

Man found not criminally responsible for attack on landlady

BY KEITH FRASER, THE PROVINCE MARCH 19, 2010

A man who committed a violent sex attack on his landlady has been found not criminally responsible due to a mental disorder.

Steven Thomas Lowry, 26, was charged with attempted murder, aggravated sexual assault and aggravated assault in connection with the April 2008 attack on the victim, who cannot be identified due to a publication ban.

Lowry, a former member of Canada's junior cross-country ski team, admitted he committed the violent acts. At trial, the only issue was his mental state at the time.

"I have concluded Mr. Lowry has proved at the time he committed the acts, he was suffering from a mental disorder," said B.C. Supreme Court Justice Wendy Baker.

"Mr. Lowry is not criminally responsible due to a mental disorder."

Prior to the attack, Lowry had moved down to the Lower Mainland from Kelowna with the intent of attending university.

But Lowry, who had suffered from a number of mental problems, including symptoms of depression and anxiety earlier in his life, began having problems when he took a room in the victim's home.

The victim attempted to help him and at one point took him to a hospital emergency ward, only to have him request that he be returned home.

On the night of the assault, the victim heard someone running up and down the hallway and doors opening and closing outside her bedroom.

Then Lowry came in and lay down on her bed, eventually straddling her and putting his hand over her mouth. Grabbing a clock radio, he smashed her over the head. She managed to crawl under the bed. He put his finger in her vagina.

She was able to leave the room but the assault continued downstairs, with Lowry grabbing a potted plant and hitting her over the head. He grabbed a rock and hit her 10 to 15 times, the assault was only interrupted when another tenant courageously intervened.

Lowry, who was heard repeatedly telling the victim he was going to kill her, claimed at trial he was on a mission to have sex with her.

There was disputed psychiatric evidence, but the judge found the testimony of a defence psychiatrist that Lowry suffered from bipolar disorder and was in a mixed-mood state to be more acceptable.

Lowry is now entitled to an assessment within 45 days by a mental health review board to determine if and when he can be released.

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