt on the door and grabbed a stainless steel rod that clothes are hung from.

As the group started to make a run for the door, Mombourquette called 911.

Aguirre used the metre-long rod to hit three guys and knock them to the floor. One guy punched him in the face and as he recovered from the blow, the group rushed past him, unlocked the door and took off with \$10,000 worth of merchandise in a van.

He wasn't going to let them get away with it. He says he had an idea where they had gone, so when the police arrived, he jumped into the paddy wagon to pursue them.

Aguirre spotted the van and easily identified the group. Four of the men were regular customers and the female was wearing a dis-

tinutive colourful jacket. Aguirre got every item of clothing back.

Despite the arrests, Aguirre was not satisfied. Within hours, he says, the group was released on bail and back on the streets. "They almost got away with \$10,000 worth of clothes," he says. "That would have put me out of business. Small stores around here only make about \$20,000 a year. That's a lot of money to us."

The police have charged a 25-year-old woman and three men, aged 17, 24 and 26, with the crime.

To make things worse for Aguirre, two thieves targeted his store in October. An older man came in and went to the back looking at expensive suits. When he tried to steal them, the police caught him on the street. A similar event happened a few weeks later.

These robbery attempts have left Aguirre uneasy. He says he still feels safe, but not when he has to leave his co-workers alone. "When it comes to leaving an employee behind," he says, "when I have a meeting or have to run an errand, I don't feel safe." He says he has an advantage because he knows all of his customers and that deters them from taking the clothes.

When he was a part owner of North Of New York, a clothing store on Barrington Street, the store had three or four thefts in two years. He wasn't prepared for the number of problems Static Clothing would bring.

But he has a solution. "Police need to be on foot," he says. "All they do is drive around. We need more undercover, plainclothes officers on the street."

He believes people try to steal from his store for a variety of reasons. Some, he says, do it solely for the pleasure of committing a crime, while others want some extra cash or nice clothes. Aguirre hopes his story will deter potential future thieves. "Don't do stupid stuff over minor things," he says. "It's not worth it."

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Store owner wants police to be tougher on thieves

By Jonathan Di Tosto
The Commoner

Bob Switzer has never been robbed at gunpoint. His music shop hasn't been broken into either. But the owner of Taz Records on Argyle Street has a beef with police attitudes toward shoplifting in the city.

When not captivating customers with discussion of Coleman Hawkins transforming the tenor sax into a bona fide jazz instrument or the influence of Les Paul and his solidbody guitar, Switzer is normally happy sorting through the music that fills his shop.

But ask him about city police's response to calls about shoplifting and he flares with emotion. He peers up over his music and looks you straight in the eye.

"The police don't care," he says. "They've put me in a position where basically, if I catch someone shoplifting, I'm the judge, jury and executioner. I've told them that too."

Switzer opened Taz Records in September 1983. He estimates losing \$1,000 to shoplifting every year, and that's just the stuff he knows about.

He had a 13-album Muddy Waters vinyl

box-set worth \$300 stolen from his shop. He received a call from another record store later that day asking if he wanted to buy the same box set. The competitor didn't carry that type of product but knew that Taz Records did.

Switzer wasted no time saying, "Of course I'm interested, especially since it's mine."

Other times, Switzer hasn't been so lucky. He recalls having both a \$400 20-disc Duke Ellington box set and a \$150 rare Pink Floyd lifted.

Dr. Christopher Murphy, departmental chair of sociology and social anthropology at Dalhousie University, says there are different reasons why people shoplift.

"Basically, there's need and there's greed," he says. "But usually, it's greed."

"If people think they can get away with not paying for something, they'll do it," Murphy says. "Look at downloading music."

Switzer says another problem is stores buying stolen goods.

He remembers one incident where a woman, who he says looked like she had a drug problem, approached him wanting to sell a CD. The disc was still in its plastic case

with the price marking from another store.

Switzer threw her out of his shop. When her boyfriend came back later trying to sell him the same album, he threw him out too.

"We can't be buying hot goods," says Switzer. "It just encourages theft. If you buy from thieves, you're an idiot if you think they won't steal from you too."

