



Day parole for man convicted in vicious beating of Nicholas Chow Johnson

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Harry Hiscock, 25, was denied full parole at a hearing at William Head Penitentiary Thursday before the National Parole Board. He's been in jail since Dec. 18, 2002, when he was convicted of aggravated assault and sentenced to eight years in custody for punching Johnson in the head during the early morning of Oct. 20, 2001.

Two juvenile males were also convicted of aggravated assault in the incident and sentenced to two and three years in custody followed by three years of probation.

Johnson, now 25, suffered irreversible brain damage after he was shoved, punched and kicked in the head on Lampson Street in Esquimalt by a group who identified Johnson as a member of a rival gang because of the red jacket he wore.

Johnson remains in a vegetative state, although he has some movement, at a Toronto rehabilitation centre where he's expected to remain for the rest of his life.

"Every time I see him I die a little bit, so I've been dying for six years," said his mother, Grace Chow, by telephone yesterday.

Chow said she stayed in Toronto because attending the parole hearing would be "too painful. I've been crying and grieving for six years now.

"We are the ones who get a life sentence of pain and grief."

Johnson was inadvertently caught in a battle between two street gangs, the Blanshard Street Bloods, who wore red, and the Crips or E-Town crew, who wore blue.

Hiscock told the parole board members that at the time of his crime, he was drinking heavily and using marijuana. He was also grieving the recent loss of a stillborn son, he said.

"I was not really caring who I was interacting with, positive or negative," said Hiscock.

He was hanging out with a group he wanted to fit in with and prove himself. The evening before the assault, Hiscock was partying with friends and ignoring a court-imposed curfew stemming from a previous offence.

He remembered a house party spilling into the street and seeing Johnson, a stranger to him, approaching the group and yelling on Lampson Street. His friends called to Johnson to "take off the colour," referring to Johnson's red jacket.

At the time, Hiscock and his friends thought Johnson was trying to provoke them. Later, Hiscock said he learned "he was actually warning us that police were on their way."

Johnson was trying to do them a favour. In return, they pounced on him.

As Hiscock landed a punch to Johnson's head, he "kind of realized what I'd done ... right from the impact," he said.

Johnson fell to the sidewalk, his head making a sharp crack as it landed on the concrete.

Freelance filmmaker Angela Bianchi attended the parole hearing as part of her research for a documentary she is making. Bianchi, a friend of Grace Chow, said she's making the film "to see what good can come out of what happened, and how we can turn a negative into a positive."

Two weeks after the Johnson assault, a cyclist riding in the 700-block of Lampson Street was surrounded, then punched and kicked by a group of eight to 10 teenagers.

The assaults prompted police to strike an investigative unit to deal with youth violence. The youth gangs identified by police at that time have since disbanded.

Hiscock must obey certain conditions while living in the community, including abstaining from drugs and alcohol, having no contact

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with gang members and taking psychological counselling.

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