David Milgaard - Your long read

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his head over the toilet and put a towel on it to minimize the burning to his face and make breathing easier," wrote

The hardships in prison led Milgaard to attempt suicide at least three times.

On Aug. 17, 1971, staff found him face down on his bunk with several self-inflicted slashes to both forearms, wrote Joyce Milgaard in her book.

"He had tried to take his life. He put sheets on the floor of his cell to soak up the blood. He noticed he wasn't dying so he "reached over and pulled a vein out of his wrist and cut it."

That fall he tried to kill himself again by swallowing wires in the hopes they would tear open his bowels, she wrote. He required emergency surgery.

In another suicide attempt, Milgaard drank leather cleaner, she added.

Twice, Milgaard tried to steal back his freedom.

Milgaard escaped in March 1972 with other inmates, wrote Joyce Milgaard. Their truck broke down and they fled into the woods. Dogs tracked them down.

"David told us the guards just stood there and let the dogs chew on them," wrote Joyce in her book. "He said that afterward when they got back to the prison the guards beat him. He said he had been beaten before, but never, ever, with such brutality."

Following another escape, Milgaard survived being shot in the back when fleeing from police after he had

escaped in 1980 for 77 days as he grasped at the freedom he deserved, Milgaard told SASKTODAY.ca in May 2021. Toronto Police shot him in the back while he had his hands up in the air after surrendering.

Prison destroyed his mind and soon he needed medications, said Joyce Milgaard.

Milgaard fights for others after being released from prison

After Milgaard was freed in 1992, he advocated for prisoner's rights, lectured law students at universities across the country, and spoke against Canada's punitive justice system advocating for a restorative justice system.

Milgaard repeatedly called on the federal government for an independent Criminal Case Review Commission to make it easier and faster for potentially wrongfully convicted people to have their applications reviewed.

Milgaard, and his group, met with Canada's Justice Minister David Lametti to discuss the commission, and in 2021, Lametti launched public consultations to create the commission. Two weeks after Milgaard died, Lametti announced the commission would be created.

In 2020 — 50 years after Milgaard's wrongful conviction - the University of Manitoba announced they were presenting him with an Honorary Doctor of Law degree.

Milgaard died three weeks before he was to receive his honorary doctorate of law degree from the University of Manitoba on June 6, 2022.

Winnipeg lawyer David Asper – who led the fight for Milgaard's freedom - also received an honorary doctor-

"Dr. Milgaard...I'm humbled to be receiving this hon-

our with you," said Asper during his acceptance speech.

"If Canada ever gets an independent commission to deal with wrongful convictions it will be partly because of your advocacy. Your spirit will have not only got you through but it will live in the success stories of others."

Byron Christopher, a former CBC reporter who was the first to get an interview with Milgaard when he was released from prison, said, "Those at David Milgaard's funeral were hoping the commission would somehow carry David's name, and perhaps it will."

Milgaard's passing

On May 19, Christopher - who became close friends with Milgaard – attended David's private funeral of 50 of David's family and closest friends

"When I heard David Milgaard had died, my first reaction was shock and sadness - followed by a sense of peace. My old friend was finally free."

Christopher said even though Milgaard was released from prison – and later exonerated and compensated with a multi-million dollar settlement - he sensed he remained tortured by memories of his time behind bars.

"David was never truly free," Christopher told SASK-TODAY.ca. "Up until his final breath, he remained a prisoner to some degree. In his last years, his 'escape' was to give a helping hand to others.

'David's ashes will be sprinkled in the Rocky Mountains," added Christopher. "That's fitting ... The man loved nature, especially fishing, horses, and camping in the Rockies.'

For a video featuring never before released interviews with David Milgaard, please visit SASKTODAYca.



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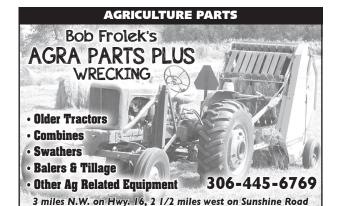
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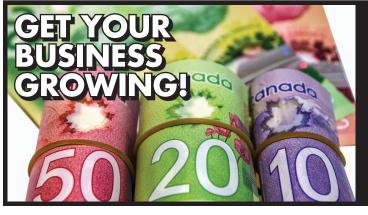
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