Halifax Regional Police averaged 25 reported cases of shoplifting per week through September, October and November to date, says Sgt. Don Spicer.

"We respond to all calls," he adds. "But calls are prioritized." Shoplifting falls under the least serious code.

Stores are provided with security forms to be filled out if a shoplifter is apprehended, says Spicer. When the police arrive, they verify the shoplifter's identification and run a check for any history or outstanding warrants. If everything is clear, the shoplifter is served an appearance notice to appear in court and released.

If there are outstanding warrants or improper identification, the shoplifter is brought back to the station, says Spicer.

"I understand the police are busy," says Switzer. "Mostly because thieves get a slap on the wrist and are released. It's an

impossible system."

Switzer says he feels he's been forced to develop his own deterrents to would-be shoplifters.

"If I catch anyone stealing from my store, I'm more than happy to kill him," he says straight-faced. "It's hard enough to make a living these days without these scumballs."

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ERICA SIMPSON

Bob Switzer, Taz Records owner, says he'll do anything to deter theft in his store, even throwing this fan at people trying to shoplift.

'One of the scariest jobs y

Store owners install new security system after 22-year-old employee is robbed twice

By Alana Cheyne
The Commoner

Nicholas Baltzer will never forget the week he was robbed — twice.

Baltzer, 22, works at Needs 24-hour convenience store on Queen Street. In mid-December of last year, on a Wednesday, Baltzer was signing in for a graveyard shift from midnight to 8 a.m. He had just started his shift when a man came in with a note. The note said he was carrying a gun, and he wanted money. Baltzer couldn't actually see the gun, but he obeyed, handing the man some bills from the till. The man took the cash and left, and Baltzer immediately called the police.

The robber didn't go far. He stood on the street just outside the store until the cops came and took him away. Baltzer says the man spent three months in jail. He says he thinks the robber was homeless, and that he simply wanted to avoid a harsh winter on the streets.

Three days later, Baltzer was hit again. It was about 6 a.m., and he was at the front counter finishing up his shift. The store was empty. He had just opened the till, to his left, and a small safe, to his right, when a man entered the store.

Baltzer suspects the man had been watching him.

"I think he was in the dark, watching me. But I can't see anything outside these windows. He came in the door, and I just knew something was wrong."

The man was dressed all in black, with a scarf over his face. He made a quick comment about the cold weather, and then — "he was behind the counter within two seconds," Baltzer says. "I must have closed my eyes or something, because all of a sudden he was right there."

The man was carrying a crowbar. He grabbed the drawer of the till and dumped it on the counter, scattering

*"He told me to get on the floor.
And that's when I started crying."*

NICHOLAS BALTZER,
NEEDS EMPLOYEE

money and change everywhere. He took about \$150 from the till and about \$200 from the open safe. He also took two packs of cigarettes.

Baltzer says the store has a panic button, but it wasn't working properly at the time. He had no choice but to follow the robber's orders, he says.

"He told me to go to the back," Baltzer says. "By this time, I was having a heart attack."

There's a small room in the back of the store, with a desk, a phone, a second safe and a locked door to another room. The man ripped out the phone cord and asked what was behind the door. Baltzer told him he had no keys to the door, and no code for the safe. The robber grabbed the surveillance camera's videotapes and led him out of the room.

"He was pretty calm," Baltzer says. "And he took his time. It would have been worse if he'd been hollering and screaming."

The man took him back to the front of the store, behind the counter.

"I felt like if I did everything he asked, I'd be OK," Baltzer says. "I don't even know what I was thinking at the time — I just did whatever he said."

But the robber's next command terrified him. "He told me to get on the floor. And that's when I started crying."

Just then, a customer entered the store. Baltzer was lying on his stomach, on the floor behind the till, and the robber was

standing next to him. The customer walked straight to the ATM machine at the opposite end of the store. He withdrew some money and left.

The robber left soon after. Baltzer got up, crying, and called his parents, the store's franchisers. They drove in from their home in Prospect Bay to give him a hand. The police came, but the robber was never found.

"All I could tell the police is that he was tall," he says. "I was on the floor the whole time!"

