

Schizophrenia took over one life, ended another

Family, friends watched helplessly as charming, successful athlete became irrational and violent

BY DIANNE WOOD
RECORD STAFF

Jason Luke had it all. Good looks, smarts, friends, lots of women.

The world-class lacrosse pro was on his way

But all that was before a mental illness called schizophrenia invaded his brain.

Within a few short years, Luke would be huddled in his room like a hermit.

The once meticulously dressed man would wear the same clothes for days. He often wouldn't wash and he smelled.

He'd be tormented by constant voices in his head that told

him he was going to marry Madonna and the United Nations had authorized him to become a hit man and kill people.

His mother, Robin Luke, at times feared her own son who shared her St. Catharines home. But she never dreamed he would go so far as to kill his own father.

Earlier this week, in a Kitchener courtroom, Luke, 28, was found not criminally responsible because of a mental disorder, for murdering Robert Lewis in his Waterloo home. Luke is now back in a psychiatric facility. A provincial review board will decide when he gets out.

Details of just how sick Luke

had become were revealed at his preliminary hearing last year.

The stories of family and friends left no doubt the man named Rookie of the Year by the Buffalo Bandits National Lacrosse League in 1998 had changed dramatically.

Les Bartley remembered those glory days. He drafted Luke in the first round.

"He has world-class speed," Bartley testified at the hearing. "He was confident. Some would call him cocky."

Luke was "soft-spoken, well-dressed and polite," and "popular with the girls," he said.

But in 1998, Luke suffered a severe knee injury at the Mann Cup, the national lacrosse league championship, in British Columbia.

He entered rehabilitation and tried to make a comeback, but reinjured the knee. After

more rehabilitation, he tried again, but shattered his kneecap. It was all over — his future in lacrosse dead.

Everyone who knew him says this was the turning point for Luke, who descended into what would ultimately be diagnosed as a severe mental illness. Today his mother isn't sure what role the knee injuries played.

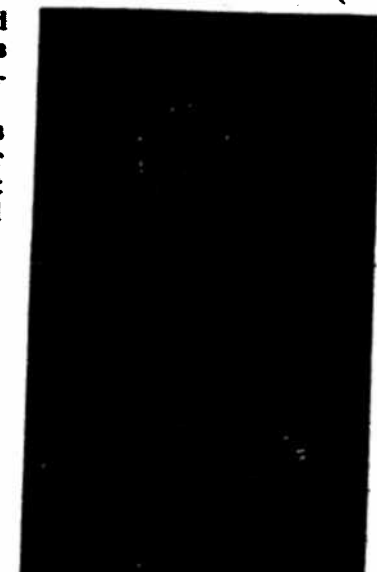
"If you read books on (schizophrenia), it says traumatic events don't affect it," she says.

But whether something precipitated the illness or not, it would emerge full blown within a year.

"It came on drastic," is how his mother puts it.

At the preliminary hearing, his former coach recalled seeing Luke in hospital in 1999 after he had suffered a breakdown of some kind.

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PETER LEE, RECORD STAFF
It was mental illness — not her son, Jason — that killed Robert Lewis, Robin Luke says from her home in St. Catharines.

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Illness: His family saw Luke at his worst

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before this summer, Jason was on top of the world," Barthey said. "I walked in. He was in a robe, leaning his hair grow out. He wouldn't acknowledge conversation."

"I had this problem, and I was having problems. He had nothing to fall back on."

Barthey saw Luke again at a game in St. Catharines in the summer of 2000. Barthey said he, not yet 16, approached Jason Luke behind the visiting team's bench.

"I saw Jason go about a kid well dressed to it, kid who wore a turtleneck pulled over his ear and dressed shoddily," Barthey testified. "He used to have lots of kids hanging around him. A couple of times I saw him, he was all by himself."

The people who saw Luke at his worst, however, were his family inside the family home his mother, stepfather and two stepbrothers became witnesses to an increasing number of bizarre acts.

Luke began hoarding things. He would take family members' belongings and stash them in his room, his mother said. A hairbrush, a pair of shoes, mustard and cereal would all be spilt up to his room.

"He had it all set up like a shrine," she said. "Different things meant different things. I'd clean it all up and it would start all over."

Luke would also have conversations with himself in which he'd yell, "I'm not the idiot. You're the idiot."

