

Murder leaves suddenly single father searching for answers

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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<http://www.ozaukeeexpress.com/images/020713/murderSM.png> **Former Belgium resident had to fight suspicions he was involved in the mysterious death of his partner to be granted custody of his infant son**

In a poignant interview that aired Jan. 31 on KWTU Channel 9 in Oklahoma City, former Belgium resident Craig Prom is shown rocking his sleeping 4-month-old son Donavon, softly singing "It's a Wonderful World." His son's 30-year-old mother Ebony Jackson, Prom's partner, was found murdered, her body stuffed in the trunk of her car, on Jan. 8 in St. Louis, Mo.

It was a wonderful world, Prom, 46, said in a phone interview Monday, until Jackson was murdered.

Now, he's worried about raising the boy on his own, finding affordable child care and mourning the loss of the woman he considered his common-law wife.

"The hardest part is getting up every day and not seeing Ebony, not holding her," he said in the TV interview.



Donavon was found seemingly abandoned at 5 a.m. Friday, Jan. 4, in his car seat in the entryway of an apartment complex in Breckenridge Hills, Ill., near East St. Louis.

Jackson had left Wednesday, Jan. 2, to drive to East St. Louis, where she grew up, to show off her son to relatives and friends and planned to also visit her mother in Denver, Prom said. The apartment complex where Donavon was found is across the street from where Jackson's aunt lives.

When Donavon's picture was shown on TV news reports, Jackson's cousin recognized him and notified police of his identity.

The next day, Saturday, Jan. 5, Prom and his brother John, who lives in Princeton, Okla., drove to Breckenridge Hills to pick up his son. However, Donavon had been placed in state protective custody. Since he and Jackson were not married, Prom was told he had to take a DNA test on Monday, Jan. 7, to prove paternity.

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He and his brother returned on Jan. 7 and stayed in the area for a week until the test confirmed he was the boy's father and a court hearing to grant custody was held. By then, Jackson's body had been found.

The St. Louis medical examiner determined Jackson died from a single gunshot wound behind an ear.

The boy's guardian objected to releasing Donavon to his father, saying Prom was a person of interest in the mother's murder.

But the judge granted Prom custody.

"At this point, we don't have any suspects," David Marzullo, director of public information for the St. Louis Police Department, said Tuesday. "It's still being investigated."

Before returning to his home in Moore, Okla., a suburb of Oklahoma City, Prom took his son to Wisconsin to visit his mother Eleanor in Belgium and other family members. His sisters Lynn Wilterdink of Hingham and Jill Nothem of West Bend went to Oklahoma for a few weeks to help their brother.

Prom said he met Jackson in Oklahoma City in October 2011, and they immediately hit it off.

They had a common bond in that both are dealing with the effects of brain trauma, he said.

Prom sustained a brain injury in a motorcycle accident when he was 19. He was in a coma for three months and doctors did not know if he would walk or talk again.

"He has limited ability to read and write fluently and his attention span has suffered, but he is a walking miracle," his mother said. "He did all his own therapy and made a remarkable recovery."

Jackson had several surgeries and treatments for a brain tumor when she was 16 and would become confused and forgetful, Prom said.

"She and I made concessions for each other. We worked together very well," he said.

The couple lived together for 14 months and were elated when Jackson became pregnant, he said.

"Ebony and I thought we couldn't have children because of our brain injuries," Prom said. "She was very proud and happy to have a son."

Rumors that their relationship was rocky and Jackson was leaving him are not true, he said.

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“She left a note saying she was leaving to visit her family,” he said. “She didn’t say anything that would lead me to believe she was leaving me.”

At 10:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 2, Prom said, he received a text message from Jackson, his last communication with her, saying, “Good night. We both love you.”

Mrs. Prom said she visited the couple shortly after Donavon was born Sept. 25.

“They were devoted to one another and so happy,” she said of her son and Jackson.

Since the murder, Mrs. Prom talks to her son frequently and they cry a lot, she said.

“A person reads about these things in newspapers or hears about them on the nightly news, but when it hits close to home, it is devastating,” she said.

Prom, who returned this week to his job as a pest control specialist for the Oklahoma Housing Authority, said members of his church are helping him take care of Donavon.

“He’s beautiful and he’s happy,” Prom said of his son. “People ask if he ever cries. He coos, smiles and laughs. The only time he’s unhappy is when he doesn’t want to take a nap or go to bed.”

Prom said he hopes the police arrest Jackson’s killer soon.

“I would tell him he took away a loving mother, a loving wife,” he said.

“I believe with all of my heart that she protected this boy.”

A fund for Donavon Prom has been set up at the Bank of Oklahoma, 201 Robert S. Kerr Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73102.

Image Information: A FAMILY PORTRAIT taken shortly before Christmas shows a happy Craig Prom and Ebony Jackson with their son Donavon.