

Muzzo to be sentenced March 29

By Angela Gismondi and Bill Rea

The fate of Marco Muzzo in the hands of Justice Michelle Fuerst.

Fuerst will hand down her sentence March 29. Three days of sentencing submissions were given in the case late last month in Newmarket. Crown attorney Paul Tait said a 10-to-12-year sentence would send a message.

Muzzo pleaded guilty to four counts of impaired driving causing death and two counts of impaired driving causing bodily harm in the deaths of Daniel, Harrison and Milagros Neville-Lake, and their grandfather Gary Neville in the horrific Sept. 27 crash in Vaughan.

Muzzo himself spoke for the first time since his arrest and incarceration. He delivered a page-long apology to the families of the people he killed.

In a packed courtroom, Superior Court Justice Fuerst heard from the crown, the defence, the victims and Muzzo himself.

After hearing emotional victim impact statements from the Neville-Lake family the day before, Muzzo himself took to the stand to give his statement.

"I stand here before you today with great remorse, sympathy and unimaginable regret," Muzzo began. "As I listened with horror yesterday to the details of the catastrophic consequences of my actions, I knew that my words would be of no consolation. Ever since the tragedy that occurred as a result of my inexcusable conduct, I have wanted to say that I am sorry and apologize to your family from the bottom of my heart . . . I know that there are no actions that can ever change what has happened."

He expressed wishing he could turn back the hands of time.

"I know that there is no steps that I can take to bring back your children Daniel, Harrison and Milly Neville-Lake and your father Gary Neville ? I pray that I could ? but I cannot," Muzzo said. "I wish that I could undo the heartbreaking experiences that your mother Neriza Neville and grandmother Josephina Frias had to witness and continue to live through. I am tortured by the grief and the pain that I have caused your entire family and the tragic effect that this has had on so many others and its impact upon the community."

He told the court he will spend the rest of his life atoning for his conduct and devote himself to educating the public on the "disastrous consequences of drinking and driving."

"I will forever be haunted by the reality of what I have done and I am truly sorry," concluded Muzzo.

Jennifer Neville-Lake and her husband Edward Lake walked out of the courtroom before they could hear what Muzzo had to say.

"I don't want to listen to the man who is responsible for killing my children," Neville-Lake, who lost her children and father in the tragedy, said outside the courthouse. "There is nothing he can say. His actions spoke louder than words."

In the courtroom, Tait said Fuerst has the challenging task of determining a suitable sentence for Muzzo. He said Muzzo had many options that day. He could have taken a taxi or a limo, or asked someone to pick him up. But instead, in an act of "extreme selfishness," he chose to get behind the wheel.

"This tragedy of almost incomprehensible scope could have been avoided," Tait stated, adding the Crown deliberately avoided using the word "accident" when describing the crash. "Every drunk driver makes a choice and in this case, the choice resulted in catastrophic consequences for the victims' family. The next generation of the Neville-Lake family was wiped out in one fell swoop . . . No sentence fashioned by any court would address this catastrophic loss."

He suggested a 10 to 12-year penitentiary sentence would be a "fit and proper sentence." He also said that Fuerst could set a precedent by imposing a higher sentence and pointed out that there is no maximum sentence for impaired driving, as each case and the circumstances surrounding it are individualized. He also asked for an eight-to-12-year driving prohibition. That, he noted, would send a strong message.

"It is time to send a message," Tait concluded.

After Muzzo read his statement, his lawyer Brian Greenspan presented 92 letters of support, from his priest, family, friends and employees. Many of the letters reiterated the idea that Muzzo "is a very good person who made a terrible decision."

Greenspan attempted to show a side of Muzzo that is contrary to how he is portrayed in the media. The letters described Muzzo as humble, kind, hard-working and always willing to help anyone in need. He said he is "grief-stricken" and remorseful for his actions which led to the deaths of four people.

His uncle Marc Muzzo submitted a letter stating public perception of his nephew is "unfair" and "unwarranted." He explained the context of the photo of Muzzo in the Ferrari that the media shows again and again. The Ferrari was his late father's sports car and Muzzo drives it once a year to a fundraiser in his honour, Motoamore, which has raised \$4 million for cancer research.