By the next day, Baltzer was working again.

"My mom didn't want me to come back," he says. "She was more afraid than I was. She called every five minutes to check up on me."

The next day, the owners came and installed a better security system. Now, after 10 p.m. or so, customers must ring a doorbell in order to enter the store.

"We can keep people out," he says. "And trust me — if you look scary, we won't let you in."

Lately, Baltzer has been working evening shifts from 4 p.m. until midnight, and he hasn't encountered any more problems. He says many of the problems occur during back shifts, between midnight and 8 a.m. Baltzer starts those shifts again soon.

"I'm scared shitless," he says. "I take a chance every time I work here. This is one of the scariest jobs you can work, really."

But he tries not to dwell on it.

"You can't be afraid all your life, or you're just a big pussycat," he says. "If it's going to happen, it'll happen."

And if it does?

"If I get robbed again, I'll walk right out of here," Baltzer jokes. "I'll say, take whatever the hell you want, and I'll jump over the counter and start running."

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Nicholas Baltzer, in front of the cigarette rack at Needs's

Variety store owner stops robbery despite being



ROBERTO A. R. ROCHA

Kamil Safatli's wife Silva was at his side when he was robbed in their convenience store.

By Roberto A. R. Rocha
The Commoner

The third time Kamil Safatli's store was robbed he was shot in the stomach.

"I tried to grab his gun and started fighting," Safatli recounts. "But it was raining and the gun was wet. It slipped out of my hands, and he shot me."

It might have ended there had Safatli realized he was wounded. Instead, he lunged at the attacker, beat him and held him until the police arrived.

That a bullet was lodged in his gut became clear after five minutes, when a slight numbness settled in, followed by the pain.

As Safatli remembers it, two masked men walked into his convenience store on 342

Windmill Rd. in North end Dartmouth on a rainy February night. The armed man told him to get down on the floor while the other searched the cash register.

"I don't like anyone to give me orders," says Safatli, a 29-year-old man who served in the Lebanese army for four years. "I had to do something about it."

He says that without even thinking about it, as if by reflex, he tried to disarm the assailant. He claims he didn't hear the shot or feel it.

"It was numb for five minutes," he says. Foremost on his mind at the time was keeping the robber down until the police arrived. He says the other man fled once he saw his partner being beaten by a man he had just shot.

"I tried to grab his gun and started fighting, but it was raining and the gun was wet. It slipped out of my hands, and he shot me."

KAMIL SAFATLI,
CONVENIENCE STORE OWNER

That his wife Silva was standing beside him, pregnant with their first child, likely had something to do with it.

"That's probably why he fought them," she

You can work'



ALANA CHEYNE

24-hour convenience store on Queen Street, was the victim of two robberies within one week.

ng shot in the stomach

muses with a smile while holding her two-month-old daughter.

"But, it wouldn't have been different if I wasn't there. They were so short. They looked like kids."

He was hospitalized for three weeks after undergoing surgery for a bullet wound to the intestines. He says that in the first five days he could remember very little because he was constantly sedated. He returned to work five days after his release.

The Safatlis, who have run the Yellow Store for the five years they've been in Canada, say little has changed since the robbery. They thought about closing the store and moving, but soon forgot about it.

"I just bought some security cameras and

that was it," Safatli says. He adds that he would probably do the same if it happened again.

Mrs. Safatli says, "In this business you know there's always a chance that it will happen. It's scary but you have to live with it."

"I don't get scared by anybody," Safatli says, in a calm and collected tone. He claims, however, to have developed a sixth sense about strange characters that walk into his store.

"I have a lot of regular customers, so I don't worry about them. But you feel it when anyone weird comes in. When someone new comes, I'm prepared."

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Internet café clerk confronts masked man

By Erica Simpson
The Commoner

Working the late shift alone around midnight last summer, Yvonne Perry noticed the emergency door at the back of the Javanet Café was wide open. Perry had already put the "we're closed" sign on the front door and hurried to shut the back door so she could go home.

