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## Tragedy on a quiet road

By JOE WARMINGTON

INGERSOLL -- There is a street here on the edge of town called Rossiter Rd.

It's a sleepy roadway where not much happens. There are some here who understand the irony of that. Others just turn on to Rossiter Rd. and never realize it is named in honour of a man whose blood was spilled on the street protecting them. You can't blame them. It all happened a long time ago.

Const. Scott Rossiter, originally from St. Thomas, moved back to the area at the beginning of the 1990s because he thought it was a safer place to raise his family.

It was here he was murdered in cold blood with his own gun.

In this life you just never know. But one thing we do know is Scott Rossiter was here and we remember him today.

To be honest I had forgotten all about this case. It occurred in 1991, around the time I started at the Sun, and although I only had a small role in the coverage, I learned a lot by watching veterans like Tom Godfrey work on it.

Some 15 years later there I was this week with Godfrey and other reporters from that time like Alan Cairns working on a case not too far down Hwy. 401, where eight bikers were murdered near where they found the body of the man alleged to have been Rossiter's killer.

It's weird how things happen sometimes but I figure if we are going to profile eight dead bikers, we sure as heck can profile one dead cop.

It was Sept. 19, 1991, when it all came to an end for the 30-year-old Ingersoll town police officer, who had moved to the force after spending seven years on the beat with Peel police. "He wanted to move to a small town for a safer place for his kids," said Cindy Herbert, Rossiter's sister. "I feel for his kids and I feel bad for him and what he's missing."

Flashback to that night. There was a guy riding "a little wobbly" on a silver 10-speed bike near the old Ingersoll town police station. It was just routine. (Is there such a thing?) "Sometimes things can turn deadly," said Cindy.

It did that time.

Rossiter checked the man's licence and radioed in the name David O'Neil. Seconds later there was a struggle and the rider "got the better of him."

"He was not a confrontational person," added Cindy. "Scott was not a fighter."

Rossiter was shot with his own gun, which the cyclist had managed to get out of his holster. A tragedy. A husband, a father of two, gone -- just like that. Three months later O'Neil was found in a shallow grave -- with three shots to the skull from that same gun. It is believed he was executed for bringing attention to nearby bikers.

The first journalist on the scene of Rossiter's murder was Alison Downie, now the Sun's readership editor. She was the city editor of the Woodstock paper at the time and tells me it still sends chills up her spine all these years later, seeing all the blood on the sidewalk. There's not a lot of romance about murder.

Just ask Scott's kids, Josh and Erin, who were toddlers at the time. Now teens, they had to grow up without their dad. "But they are doing well," says Cindy. "We have videos of Scott."

And she has clippings and pictures ranging from the euphoric times of his youth to his tragic end. He's not dead to his family. "This whole thing brings it all back," said his mom, Marilyn, who has had a difficult time coping.

"She lost a son," explains Cindy. "I have a son so I know to lose one would be unimaginable."

Normally the horrible memories of that night surface when a cop is murdered. Cindy always thinks about how hard it was on Scott's wife, Penni, and how Cindy herself got the call and was asked to go tell her mother.

"You get emotional -- like when the four of them were killed out in Alberta. It brings it all back. Your emotions get stirred up. You feel for their families. It's disbelief."

If there is one good thing that has come out of this, it's that Scott Rossiter's name is out there again. "It's nice that people still remember him," said Cindy. "There wasn't anybody who met him who didn't love him. He was a great, great guy."

He must have been because so many cops e-mailed me this week wanting it clarified he was not an OPP officer. He, in fact, never was. The Ingersoll police later amalgamated with the OPP, which sometimes creates confusion.

In essence, his mom says, he is an OPP officer, because when the Ingersoll police became the OPP "they took Scott with them."

In fact, at the OPP memorial in Orillia you'll find Scott's name -- something that means a lot to his family. "They adopted him," said Cindy. "I wish we could have him back. It's true when they say, 'Only the good die young.'"

No matter what anybody does, it's not going to change anything. He's gone forever. But for those who didn't know, Scott Rossiter is the man behind the name on that street sign. It's quiet out there on that Rossiter Rd.

Just the way Rossiter liked it.

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