

**Thirteen-year-old thief tears twins apart:
Ken and Sarah Machado were twins, best friends. Then a joyrider slammed into their car,
killing Sarah. Ken Machado tells Peter Clough that Sarah's the first and last thing he thinks
about every day**

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Byline: Peter Clough

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Ken Machado doesn't know where he got the strength to pull himself from the wreckage.

He stormed across the road and started screaming at the three kids who were crawling out of the other car.

A woman who heard the crash from her home remembers him yelling out: "Look! See what you've done! See what you've done!"

Ken, 16 at the time, had somehow produced the adrenaline to free his badly injured body from the twisted mess. His twin sister Sarah was already dead in the back seat. His friend Martin Williams, the driver, lay unconscious on the dashboard.

Acting purely on impulse, Ken found himself yelling and spitting at the kids who'd come out of nowhere to deliver such devastation.

He couldn't believe his eyes. The driver of the other car was 13.

A court heard later that the boy behind the wheel was involved in a ring of teenaged East Vancouver car thieves. He and his two passengers, both 16, had stolen a Chrysler Intrepid to go on a joyride. On University Boulevard, however, they encountered a police roadblock and the young driver pulled a quick U-turn across the grassy median.

Police gave chase, clocking the fleeing car at 100 km/h. At West 10th and Tolmie, it ploughed head-on into the Acura being driven by Martin Williams.

After a long recovery, Ken Machado sounds cheerful and confident about his life. He says he no longer bristles with anger when he thinks about the young car thieves whose mindless behaviour that night cost his twin sister her life.

He had said at the time that "half of me died." Today, 21 and a sociology student at McGill University in Montreal, Ken says he no longer feels that way.

Born in Tokyo to a Japanese mom and a Venezuelan dad, Ken and Sarah were hardly ever apart. Alex and Kumiko Machado brought their twins to Vancouver when they were five. "We didn't have many friends so we just stuck together," says Ken.

There was no shortage of good friends at Kitsilano Secondary School. Ken and Sarah were popular students who were still inseparable. They celebrated their 16th birthday with a huge party. "Lots of underage drinking," Ken laughs. "It was pretty crazy. We had it at our friend's house. Her parents were away."

He says even West Side kids usually know one or two people who've stolen cars -- or at least driven a parent's car without a licence. Ken remembers how thrilling it was for himself as a 16-year-old to finally have access to wheels -- thanks to his best friend Martin.

He says Martin was the first in their group to have his own keys. On the day of the accident, the Sunday of a long weekend, the three of them had driven out to the Cloverdale Rodeo. After a barbecue at Martin's house, they drove down to Trimble Park to hook up with some friends. The other kids were eager to get inside Martin's '93 Acura, play with the controls, savour that first taste of freedom.

Shortly after midnight, Martin offered to drive Ken and Sarah home. They were heading west along West 10th. Ken, sitting in the front, remembers leaning over to turn up a song he liked before he saw a bright light and everything went black.

The 13-year-old driver of the stolen car belonged to a ring of about 10 East Vancouver teenagers who stole cars on a daily basis. A court heard later that his mother had started using cocaine and heroin when he was a baby of six months and that he had started life neglected, abused and abandoned -- bounced around from one foster home to the next.

At New Beginnings Baptist Church on East 1st Avenue, Pastor Joe Russell knew all three of the boys in the stolen car from his work with needy families and his efforts to encourage young thieves, drug addicts and joyriders to learn about responsibility.

He says the "bounced-around" syndrome is typical of the 150 or so young offenders he's helped at New Beginnings. He says more than 95 per cent of them have grown up without a steady father figure; about a third have never known any kind of real parent.

During his 15 years of work with young offenders, the pastor has noticed a huge drop in the age at which auto theft kicks in -- from a typical age of 16 or 17 to 12 or 13 today.

"At that age they'll start hanging around in little packs of five, six, seven, eight kids and that in effect is their family," says Russell. "'We take care of each other.' 'Nobody's gonna mess us around.' It isn't realistic. It doesn't really work. But it works better than any system they've got."

He's worked with joyriders as young as 10 -- one kid so small that he needed a cushion in order to see out the windshield. Russell says kids that young steal cars purely for fun and for status. Typically they'll take turns to have a go at the wheel.

"One will be telling the other, 'That's the clutch, that's the brake, and there's the gas,'" he says. "Usually there's drugs and booze involved. They're in a party mood and that's where you're holding your party -- out on the road."

Russell gives driving lessons to young men who've turned 16 and show some interest in developing skills that might help them find jobs and a stable, non-criminal lifestyle.

He was amazed at how many of them already knew how to operate a vehicle.

He says he lost touch with the 13-year-old responsible for Sarah Machado's death after the boy was sentenced to seven months at a juvenile detention centre near Campbell River. The youth was also given two years' probation and banned from driving until the age of 19.

Russell says all three boys in the car were extremely remorseful for their actions. He has helped one of the 16-year-old passengers, a twin himself, who he says was "shattered" by the experience. Sarah's death produced an outpouring of sympathy for her family along with angry calls for a more effective approach to dealing with out-of-control young offenders.

In the House of Commons, Surrey North MP Chuck Cadman, who died earlier this year, spoke of Sarah's life and warned there would be more tragedies unless better ways are found to stop juveniles from becoming hardened criminals.

"We are doing an injustice to these youths by allowing them to get away with the crime at an early age," he said.

Pastor Russell agrees that the young offender programs he hears about aren't taken seriously by the people they're designed to help.

"They laugh about it," he says. "You should hear the kids talk about it. It's almost a status symbol. There aren't any consequences. At first it's scary -- they were in court or they had to spend a night in jail or whatever, but there are no real consequences.

"This might be unfair, but I haven't seen one kid turned around by a government-run program. I've seen youth turned around by wonderful peer models or older brother models but it takes community people getting involved in these kids' lives."

Ken Machado says he doubts the solution to the joyriding epidemic lies in handing out stiffer penalties to children.

"He stole a car, he crashed it, he killed a girl," says Ken of the 13-year-old driver. "Do you punish him like he was an adult -- and then he's in a jailed environment with real criminals for a long time? He comes out saying that he's changed? How do you know he hasn't gotten worse?"

He says he has mixed feelings about the young man, now about 18. "At first I wanted to kill him," he says. "I was angry. But you can't really hate someone who's had such a miserable life." He says he came to that realization when he went to court and looked at the young offender's family - - and then at his own.

After recovering from his injuries, Ken went to China to teach English. Now he's enjoying life as a student in Montreal among friends who don't immediately associate him with Sarah.

He's thinking of going to law school.

"But you don't get over it," says Ken. "I think about it every day. It's the first thing I think about when I get up and it's the last thing I think about when I go to bed. You sort of have to learn to live with it."

At 10th and Tolmie, the memorial to Sarah flourishes. Her friends Sasha and Camille planted a white rose bush there and every May 22, the anniversary of her death, her friends leave flowers at the site and then go out for dinner to celebrate her life.

pclough@png.canwest.com