The lime green wooden door has a screen in front of it that swings inside the building. On the door frame that encloses both the screen and the wooden door there is a flimsy wooden latch, also painted lime green, which attaches to the door and locks it. Perry walked to the back of the shop, stopped at the door and reached her hand around its far side so she could secure it to the latch. Just as her hand extended outside of the building, a man jumped out from the stairwell behind the door, landing inches in front of her.

His face was hidden behind a white cloth pulled tightly behind his ears and tied to the back of his head. Perry let out a yelp. The man motioned towards her and put his index finger up to his mouth.

"No, no, no," he says. "Shhhh, shhhh." Perry shoved his body away from hers, pushing him backwards. The masked man turned his back to her and scrambled out of the light shining on him from inside of the cafe. He escaped through the parking lot.

"I probably scared the shit out of him," Perry says, smiling. "I didn't have time to be scared"

Originally from Clark's Harbour, Perry, 28, began working at the Javanet Café four-and-a-half years ago. She is slim, five-foot-seven, wears glasses and has a quiet voice. She works full time. Perry shows little emotion when recounting the incident.

The Javanet Café, with its brown-and-white-striped tablecloths and living-room-style couches, seems an unlikely place for a break in. But, there was more to come. Only two months after the masked man tried to enter, two thefts occurred.

Yvonne Perry was present for one of them. Two men entered through the front door. One distracted her by asking her to come over to the ice cream freezer, which sits at the far end of the counter, to identify each flavour. Meanwhile, the other guy quietly opened the till and stole \$300.

Perry didn't even notice the missing cash until she was counting all of the money at the end of the night.

"Why am I so short?" Perry thought after counting the money in the register. "How could they have taken it?" Perry says she knows the two men took the money, because a week later — on a day she wasn't there — two men fitting the same description appeared at the café and used the same strategy.

The clerk on duty that day, Karen Janik, started working at the café two years ago. She says the pair came in around 11 p.m. One man distracted her while the other

opened the cash register. Janik turned around in time to see the man's hand coming out of the till, and caught him in the act. "Oh my God, you were just in my till," Janik remembers saying. "I'm calling the cops."

"Go ahead and call the cops," the suspect replied. "I don't care."

The two men stole \$300. After they fled the café, Janik called 911. She says it took the police one hour and twenty minutes to arrive. She says the officer told her it was a busy night. The two men were never arrested. Janik and Perry were never asked by the police to look at pictures or identify

"He said, 'Go ahead and call the cops, I don't care.'"

KAREN JANIK,
JAVANET CAFÉ EMPLOYEE

anyone. "I was glad I didn't have to deal with it," Janik says. "I really didn't want to see those guys again."

Terry Butler, owner of Javanet Café, says it's difficult to run a store after a robbery. "You think you are keeping your head above water, and then something like this happens."

While Janik stopped working nights after the robbery, Perry didn't. Butler says it would be nice to have two people working at night, but he can't afford it.

When asked how she continues to work alone after the attempted break and enter, and the robbery, Perry seems nonchalant.

"If you worry about it, it's going to affect how you react," she says.

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ERICA SIMPSON

Yvonne Perry demonstrates how a man hid behind the back door of Javanet Café, under the stairs, before trying to break in.

streetLEVEL

Have you ever experienced a crime?



Amanda Rhyko, waitress and nanny

“I was backpacking in Australia and someone stole my passport and credit cards. It was horrible. I thought I was stuck there.”



Charlotte Cox, facilitator

“Money was stolen out of my car recently. I was shocked. We live in a nice neighbourhood — the south end.”



Geraldine Carroll, homemaker

“My van was stolen out of the Sobeys parking lot in Clayton Park. The police caught the guys red-handed. I was very upset — it’s my personal property.”



Jeff Anderson, electrician

“In ‘97 my bike was stolen. I was at school at the time and I had no money. It ticked me off.”



Mark Martin, shop owner

“My stereo was stolen out of my car. I was p.o.-ed, but it didn’t ruin my day.”

Halifax applying for drug treatment court

Addicts rob to serve their craving, says Dal sociologist

By Matthew Wuest
The Commoner

The federal justice department will soon be accepting applications from cities that want to be part of a pilot project to establish three new drug treatment courts in Canada.