"He'd tell me what the voices were telling him to do—to kill himself and kill people," his mother said. "I'd say, 'You can't kill people. You'll go to jail.' He'd say, 'You don't understand. I've been given permission from the UN.'"

Luke told his mother he'd been ordered to become a hitman. He would wait for South fighter jets to land on a flat area of their property. Hillary and Bill Clinton were coming for him.

He would run outside in the middle of the night if he heard a piano, crying, "They're here!"

Once, his mother saw him crouched down with his knees stuck. She he was a sniper. He held the stick like a rifle.

"I asked it when planes flew over," his mother said. She knew she would have to go out and find her son.

He also waited for Madonna because they were going to be married, Robin Luke said. The rock diva talked to Luke through the television music channel.

"He'd shower and put on his shirt and pants, get dressed up all nice and stand at the roadside waiting for



Jason Luke's illness could result in behaviors and destructive behavior.

Madonna," she said. "Sometimes all night long. In the morning, he'd come back in."

The only time he shaved and showered was for Madonna.

Luke would also sit by the window for hours, waiting for the Queen.

And he could be destructive. At times, he would walk up to the refrigerator, then suddenly turn around and, with his arm, knock everything off the counter.

One day, he looked at this mother and told her the voices were telling him to stab her right then.

"I kind of hid in my room after that," she said. "I was pretty scared."

Later, after his arrest, Luke would also frighten a psychiatrist at the Mental Health Centre in Penetanguishene where he was sent for assessment. Dr. Alan Remshaw said she felt intimidated by his menacing presence at first.

Luke's mother admitted him to the psychiatrist's wing of St. Catharines General Hospital in the summer of 1999 after he trashed their home. She was forced to call police. Luke was admitted involuntarily for 72 hours, and she convinced him to stay another six days.

But he escaped several times, and ultimately signed himself out. His mother feels the hospital psychiatrist "washed his hands" of Luke because he wouldn't stay. She had to beg the doctor to give her a two-week prescription for her son. After that, he was on his own to find medication.

But his mother says they had no family doctor because of a doctor shortage. She ended up having to rely on walk-in clinics and hospital emergency departments. And even when Luke got anti-psychotic medication, he wouldn't always take it. He wasn't sick, he said. He was convinced the voices were real.

Several times, Robin Luke resorted to getting medication from other people who were taking it, and putting it in her son's tea. He was always better after she did that, she said.

The day Luke left to visit his father in Waterloo—Nov. 28, 2000—his mother said he was actually planning to go to Jamaica. He believed his father's abuser was "high up in the government

and was going to help him find the government officials who were programming him."

Luke believed his father had a ticket for him and was going to help him get to Jamaica.

Robin Luke, who once lived in Kitchener, had met Lewis at Octoberfest. They never married, and split up long ago. Luke was occasionally raised by his stepfather, Keith Smith, but saw Lewis often.

Court was told at the hearing that Jason's father had issued an ultimatum that week. Ken Pasram, who worked with Lewis and had lunch with him the day before he was killed, testified Lewis had told his son that if he didn't see a doctor by Thursday, he'd have to go home.

His mother thinks that had something to do with the fight they had on Thursday as Lewis was heading out for work. His body was found face-down in a pool of blood at the bottom of a flight of stairs. His throat had been cut and there was a knife under his head.

Court also heard that Luke had been asking his father for large sums of money and would get angry when he didn't get it.

Lewis's sister, Doris Buchman, who lives in England, said that once, from what Lewis told her, it seemed Luke had been threatening his father. Lewis told his sister, "I've told Jason, if you want to kill me, you'll have to wait until I'm asleep because (I've) got a hatchet" and would chop him to bits."

Later in September, Lewis told his sister it didn't make sense for Luke to kill him because he would have to go through her to get whatever money Lewis had. She was the executor. Lewis would be dead two months later.

Robin Luke is sure her son didn't kill his father for money. It was the mental illness that did it, she said. Today, Luke is greatly improved on an anti-psychotic medication called Risperdal, his mother says. His voices have stopped. Luke has told her he would be afraid not to take medication now. His mother feels the law should be changed to force people released from institutions who have committed crimes to take their medication.

"The mentally ill have too many rights," she said. "When they're out in society, they should have to take their medication."

When he gets out, her son hopes to return to university so he can help other mentally ill people, she said.

Today, he's sane, but angry that the mental illness took away his father.

"He said, 'I didn't kill someone I hated. I killed somebody I loved,'" she said.