

The ChronicleHerald

The making of Nova Scotia's mass killer

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Nova Scotia's mass killer as a toddler. - Family photo

Legacy of child abuse spanning four generations may have been the key that unlocked potential for horrific violence

Editor's Note

Most of us are still trying to make sense of what happened in April.

One shooter, 22 victims. Court documents released this month say the killer was abused as a child. We set out to ask what role this may have played. We spoke with experts, victims of violence and those who knew the killer best—his family. Here is what we found.

Glynn had seen enough.

He made up his mind to take the kid—his nephew—and leave his brother and sister-in-law behind.

He had been living with the young married couple in Hamilton for only a few months when something happened he couldn't ignore. He was standing in the hall and heard the screaming. It was coming from Paul and Evelyn's bedroom.

"I ran down the hallway, opened the door and Paul was straddling Evelyn's chest and choking her," he recalled. Glynn looked. Paul stopped.

The child was in the room, too, watching. Barely a year old and learning to walk, that toddler would grow up to be one of the worst mass murderers in the country's history.

But back for a moment, to 1969. The brothers were working together at the Stelco steel mill in Hamilton. There was a strike that summer and Glynn left, heading home to Moncton rather than waiting for it to end. But he wanted the kid out of that house. Glynn says he told the couple he'd take the toddler and that Paul and Glynn's mother would take care of him. They agreed.

"I wanted to get him away from them because I loved him," said Glynn who now lives in a long-term care home in Moncton. He has dementia but The Chronicle Herald spoke to Glynn on multiple occasions and the details of his recollections never changed. Other family members and a close friend said Glynn's long-term memory is good.



Undated school photos of the boy who grew up to become one of the worst mass shooters in Canadian history.

‘Severely abused as a young boy’

Glynn's nephew—50 years later—would become the man responsible for the Portapique massacre. SaltWire is not naming the gunman and we have also omitted the surnames of the people in this story who are related to him.

RCMP warrants released Wednesday, Dec. 9 offer evidence that the gunman endured much as a child. The killer “was severely abused as a young boy,” according to one of the partially redacted witness statements.

Paul was the culprit, said his brother, Glynn.

The choking incident set the stage for what was to come for Glynn’s nephew and sister-in-law. The beating and bullying continued, according to Glynn and others close to the family. Along with Evelyn, the boy became a target of Paul’s manipulative, possessive and violent ways.

The Herald made several attempts to reach the gunman’s father to respond to the allegations in this story. The newspaper delivered a letter to Paul and Evelyn's home

listing the allegations. He did not respond but his wife phoned Tuesday and said:
"There is no truth in the letter we received."

A woman with an intimate understanding of the inner workings of the gunman's family believes years of abuse the gunman endured and saw his mother suffer helped create a monster.

"I'm not defending him at all. What he did was beyond monstrous," said the woman.



The father of Nova Scotia's mass killer as a boy, posing for a photo with his mother. - Family photo

'The monster was created'

We will call her MJ. She asked that her name not be used because she's afraid of Paul. She said the gunman's father slowly "pecked away" at his son, moulding him into what he became.

"The monster was created, and I understand that whether or not he was created, that doesn't take away the unimaginable pain of the people who lost their loved ones."

Paul was known for his volatile temper and his young son was often the target, said MJ. What most parents would consider normal childhood missteps or growing pains, Paul found intolerable and responded with fury.

She recalled Paul boasting to her about making his nine-year-old son shoot his pet dog because he'd not cleaned up its poop. On another occasion, he was angry that his son, five years old at the time, was still attached to his baby blanket. So, he sat him on a table and burned the blanket in front of him.

"Paul was telling me this like he was this great dad teaching his son important life lessons."

The gunman grew up in Moncton and for years his father worked as a travelling salesman. When Paul came home, his son was terrified. "He exerted absolute control over the family, he would snap in a heartbeat," MJ said.

Glynn is well-acquainted with his brother's violent side. There were five brothers in the household and growing up all of them were afraid of Paul.