Dr. Don Clairmont of Dalhousie University’s department of sociology and social anthropology says drug treatment courts have the potential to reduce the number of small business robberies in Halifax.

Drug treatment courts are special courts within the legal system that treat drug addicts who commit crimes instead of incarcerating them.

Clairmont says these special courts are effective because more often than not, people with substance abuse problems are the ones committing robberies like convenience store holdups.

“A lot of small robberies are related to people serving their craving,” Clairmont says.

Clairmont says people with substance abuse problems are aware of the jail-sentence consequence of their actions but it’s difficult for them to stop. “I think they’re aware of the severity,” Clairmont says. “What they’re doing is in response to a major pressure they feel. They’re unable to control the urge.”

Dr. Scott Kenney, of the sociology and criminology department at Saint Mary’s University, agrees. “When people want their fix, they want it bad,” Kenney says. “In many cases, the robberies are crimes of desperation.”

That feeling of desperation can overwhelm people and eventually makes them snap, Kenney says.



MATTHEW WUEST

Don Clairmont says, “Jail doesn’t help.”

Ultimately, Kenney says, the best way to reduce robbery is to eliminate the feeling of desperation that drives people to commit crime.

That’s where drug treatment court comes into play, says Clairmont. It attacks crime at the grassroots — people’s drug addiction problems.

“Doing jail time doesn’t help them,” Clairmont says.

Toronto began operating Canada’s first drug treatment court in 1998, and Vancouver followed suit in 2001. According to the National Crime Prevention Centre (an agency of the Department of

Justice), 85 per cent of the graduates from Toronto’s drug court haven’t re-offended, based on statistics from its first three years of operation.

There are also financial benefits to having these special courts. The National Crime Prevention Centre says the annual cost of Toronto’s drug court is about \$8,000 per offender compared to \$50,000 per offender for incarceration.

The good news is that a drug treatment court could be on its way to Halifax. The federal Government announced funding of up to \$23 million to expand the pilot project over the next five years. They plan to open three more drug treatment courts in 2004.

Mark Stokes, director of communications for the National Crime Prevention Centre, says they’ll accept proposals from cities wanting drug treatment courts in the spring of 2004. Stokes says any city that submits a proposal is a candidate.

“It’s difficult to say which cities would be better candidates,” Stokes says. “We’ll take a look at every community and the proposals will be evaluated.”

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Halifax robbery rate is 1.5 times higher than national average

By Matthew Wuest
The Commoner

The robbery rate in Canada has actually dropped over the past five years, but the rate in Halifax is almost 1.5 times the national average, according to numbers from Statistics Canada and the Halifax Regional Police.

These statistics — which define robbery as “theft or attempted theft in which the perpetrator had a weapon or there was violence or a threat of violence against the victim” — include all types of robbery, not just those of small businesses.

Based on the national average, Halifax should have had about 309 robberies in 2002. But it had 449, according to the Halifax regional police website. That means a rate of 123.6 robberies per 100,000 people. The national average was 85.0 per 100,000 people.

Dr. Scott Kenney is a sociology and criminology professor at Saint Mary’s University. He says these types of small robberies can hit close to home for people in neighbouring areas.

“When too many of these things happen and they get publicized widely, communities

can really close in on themselves,” he says. “It can be very concerning to people in the area.”

However, Dr. Don Clairmont of Dalhousie University’s department of sociology and social anthropology says small business robberies aren’t the crimes that have most people losing sleep.

“The minor crimes causing people anxiety are residential break and enters and swarming cases,” Clairmont says. “The crimes that have you feeling you can’t walk the streets.”

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Victims ‘re-live robbery’ — police

By Matthew Wuest
The Commoner

The victims of small business robberies can sometimes have difficulty carrying on with their day-to-day lives, one Halifax Regional Police official says.

Verona Singer, coordinator of victim services, says victims suffer even more than physical injuries and financial losses — in many cases, they also suffer through significant mental anguish.

“Some people won’t even go into a corner store anymore after an incident like that,” Singer says. “They’ll say ‘I can’t go in there — it reminds me too much of what happened the last time.’”

