

Life Stories

Crime and the Will Conley effect



Stefan William Conley



Standing up at friend, Bryan's wedding. Left to right are Glen, Bryan, Will and Arnie

On March 2, 2006 an innocent man was critically beaten in public on the route 74 Edmonton Transit bus and later died on route to the hospital. Three 17 year-olds and a 16 year-old turned themselves in for the murder of 35 year-old, Stefan 'William' Conley. The charges against the three, however, were reduced to manslaughter and the youths were released before a judge on a semi-conditional 'no-cash' bail.

Feeling disturbed on so many levels by this awful tragedy, I met with one of Will's best friends, 40 year-old Arnold Saathof, while he was bartending at Rosie's Bar & Grill at 10475 80th Avenue.

Mr. Saathof, who is described as a 'phenomenal person' by his friend Bryan, is very approachable despite our differences. He is the man that any man could relate to.

Upon our meeting, we talk about the bone chilling details that led to Will's death. I feel sad for a public who are not aware due to the media's attempt to capture the 'exclusive'

"What are the four teens like...they definitely are not God fearing kids", I ask.

"No definitely not...they didn't show any remorse...they just smirked and waved at their little girlfriends (during the bail hearings)", he replies.

What kind of kids are these, I thought. Does no-one fear God's Judgement anymore?

"Except for the smaller one; he just stood there with his head down and kept looking at his mom, like he was saying, 'I'm so sorry Mom'. I think he was just dragged into it by his friends".

Mr Saathof continues, "At least he was sorry...but their parents didn't even come over and say, I'm sorry about what happened."

I have to ask, "What do you think was going through Will's mind, knowing this was the end of his life?"

"If I know Will," (he would be thinking) "what about my friends and family; what's going to happen to my friends", he replies.

I also ask him about the lack of 'witness accountability' and its damaging effects.

Mr. Saathof responds in a painful, sobering tone, "Someone could have just screamed at them, that would have snapped them out of it...but nobody did anything."

Mr Saathof continues on, "they (bus drivers) have their voice(s), they have their brakes. Right, step on the brakes; oh, whoops, get the hell off my bus."

Witness accountability is very much a critical issue as it very much validates the ethical, societal and even religious morals and values that we hold for one another.

Is our adult society simply one large Pandora's Box? Should we tell our children, "if you witness another child being bullied in school... just don't get involved?"

Bryan, another one of Will's best friends, responded to my arguments. "If I didn't know Will and (I) watched him die and (I) walked off that bus, I couldn't live with myself...if I'm going to do time for it, so be it, it's worth it."

I continue on to ask Mr. Saathof how he feels about the public response to his online petition (find it at <http://www.petitionspot.com/petitions/Conley>). The petition challenges the Young Offenders Act regarding allowing the four guilty teens the privilege of anonymity and the freedom to do as they wish without the liability of bail.

Mr. Saathof suddenly speaks up cheerfully. "I'm happy with it, I'm so happy with 10,000; I really didn't think so many people would care about it."

The online petition, coupled with Mr. Saathof's local Rosie's petitions reveal just how much resentment the public feels about the leniency of the teens' bail conditions.

Mr Saathof plans to use the 18,000 respondent 'voices' to generate discussion among the highest levels of government.

Whatever 'voice' the four teens had tried to impress upon Stefan William Conley, they failed miserably.

Personally, I have been told by quite a few people, "I just don't trust teenagers; they travel together like a pack of wolves, you just don't know what

they will do."

And who can blame them for their perceptions? People throughout North America have already heard about what 'four teenagers' are capable of doing.

Why should our adult society take the risk of giving them fair opportunities, if they can just turn around and stab us in the back?

Do these four teens speak on behalf of all teenagers? E-mail me at ourvoice@telus.net.

What would Will Conley say if he could see the proactive efforts of his friends to gain some justice and to prevent his death from being in vain? According to his friends, Will's answer would be, "Rock and Roll...definitely!"

"Will would have done the same for anyone of us...that's just the kind of guy he was," one friend comments.

So just what kind of guy was Stefan William Conley?

According to Bryan, Will was a bit of a funny character, one who was definitely 'hilarious' after a few beers. At first glance, a stranger may see Will as a guy with just a mind for partying and rock and roll. Those who actually sat down and experienced Will's infectious personality, however, would find a subtle glimpse of a deeper, brilliant mind at work. You would think he was just carrying on a typical conversation with you, until you really 'thought' about what he was saying.

"Going on, beyond what you (may be able to) comprehend, Will was very eccentric. He would say things of the most profound meaning", explains Bryan.

Will, who had a deep-rooted knowledge of music, was known for his excellence in drumming and he knew how to work the guitar. Working in his off-time on his own recordings, he was on his way to becoming a Rock Star. For Will, this was no dream, it was reality waiting to happen.

Even though Will sang in, what he dubbed as, 'the key of scream', he threw it all out on the table for everyone to see as the Rosie's Karaoke MC. His voice did not stop Will Conley from showing the audience what, Rock and Roll, loud and proud really meant.

The music that best describes Will is most likely Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, the older Metalica and he was also a big fan of Pink Floyd's, The Fletcher Memorial Home.

Will absolutely loved women. With no apprehension at all, Will would simply approach the ladies to get to know them. Like Bryan says, "he had more confidence around girls than anyone I knew in my life."

"Ninety-nine times (out of a hundred) he would get shot down," Bryan says, laughing. "He would just brush it off (and) never got vindictive or vengeful...I don't know; it's amazing...nothing phased that guy."

"Unless you did something seriously bad ... he'd just brush it off," continues Bryan.

"Will never judged anyone, never, no matter what you were like...he'd talk to people about violin music, if it was something he could learn from...if you were just blowing smoke out of your ass...he'd tell you." "You know, in your lifetime you will never meet anyone like that, never", Bryan finally states.

Going back to the first time I met Arnold Saathof, he reveals that the dispute between Will and the four teenagers had to do with the heavy metal band, Metalica.

"He died for the music," I questioned, not sure if I was making sense out of what he was saying.

Mr. Saathof replies, "yeah, he died for the music."

You can find the Stefan William Conley Memorial Site at <http://www.wilconley.com/#>.

I dedicate this column to a stranger that I have never known. We come from two different worlds yet something perhaps a 'beat' unites us. This stranger's name is Stefan William Conley.

All of the money I make from this column, I am giving to that stranger's family to help them with their financial burdens.

-Darryl Learie