"When I was a kid, he used to beat the shit out of me almost every day and I'm still afraid of him," said Glynn.

Paul's criminal record shows he was charged with assault in 2018 that resulted in a peace bond.

Paul came by his violent nature honestly, said Glynn. The boys were afraid of their father Stanley.

"Paul was just like my father and my father was a horrible pig," said Glynn. "He treated me like shit all of my life. He should never have had children."



Stanley, the grandfather of the man responsible for Nova Scotia's mass killings in April, is seen in the middle of this undated photo - Family photo

Abuse went back generations

From an early age, Glynn and Paul were roughed up by their father, he said. One incident when the brothers were four and five years old, is burned into his memory.

In the early 1950s, Stanley was taking his sons on a trip to P.E.I. aboard the now-defunct MV Abegweit passenger ferry, commonly referred to as the Abby. The vessel connected Port Borden, P.E.I., to Cape Tormentine, N.B., via the Northumberland Strait. They were standing on the passenger deck of the vessel, still docked in Cape Tormentine, when the father picked up the boys by their ankles and dangled them over the railing above the water.

"I remember shaking, screaming, yelling and probably crying," said Glynn. "Paul said I was so afraid I didn't even take a breath. I remember the water looking so cold, thinking why doesn't someone come help us?"

Their brother Neil was also aboard the ferry and witnessed this. The retired teacher and school administrator lives in Shemogue N.B. He said that as a boy he endured multiple beatings from his dad that continued until he was 12 years old. The physical abuse ended after his mother went to the police and the father ended up in court, he said.

'Threats, humiliation and intimidation'

"The judge told him if you come back again in front of me, bring your suitcase," said Neil. "He never beat me again but he went to psychological torture: threats, humiliation and intimidation."

Personality traits run in families, says Simon Sherry, a psychology professor at Dalhousie University and expert in psychopathology. The professor and practising psychologist wouldn't comment specifically on the killer or the potential impact his upbringing played in his cognitive development.

But upbringing has a strong influence on whether a child prone to psychopathy develops psychopathic traits and to what extent, he said in an interview. These traits impact emotional, interpersonal and behavioural functioning and can show themselves in a range of ways, said Sherry.

Someone could be quite charming and superficial or callous and remorseless, he said. "You can have someone who is deviant and engages in criminal behavior, someone who is impulsive and someone who can engage in a range of criminal behavior."



Nova Scotia's mass killer, as a teenager, poses for a photo aboard a ferry. - Family photo

Triggering psychopathic traits

Psychopathic traits are not randomly distributed in the population but rather aggregate in certain families, Sherry said. "So, if you think about it in a family where there are a lot of psychopathic traits it stands to reason that's a lot of psychopathy under one roof."

When it comes to the relationship between child abuse — or as Sherry calls it, child maltreatment— and whether a person develops psychopathic traits, timing counts. That includes how early maltreatment (including emotional, verbal and physical abuse) happens in life, over how long a period and how often.

But not all maltreated children go on to victimize other people, said Sherry.

"So that raises questions: if not all maltreated children go on to victimize other people, why do some go on to become abusive and other children never engage in that behavior?"

"I think the answer lies, at least according to science, in some sort of an interplay between genes and environment, nature and nurture. So, for people who go on to

develop these psychopathic traits it looks like it's a result of a combination of their genetics as well as exposure to childhood maltreatment."

Neil believes that his nephew was the victim of both. He said serious physical and emotional abuse can be traced back through four generations of the family. He said his grandfather George also beat his children. He said his mother told him stories of his grandmother being forced to hold onto the children during many of the beatings.



The mass killer's father, Paul, dresses as the Riddler for Halloween in this undates photo. - Family photo

Generation to generation

"It went from George to Stanley to Paul to Gabriel," said Neil. Not all the brothers can be lumped in the same category, he said. Three of them had children, including Neil who had three, and none laid a hand on their kids or partners, he said.

