

Woman couldn't pick out 'caveman' in police lineup

Neighbour spotted bearded man in Honda day before victim's body found in car trunk

BY JEREMY MERCER

It's amazing how a simple, everyday event can become a key piece of evidence at a murder trial.

Take Linda Beland and what, at the time, must have appeared to her to be the very normal morning of Feb. 21, 1996.

Ms. Beland woke in her south Ottawa home at 93 Newport Cr., drove her fiancé to work, and then stopped at the community mailbox at roughly 10:30 a.m. to collect that day's letters and bills. When she arrived, the postman was sorting the mail into the individual slots, so she had to wait. That's when she noticed the other man waiting to get his mail.

"He looked like a caveman," Ms. Beland recalled.

Then, having noted his looks, Ms. Beland watched as he retreated towards the home at 82 Newport Cr. and approached a grey Honda Civic parked outside.

"The man went into the car, the driver's seat," Ms. Beland says.

This woman's observations may well turn out to be among the most significant evidence offered at the murder trial of Dimitre Dimitrov.

Mr. Dimitrov, 42, faces charges of second degree murder in connection with the death of his landlord, Hristo Veltchev.

In what ranks as one of the region's most mysterious killings, on Feb. 22, 1996, Mr. Veltchev's battered corpse was found in the trunk of his grey Honda Civic, which had been left abandoned in the parking lot of the former Loblaw's grocery store on the corner of Bank Street and Alta Vista Drive.

After finding pools and splatters of Mr. Veltchev's blood in the garage of his home at 82 Newport Cr., police determined the killing took place there.

They also identified the three other residents of the house — the victim's wife, Faith Veltchev, another tenant, Dimitre Tzenev, and Mr. Dimitrov — as suspects in the case.

Mrs. Veltchev, who testified her husband was abusive, was arrested but never charged in connection with the case.

Mr. Tzenev, whose wife, Stefka, the court heard, might have been sleeping with Mr. Veltchev, was charged with killing the man but a judge dismissed the case due to lack of evidence.

Mr. Dimitrov is in the second week of his trial on second-degree murder charges.



FILE PHOTO

Dimitre Dimitrov is charged with second-degree murder in the death of his landlord, Hristo Veltchev.

"You can go a little further than that," prompted Mr. Clifford. "I'd expect it," conceded the officer.

The trial continues today.

Mr. Dimitrov is in the second week of his trial on second-degree murder charges.

To date, assistant Crown attorney Robert Wadden has suggested little motive to implicate Mr. Dimitrov in the killing. Instead, after telling the jury the case would be based on circumstantial evidence, the prosecutor wove together various accounts of the day's events to build his case.

Court heard that Mr. Veltchev was last seen alive at 7 a.m. on Feb. 21, 1996 and that his body was found after 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 22, 1996. Mr. Wadden also called evidence to show that the Civic was in the Loblaw's parking lot as of 4:30 p.m. on Feb. 21, 1996.

Mr. Wadden called both Mrs. Veltchev and Mr. Tzenev as witnesses. Mrs. Veltchev told the jury she left for her job as a cafeteria cook before 7 a.m. on Feb. 21 and didn't return home until after 5 p.m. that night.

Mr. Tzenev told the court he left for school at roughly 8:20 a.m. on Feb. 21 and didn't return home until after 7 p.m.

Which brought Mr. Wadden to Ms. Beland, whom he called as a witness yesterday.

Ms. Beland identified Mr. Veltchev's Honda Civic as the car she saw outside 82 Newport Cr. while waiting for her mail at 10:30 a.m. on Feb. 21 — a time, if previous testimony was to be believed, neither Mrs. Veltchev or Mr. Tzenev was home.

She also testified that the man who was walking towards it had a beard and dark hair — as Mr. Dimitrov did in February 1996.

But, when presented with a photo lineup, Ms. Beland could not identify Mr. Dimitrov as the man she saw. In fact, the jury heard the mug shot she picked out was of a man who had been in the penitentiary since 1986 for first-degree murder.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Dimitrov's defence lawyer, Vince Clifford, continued to hammer away at another key piece of Crown evidence — a pair of boots Mr. Wadden has said belonged to Mr. Dimitrov.

The boots were found in the hall closet at 82 Newport Cr. and had speckles of the dead man's blood on them.

With Sgt. Scott Brown, a blood spatter expert, on the stand yesterday morning, Mr. Clifford emphasized there was no blood found on the soles of the boots.

"It goes without saying that if you stand in a pool of blood, you're going to get blood on the soles of your shoes," Mr. Clifford said, referring to the pools of blood in the garage.

"That's possible," answered Sgt. Brown.

Poverty is curable.