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Account of Port man's troubled childhood, learning disabilities doesn't sway judge

Prosecutors and investigators describe 37-year-old Brian Moulster of Port Washington as a calculating thief who broke into people's homes and stole everything from expensive guns to electronics and jewelry.

But in an Ozaukee County courtroom Tuesday, Moulster's lawyer described him as the victim of a troubled childhood and an educational system that failed to address his learning disabilities, leaving him functionally illiterate.

"With all due respect to Mr. Moulster, we're not dealing with someone who is normal or close to operating on an average level," Moulster's attorney Robert Olmr said. "The truth is, he's slow.

"It certainly didn't dawn on him how wrong his crimes were."

Judge Sandy Williams, however, wasn't buying it.

"I'm not about to impose a sentence based on the fact you can't read or you had crummy parents," Williams said. "I'm going to impose a sentence based on the fact you're a thief."

Following the recommendation of District Attorney Adam Gerol, Williams sentenced Moulster to nine years in prison followed by eight years extended supervision.

She noted that Moulster not only stole guns, but sold them.

"That's where you elevated the seriousness of your offenses. You began selling firearms," Williams said. "We have enough problems with firearms being legitimately out there."

In October, Moulster pleaded no contest to three felony counts of burglary and one count of burglary becoming armed with a dangerous weapon.

Authorities connected Moulster to a series of unsolved burglaries that spanned nearly a year after a bow he stole was seen at a Port Washington rummage sale.

At about the same time, a man who purchased a shotgun from Moulster asked the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department to check the serial number of the firearm to see if it was stolen. When authorities discovered the gun was, indeed, stolen, they set up a sting in which Moulster was caught selling another stolen shotgun to a man working with authorities.

Moulster's burglaries date to August 2011 when he broke into a business and home in the Town of Belgium. He broke into the same home again in May, stealing a bow, jewelry and a safe, according to the criminal complaint.

In November 2011, Moulster entered a home in the Village of Belgium and stole numerous shotguns, including a 870 Remington 12-gauge, Benelli 12-gauge, Browning BTS 10-gauge and Ithica 410-gauge, as well as three rifles with scopes, a .357-caliber Magnum revolver and ammunition, the complaint states.

After he was arrested, Moulster admitted to committing two of the burglaries and said he hid several of the guns under his bed in his home in the 400 block of North Harrison Street. He said he sold three other firearms to A-1 Gunsmithing and Firearms in Grafton, according to the complaint.

In court on Tuesday, Gerol said Moulster's crimes involved a "highly personal level of intrusion" into the lives of his victims, some of whom Moulster knew.

Moulster realized what he was doing was illegal, but he rationalized his actions with warped reasoning, Gerol said.

"The attitude in his world view was such that he became the arbiter of what is the best for people ... what they deserved," he said.

After Moulster was caught in the sting operation authorities set up, he lashed out at the man who helped officers catch him, Gerol said.

"He told (the man) that he would put a bullet through his head when he gets out (of jail)," Gerol said.

Olmr attempted to counter the portrayal of Moulster as a calculating criminal by describing a troubled childhood in which he was abused by his parents.

Moulster's sister said their parents ignored her brother and his learning problems, leaving him ill prepared to deal with the challenges of adult life.

Moulster's ex-wife, who brought the couple's young children to the sentencing, likened his reasoning ability to that of a child.

Colson Leach, the pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Port Washington, said Moulson overcame his struggles with reading to become a standout student in the Set Free program, which Leach teaches in the jail.

Moulster did not speak of his childhood or learning disabilities, but apologized.

"I'm truly sorry to the victims," he said. "I never intended to do what I did. I learned from my mistakes."

But Gerol was quick to refocus attention on what he said is Moulster's real problem.

"The common factor in all of these crimes isn't his lack of education or inability to read," he said. "The common denominator is anger. That's what needed to be addressed and controlled."

Williams, who admonished Moulster for allowing his children to be present in the courtroom for his sentencing, ordered him to pay about $15,000 in restitution to the victims of the burglaries.