Greenspan suggested an eight-year sentence would be more in line, especially since Muzzo accepted responsibility from the first moment and never deviated from that guilty plea. He pointed out that pleading guilty spared the family having to go through a trial. He added Muzzo has no prior criminal record.

It was a gut-wrenching day in court last Tuesday when Muzzo heard from friends and family of the four people he killed. Neville-Lake spoke for about 40 minutes, frequently pausing to collect herself and dry tears. She was not alone, as there were few dry eyes either in the courtroom or the adjoining facility that had been set up to handle the overflow crowd. Sounds of sniffing could be heard throughout the address.

The children had been visiting their grandparents in King City for a sleep over, and they were being driven home when the tragedy occurred.

Neville-Lake recalled the horror of being told her oldest boy and father were dead, and the two younger children were at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, and a surgeon had told them to get there fast. Upon arrival, she said they were told both youngsters were brain dead, and were being kept alive so they would have a chance to say goodbye.

'All of my babies are gone!' she recalled crying out. 'Not one left!'

She also remembered having Harry and Milly put together so they could die together.

As well, she remembered not being given information on where Daniel was, knowing only he had died without her.

Neville-Lake also recounted the ordeal of lining up 20 pallbearers, choosing the children's 'forever clothing,' and deciding 'what toys and treasures do we send with them.'

She also reflected on watching the children's caskets being lowered into the ground, thinking 'I want to go with them so badly.'

Neville-Lake recalled their house had been a busy place, full of laughter and love, and with the melody of her kids' shouts and laughing.

'Shame on you for taking my loves from me,' she told Muzzo, calling her life now a 'hell on earth.'

She wakes up at 5 in the morning.

'I'm listening in vain for my kids to call out my name and I don't hear them,' she cried. 'You have silenced my children's voices.'

'I sit and stare at the pictures that your drunk driving left me with,' she added. 'I miss my kids. I miss my dad. I want my old life back.'

Neville-Lake said doctors and therapists are doing their best to keep her alive. She used to make many of the basic things used around the house, like soap, shampoo, bread, etc., but now she needs help with the most basic tasks.

The family table in the kitchen is where Neville-Lake said she taught her children to bake and cook, and where they wrote their letters to Santa Claus.

'It hurts to look at the family table, knowing that our family is dead because of you,' she said to Muzzo.

She added she walks aimlessly around the house, searching for her family.

'When you killed my children, you took away my identity as a mother,' she told him. 'Edward and I are now empty-nesters because of you.'

Neville-Lake also said Milly lived a little less than 1,008 days. 'I should have had thousands of more days with her,' she said, adding she never really got to know her daughters' likes and dislikes. She chose colours for the various pallbearers to wear, and had to guess at what Milly's favourite colour was.

The accident occurred five days before the parents' 10th wedding anniversary, and she said caskets and graves are all they have left to show for those 10 years.

Neville-Lake said her husband, once strong and brave, had been reduced to a shadow.

'I am drowning in the horror of what your choices have done to me,' she told Muzzo. 'I want my kids back. I desperately dream of feeling their little arms around my neck.'

'You drove drunk and killed my family on a clear Sunday in the middle of the afternoon,' she said to Muzzo, adding her name is now associated with his, and she doesn't know if she can live down the shame of being associated with a drunk driver like him.

'I would not wish this horror I am living on anyone, but you,' she said to Muzzo, adding he might be able to understand what he took from her if he ever has children. 'I want my kids back. I want my dad back. I want my life back. I want to be a mom again.'

There was also a statement from the children's father Lake, who stated his world changed forever when his kids and father-in-law died.

'My heart is broken, crushed and heavier than I could have ever imagined,' he said. 'The pain is excruciating.'

He reviewed many of the things he can no longer do with his children, including 'tucking them in and kissing them goodnight.'

'Most importantly, I will miss being a dad,' he added.

Lake said he's not returned to work since the tragedy, and pointed to the financial costs associated with the funerals, etc. The incident has affected his sleep, as well as his relationship with his wife. He has experienced a lack of energy, has had trouble focusing on tasks and has had suicidal thoughts, as well as chest pains, anxiety and night terrors.

?There's no way to describe the pain we're going through,? he stated. ?Because of you, we now live with the horror for the rest of our lives.?