She says it’s common for convenience store workers to quit their jobs after a robbery. That’s because every time they go behind the counter, they re-live the experience. The chances of this happening increase with the severity of a robbery, especially in cases where the victim “actually thinks that they’re going to die.”

The Halifax regional police offer a variety of services for victims, and victims can get compensation for long-term counselling through the Nova Scotia criminal injuries program.

Shattering

Dr. Scott Kenney of Saint Mary’s University’s sociology and criminology department says in cases where a robbery doesn’t involve significant violence, the effects on victims aren’t as severe. However, it often changes a victim’s outlook on society.

“Crime tends to shatter one’s faith in others and one’s assumption that they’re safe in their ordinary social environment,” he says. “It makes a person more suspicious of others.”

However, Kenney questions whether robberies can be traumatic enough to prevent victims from carrying on their day-to-day lives.

He cites a book, by Dr. Tana Dineen, arguing that mental health professionals attempt to “manufacture victims by encouraging people to see themselves as victims or suffering from a disorder. This gives mental health professionals an opportunity to make a living.”

Singer, however, says that how people deal with being victims comes down to the individual’s life experiences. If a person has dealt with serious crisis situations in the past, being a robbery victim is probably not going to affect the victim’s day-to-day life.

“Depending on a person’s ability to cope with stresses and their impact, someone can recover very quickly and return to work,” she says. “Others cannot.”

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INGRID DEON

A passerby walks along the strip on Spring Garden Road where a man robbed three stores. Four other store clerks say he begged them for money.

Man asks for money in stores before and after robbing spree

By Ingrid Deon and Erica Simpson
The Commoner

A man charged with robbing Pita Boys on Nov. 5 — and later that day Queen Street Super Video and Sunswirl Tanning Salon — asked other stores in the neighbourhood for money, their staffs say.

Employees at Dandelion Café, Javanet Café, Dairy Deli and Tim Hortons on Spring Garden Road, between Robie and Carlton Streets, all believe the man was in their shops before — or after — Pita Boys was robbed.

The police visited the four shops after the robbery at Pita Boys to talk about the man.

Karen Hayder, waitress at the Dandelion Café, says a man came into the café around 1:45 p.m., an hour before Pita Boys was robbed.

"He said that Dave [the owner] was going to loan him some money," she says, "which doesn't sound like Dave at all.

"I opened the till," she says, "to see if there were any envelopes with his name written on them, but there weren't. He said, 'Can I see?' and I said, 'No.' He asked if I would just hold it up and I said, 'No, I'm not going to hold the till up for you to see.'"

She says he was "really persistent and kind of pished."

She buzzed the owner of the café, who lives in the basement, to come up and help her. "I asked the guy if he wanted a coffee or something while he waited, but he just left."

Hayder says he stood about 5'8" and had a

shaved head and a round face. He wore a red and tan jacket. She didn't call the police but she says they came in and spoke to her while they were investigating the Pita Boys robbery.

Lynn Vail, owner of Pita Boys, refuses to talk about the robbery. She says the police told her that she'd be better off if she didn't say anything.

"It shows that you've been successfully burglarized," she says. "It makes you an easy mark."

Staff at Queen Street Super Video also declined to comment about the robbery.

Terry Butler, owner of Javanet Café, says a man he believes to be the suspect came into his shop around 3 p.m. and asked to borrow \$80.

"He said that he had to pay a bill, otherwise, somebody would try to kill him."

Butler says he suggested the man call the police if he felt his life was in danger.

"But, he just left after that," he says. Butler believes the man went door-to-door begging for money after he left Javanet Café.

Staff at Dairy Deli said a man came into their pizzeria at that time and asked for money, but they refused to talk about it.

Joel Sirois, a counter staff member at Tim

Hortons, next door to Pita Boys, saw the man but doesn't believe he's the man who robbed Pita Boys because "he's a nice guy." Sirois says it was around 3:30 p.m., after Pita Boys was robbed, when the man came in — for a coffee.