Neil said it's well understood in the family that Paul is a scrapper and had been involved in several fistfights through the years, though he hadn't witnessed any. He said his older brother is a lifelong petty thief and he believes Paul taught his son one life lesson, in particular: "It doesn't really matter if you commit a crime, the fault is getting caught."

Paul was to appear in court Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020, on charges of theft — of razor blades from Costco — and police obstruction. He was also charged with theft in the 1990s and given an absolute discharge.

Neil said stories of Paul's petty theft circulated within the family. Once at an Irving gas station, he stole a stamp used for cards that could be redeemed for a free coffee, said Neil. He said years ago Paul used to bring his family to drive-in theatres and had Evelyn hide in the trunk of the car in order to avoid paying for an extra ticket. He believes Paul's son witnessed this behaviour and copied it.

The motive, Neil said, was never about saving a few bucks, rather it was about "beating the system and proving he's smarter than everyone else."

He said the pair used to work out at the Université de Moncton gym together and his brother found a way around paying the admittance fee. The five-dollar fee paid for a yellow T-shirt with the name of the university fixed to the back. Neil said his brother had a replica made after measuring the dimensions of the lettering and purchasing the identical typeface along with the exact same yellow T-shirt. From that point on, he worked out for free.

Petty crimes and family feuds

Neil said his nephew would do similar things, such as walking into a movie theatre without paying. He'd reuse fast-food soda cups to get away with not paying for a drink with his meal.

"He was a millionaire, so this wasn't about saving five or 10 dollars," said Neil. "It was to get away with it, to prove he's smarter than you."

His nephew's behavior escalated, said Neil, to the point that he tried to swindle his uncle Glynn out of his own home. Before moving into a long-term care home Glynn had lived in Portapique a few houses away from his nephew. They were close for a time before the bitter dispute.

The future killer managed to get his name on the deed of Glynn's property and refused to give up ownership. Neil intervened back in 2013 and tried unsuccessfully to reason with his nephew. Neil wound up having to hire a lawyer to resolve the dispute. The

home was sold in 2015 but it took a court order for Glynn to get the money later that year.

Lisa McCully moved into the home. Five years later, she was one of gunman's victims.

Neil and his nephew never spoke after the dispute over the home. Neil said he feared for his life while the shootings in April were unfolding and discovering his nephew was the gunman.

Mounting evidence shows that the gunman also terrorized his common-law partner. RCMP have said the massacre began on the night of April 18 after the gunman argued with his spouse and restrained and assaulted her before she managed to escape into the woods.



Nova Scotia's mass killer poses for a photo beside a helicopter in this undated photo. - Family photo

Another choking attack

Glynn said his nephew's partner was the victim of vicious physical and emotional attacks. One incident in 2013 mirrored the assault he said he witnessed his brother inflict on Evelyn in Hamilton.

He said his nephew, who often became violent and aggressive when he drank, was drinking on this day. Glynn was at a neighbour's house in Portapique at the time with his nephew's partner when he showed up on a four-wheeler demanding that she get on the vehicle and go home.

Glynn was concerned for her and followed the pair back to his nephew's home.

"I knew he was going to hurt her and so I showed up at his place and sure enough she's on her back on the lawn and he's on top of her choking her," said Glynn. "He's a tall man and he's big. He clenched his fists and came after me. I thought, my God, he's going to knock me into next week. I was scared to death because he was nuts."

His nephew backed off when, just then, another friend showed up at the house.

When he heard, years later, that his nephew went on a shooting spree, he was glad to be living far away.

"He would have killed me along with the other people, you know, he would have burned my house down, too."

'Make sure he doesn't follow you'

Meantime, the woman ran inside the house, grabbed her keys and got in her car and drove off. Glynn recalled the gunman's spouse calling him from Truro and asking whether she should stay there overnight or continue on to the couple's home in Dartmouth.

"I said whatever you do, make sure he doesn't follow you because he's really wound up. He might kill you."

