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Charges dropped in alleged Harold the Jewellery Buyer murder-for-hire case

Article

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Curtis Rush
Police Reporter

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Charges have been withdrawn against a 71-year-old part-time employee of Harold the Jewellery Buyer in an alleged murder-for-hire plot.

The Crown decided Monday it was not in a position to prove the charges against Maria Konstan, said spokesman Brendan Crawley.

Konstan's lawyer, Marie Henein, said her client is relieved.

"This has been a stressful and difficult process for her, but we're thrilled it has finally come to an end."

When reached at home, Konstan added she is angry over the stress this has caused her and her family over the past year.

"They (police) destroyed my life, they destroyed my dignity, they destroyed my family," she said. "They tortured me for no reason."

Not only did she suffer a mini-stroke before her arrest, she battled depression and suicidal thoughts afterward, Konstan said.

The spiral began one night last July, she recalled, when three police officers showed up at her door at 12:30 a.m. to arrest her.

She was in her pyjamas.

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Konstan learned the charges related to an alleged plot against Jack Berkovits, owner of Omni Jewelcrafters, a Bathurst St. competitor at the time located across the road from Harold the Jewellery Buyer.

"I said, 'I haven't done any of this,' " Konstan said and police responded it was their job to arrest her.

But they agreed Konstan's daughter could bring her to the police station the next morning. There, "they handcuffed me and took away all my belongings," she recalled.

At court, she felt humiliated to appear in front of her family in handcuffs, she said.

"That was the worst day of my life," Konstan said, adding police didn't even interview her before pressing charges.

Lawyer Barry Swadron said he is now looking into a possible civil action against various parties.

Harold Gerstel, owner of the jewellery company, said he was "shocked" by the charges against his employee.

"The whole thing was so absurd and so ridiculous. This could destroy anybody."

The jeweller said he was also "smeared" by being associated, even indirectly, with such serious charges against an employee.

The charges stemmed from allegations that Berkovits, the rival jeweller, met a man at a nearby pizza place who told him he had been hired by Konstan to kill him.

"He said, 'I really like you. I can't do this. I can't kill you,'" Berkovits had previously said in news reports.

It was reported that Berkovits said the man, a former mixed martial artist, told him he worked as an "enforcer" for Harold the Jewellery Buyer.

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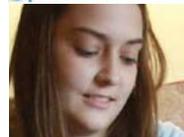
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