"He came in and got a coffee and five minutes later he left," Sirois says. He says the man is a regular customer at Tim Hortons. He got a large black coffee with two sugars. The man didn't ask him for any money.

Police say the alleged robber jumped into a taxi shortly after Queen Street Super Video was robbed.

They arrested Stephen Paul Austin, 32, of Gottingen Street Wednesday at about 7:15 p.m. as he left a house and charged him with robbery. Police say in at least two of the robberies he claimed to have a gun. However no one saw a weapon, they say.

Austin appeared in Halifax provincial court Thursday, Nov. 6 and was charged with three counts of robbery. He was sent to the East Coast Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Dartmouth for an assessment.

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streetLEVEL

Have you ever experienced a crime?

"My roommate's bike was stolen. The living-room window was left open. It was scary — I was pretty creeped out."



Belinda Madden,
Saint Mary's
student

"Years ago we were building our house and somebody stole all of the hardware. It cost us \$200. I felt violated."



Cathy Mosher,
social worker

"My car was stolen last year from the Halifax Shopping Centre. It was a 2001 Jetta. I wasn't happy at all."



Craig Garland,
retail manager

"Somebody broke into a basement apartment I shared with two other girls. I was home at the time. It was very frightening."



Kate Archibald,
nurse

"A friend and I were walking home and we were mugged. They took me down from behind and stole \$5. You think it will never happen to you."



Mark Reesor,
CompuCollege

streetLEVEL

Have you ever experienced a crime?



Nancy Kaszor,
appointment co-ordinator

“Somebody broke into my car recently. They seemed to know what they were doing. It cost \$300 to replace the window.”



Natasha Brennick,
Wicker Emporium

“Two girls tried to take money out of the cash register once. They knew how to open the till. The sales girl caught them when she heard the till ring.”



Serena Paul,
hairstylist

“At a party once these two dudes hit me and I retaliated with a knife. I got off on probation. I learned how to chill out after that.”



Susan Nasser,
research co-ordinator

“Someone broke into the house and stole my husband's wallet. The police accused my son — it was the first time I understood teenage stereotypes.”



Tarek Ezzat
Dal student

“A friend of mine was robbed last year. All of his credit cards were stolen. It didn't worry me too much — I'm not scared of crime.”

Convenience stores and police don't see eye-to-eye on robberies

By Genevieve MacIntyre
The Commoner

Convenience store owners and police officers want the same thing when it comes to protection from robbers and thieves. They want to prevent as much of it as they can. But if you interview spokespersons for convenience stores and the Halifax Regional Police, you'll find they have differing views on how dangerous it can be to work in convenience stores.

“Once upon a time people would rob and leave,” says Sid Chedrawe, chairman of the Independent Food Stores Association and owner of a convenience store in Dartmouth.

“Now they often injure people in addition, putting people in retail at risk. They take what they want, assault clerks, then leave. That's our biggest concern.”

Sgt. Don Spicer of the Halifax Regional Police says recent statistics, which he said were not available, show that convenience store robberies in the Halifax regional municipality are down slightly from previous years. He says a series of high-profile robberies in a short period of time have raised awareness, making it look as though the numbers of robberies are increasing when really they're not. He also says “few” robberies result in injury or death.

Chedrawe, however, says he's noticed an increase in the number of small-store robberies since the price of cigarettes has increased. They're an easy commodity to sell on the streets. He says there's also been a “dramatic increase” in the incidence of violence associated with crime.

One case occurred about six months ago in Dartmouth. A group of teens were loitering outside a shop. The clerk went outside to see what was going on. One of the teens pulled a gun and the clerk was shot. Chedrawe says it was “pure luck” the clerk wasn't killed.

Chedrawe has seen worse. About five years ago, a man he knew was held up while working in a convenience store. The man handed over what the robbers wanted. As the robbers were leaving they turned around and shot and killed him.

“It's hard enough that we have to make a living, paying bills and buying food,” says Chedrawe. “Now we have to deal with safety and security.” As a result, some store owners find it difficult to attract extra employees. “Why would people work in a store where they might get held up?”