MJ, the woman with close ties to the family, had also gotten to know the gunman's partner. She said there's no question she endured years of serious abuse.

"She is a victim, she did what she had to do and she was a survivor, I promise you that."

She said the gunman endured another family trauma in 2009, an event that sent him into a permanent downward spiral. The gunman found out that he had a biological brother living in the U.S. who his parents had given up for adoption in 1970.



Nova Scotia's mass killer, as a teenager, smokes a cigarette at an outdoor venue. -Family photo

A brother he never knew

"Imagine being 40 years old and discovering this and how he must have felt after a life full of deceit and the hell that he went through," MJ said. "It destroyed him that his brother had a chance to survive versus what he had to live with."

His brother Jeff lives in North Brookfield, Mass., and is a respected community figure. By all accounts, he enjoyed his childhood and had loving adoptive parents. The contractor is most noted for restoring several important historical landmarks in the region.

The Herald made several unsuccessful attempts to reach him.

Paul and Evelyn lived in Massachusetts briefly in the early 1970s. Before heading to the U.S., they returned to Moncton from Hamilton to collect their firstborn son where he was being looked after by Paul's mother at her home. Evelyn was pregnant and soon

after moving to Fitchburg, Mass., gave birth to Jeff. Both Glynn and MJ said Evelyn's husband forced her to give Jeff up for adoption.

Decades later, the couple reunited with Jeff in 2010 when he was 40 years old. What began as a joyous reunion turned into a nightmare for the couple's youngest son.

According to MJ, Jeff had made a couple of trips to Nova Scotia to try to build a relationship with his new family and brother. But it never materialized and Jeff never overnights at either his brother's Dartmouth home or visited his cottage in Portapique.

His last visit here was in Christmas 2012. By the end of it, he had seen enough, including some of the automatic weapons and a grenade his brother had been keeping at his Dartmouth home.

"When he left in 2013, Jeff never spoke to his brother again," said MJ. "He just knew he was morally bankrupt."

He no longer keeps in touch with his parents either.

The relationship between the gunman and his father was never good. Warrants released in September revealed that the pair got into a violent dispute during a family trip to Cuba. The witness statement came from the gunman's spouse who told investigators "that (her partner) was smashing Paul's head on the pool and there was blood everywhere."

She said her partner "had nothing to do with his parents." He had "cut family off after there was a dispute over ownership of a house."

The Herald also spoke to a lifelong family friend of the gunman's parents. The woman, who asked that her name not be used, said that Evelyn had confided to her that she was being abused by Paul.



Stanley holds his sons Paul, who would become the father of Nova Scotia's mass killer, and Glynn. - Family photo

'Evelyn cries every day'

But she said she never witnessed Paul mistreating Evelyn or her son. She said Paul has always been eccentric. He has an awful temper but he also has a big heart, she said.

"I wouldn't want to get in his way when he gets upset. I heard it from people; I heard it from his wife. Why didn't she leave? Everybody lives a life and nobody is perfect.

"Evelyn cries every day, every day. Her heart is broken. She has her faith in God and that's what keeps her going. Paul just carries on and they have this nice little home and a beautiful backyard and he works away at that. It's a hard thing that they have to live with. They've also lost a son."

She said the gunman's actions cannot be pinned solely on his parents.

"When you look at the whole family through the generations, they certainly had problems."

Identifying potential killers

She can recall the gunman as a boy, a boy who gave no indication of what he would later become.

"He was just a beautiful little boy," she said. "He was almost like an angel."

While the psychology professor won't talk about any trauma the gunman may have experienced, he points out that child maltreatment is a public health crisis. At minimum, one in four girls and one in six boys will be seriously maltreated during their childhood and adolescence, said Sherry.

"There are implications for identification and if we can help identify individuals who are at risk for mass murder then we can move toward preventing these types of tragedies," said Sherry. "We have to recognize that this is a public health crisis and take the steps needed to reduce the prevalence of that abuse."