

EVERYONE COULD feel Sam Pirrera's shadow at Maggie's funeral. He was in fact just across the street from the church, in the Barton Street jail awaiting his next court date. Kim felt angry as she left the church, seeing the jail where her friend's killer continued to live. It wasn't right.

hooker," as though that was her title, her essence. Maggie's family and old friends were appalled by the coverage. She had fallen into drug addiction, had worked the street, but the sum of her life was far more than that.

Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, April 13, amid tight security, Sam Pirrera entered a Hamilton courtroom dressed in orange prisoner coveralls, shackled at the hands and feet. It was his second appearance in court.

Standing before justice of the peace Cathy Woron, he was remanded in custody until April 21. He said nothing.

Maggie Karer was cremated, the funeral held Saturday, April 24, at St. Stephen of Hungary Roman Catholic Church on Barton Street East. Maggie's family was there, mother and brother, aunts and uncles, a couple of old friends from high school days and her son, who was now 10 years old.

It was a small ceremony. The family did not want media there, they were still bitter over the coverage.

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The burial at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Burlington, a photo of Maggie laid in the stone, young Maggie, the bright smile, radiant skin, eyes alive, in the years before drugs got hold of her.

Five days later, Kim organized a memorial for friends who had not been at the church. It was held at Gage Park, near the swing set. Kim thought that was the perfect place for it, near children. That's how she wanted to remember Maggie, as a child.

Kim read the Lord's Prayer and everyone joined in. There were about 15 people, mostly women, no family. A couple of girls Kim and Maggie went to school with. Kim had a speech prepared, but when the time came, she just went from the heart. It felt right.

"People need to remember Maggie as a vibrant, carefree girl," she said. "A girl with chestnut hair and olive skin. She had a smile that could melt your heart. ... Do not judge Maggie. Do not judge what she did or who she became. Judge her by who she was: a caring, loving mother who loved her son, loved her parents."

A couple of plainclothes police officers were also there, lingering back from the gathering a bit, perhaps checking to see who might show at the service. When the police left, about 10 other people appeared. They had been watching from afar, and now they surrounded Kim. They were women who worked the streets. They thanked Kim for having the event. One broke down crying, said she wanted to get herself clean, get out of the life. Kim and a friend tried to help her. Two months later, that same woman was back on the streets, on crack.

Long after the ceremony, the words to the Lord's Prayer kept repeating in Kim's mind. "Deliver us from evil." How old was that prayer, she reflected, and yet evil never ceases to haunt us.

Kim and Maria were badly shaken by it all. Nightmares violated Maria's sleep, she could see Maggie being beaten, dismembered. She fell into depression. Right after the news of the murder broke, the two friends drove up to Sam Pirrera's house together, brought flowers, poems, which they laid at the base of a large tree in the front yard. For several days to follow, they drove up there, parking near the house, just talking, as though the yard was Maggie's gravesite.

For Detective Sergeant Peter Abi-Rashed, the murder case against Sam Pirrera in the death and dismemberment of Maggie Karer seemed clear enough.

Sam had told his estranged wife Danielle that he killed a woman. Maggie's body parts were found in Sam's home. The Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto confirmed that all of the parts examined at the autopsy in fact belonged to Maggie.

In his interrogation by Abi-Rashed, Sam had offered no defence other than accusing Danielle of lying, and claiming that the woman who visited his home had left safely by taxi. Abi-Rashed's team investigated with city taxi services and found no evidence of any cabs going to Pirrera's house in the days before the body parts were found.

The more pressing question now was: Could it be proved that Sam murdered his first wife, Beverly Davidson?

Through the spring, Major Crime Detective Dave Place continued trying to find Beverly. He interviewed old friends of hers, and family. Where had she been the last eight years?

Interviewing was Place's strength, he would eventually gain a reputation as one of the best interrogators in the police service. He just had that way about him, easygoing, honest, could get anyone to talk.

Through court records and interviews, Dave Place tried to piece back together what may have been the final years of Beverly's life.



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTOS

By Feb. 27, 1999, when the police photo above was taken, crack cocaine had taken its toll on Maggie Karer. Five weeks later she was dead. Holding her son in a family photo a few years earlier, she still looked radiant.

aware of the wedding, that Sam had kept it a secret because they were so opposed to him marrying Beverly.

Others believed they knew of the wedding, but chose to boycott it because they were so disillusioned with Sam's lifestyle, his drug abuse. Bev's mom would always believe they didn't attend because they disapproved of a non-Italian marrying into their family. The two families did not get along.

Sam and Bev couldn't afford their own place, so they lived upstairs in the Davidson home, right down the hall from Bev's parents. Lesa Davidson could barely stand it.

Sam did not treat Bev well, did not talk nicely to her, even in front of Lesa. Sam had never recognized boundaries of civility like that, was too cocky to consider being more discreet.

Lesa told Bev it was a bad situation, Sam was not right for her.

"But Mom, when he first wakes up in the morning, he looks gorgeous," she said.

"Then you must have your eyes closed because he doesn't look too good to me."

Sam had completed Grade 12 at Scott Park high school, where he was a B student. Had worked for a few years as a cook at a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and now worked for Automotive Parts and Performance, as a dispatcher in shipping and receiving, making \$5.75 an hour. He submitted a resumé to Dofasco.

"I'd be very happy to work at Dofasco because of everything it has to offer," Sam wrote. "And I think it would be very good for my future." His father and a friend, Antonio, were listed as his references.

Under other activities: "Working on cars and playing hockey."

Department Applying For: "Oxygen steelmaking, No. 2 Melt Shop."

Tomorrow: 'Be right back, Mom'

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