In some stores, clerks choose to protect and defend themselves during robberies. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, people can use as much force as necessary to protect themselves or to assist in citizen's arrests. The courts decide whether the force used is excessive.

Spicer says, robbers often don't even possess a real weapon. They might indicate that

they have a gun, bat or knife, but these are not always seen and it is questionable whether they really have a weapon.

Spicer says it's illegal for storeowners to keep firearms in their stores for protection. It's also against the law to possess mace. Pepper spray is legal for protection against animals, but not against people. Spicer says many storeowners keep baseball bats in their stores because bats are not considered weapons until they're used as weapons. Then it's up to the courts to decide if they were used excessively.

Chedrawe says storeowners realize that police officers have limits and can't be every-

where in the HRM at all times. But he wishes police would respond to convenience store robberies more quickly. He says municipal and provincial governments should provide funding to increase the number of police.

Spicer says the police have a response system for calls, which is coded by priority so they can respond to the most urgent calls. He says robbery is a code-one call, meaning the police are to respond as quickly as possible.

Halifax Regional Police has 403 officers. Spicer would not reveal how many officers work on an average night. They cover the entire Halifax Regional Municipality, including Dartmouth and Bedford. They also cover the Halifax county, including Sackville, Tantallon, and Cole Harbour.

The Halifax Regional Police don't have the resources to offer additional or special protection to small businesses, says Spicer. They do, however, work with storeowners to do a “safety audit of the premises.” This means they suggest subtle improvements to the stores, such as adding brighter lights, removing posters from store windows that could reduce visibility from both the inside and the outside, not keeping a lot of cash in the till, and if at all possible, having two clerks working together, especially after dark.

Ideally, Chedrawe says, all convenience stores should have two employees working together on night shifts, but this is not always economically viable. Retailers don't always have enough profit to employ two people to work the same shift.

He says he's fortunate because he's able to have more than one person working at his store some of the time, which discourages robbers. His store has never been robbed.

With the introduction of Sunday shopping Chedrawe worries about how convenience stores' business will suffer. Business that they would normally get on Sundays will be taken by major businesses. This will result in convenience stores losing profit. Some convenience stores, therefore, will have to remain open for longer hours to make up lost busi-

ness, and some clerks will lose their jobs as a result of decreased store income. This will make it difficult to have at least two clerks working at night.

“We mentioned to the provincial government that with the increase of cigarette prices, with that extra revenue brought in, they should start something to bring in more employees,” says Chedrawe. He says if convenience stores were offered payroll subsidy programs, more people could be hired and the number of robberies could be cut down.

“On the food chain, we're very low,” Chedrawe says. “In priority with banks and big businesses, we're very low. There's big fish and small fish. We're small fish. That's just the way it is. It's just a fact of how life works.”

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Robbers: A portrait

- Robbers are usually after cash, cigarettes, and lottery tickets.
- Sometimes 10-12 teens will swarm a store, terrorize workers and customers, shoplift, and then leave.
- Robbers are generally males, but many females commit robberies as well.
- The average age of a robber ranges from late teens to early 30s. They can hit anywhere — there are no specific targeted areas.
- Robbers generally hit stores when there are few witnesses around.
- Some robbers pretend to have a weapon when they really don't.

If you're robbed at work

- Comply with the robber's demands.
- Fighting back is an individual decision. Weigh the cost of store items and cash to the cost of your own life. If you produce a weapon in retaliation, the robber could grab it from you.
- Be a good witness — note the robber's appearance, car, and direction of travel.
- Contact police as soon as possible. If you suspect that someone is lurking around and scoping the place to rob, call the police in advance.
- The police will ensure medical attention for physically-injured victims.
- The police, along with Victim Services, will help emotionally-injured victims.

Robber-proof your store

- Keep the store well-lit.
- Don't hang posters in store windows — they obstruct vision.
- Keep surveillance cameras and monitors visible so that robbers know they're being recorded.
- Don't carry a lot of cash in the till.
- Refuse to cash large cheques.
- Attend storeowner workshops to exchange ideas on security precautions.
- Share ideas with other storeowners.
- Install a security system.

Sources: Halifax Regional Police and Indepen-