MAN’S RELIEF AS RAPE CHARGE IS DROPPED

Date: Saturday 18th October 2003

AN Eden man spoke of the six-month nightmare he endured before being cleared of a charge of raping a teenaged girl.

AN Eden man spoke of the six-month nightmare he endured before being cleared of a charge of raping a teenaged girl.

Malcolm Lamb, aged 43, said the allegation, which was made in March, had led to him losing half a year of his liberty when he was ordered to live outside Cumbria while the matter was investigated by police.

Friends deserted him, his home was ransacked and he was attacked by a fellow inmate while in a bail hostel. But, just two weeks before he was due to stand trial on the matter, and having prepared himself for a daunting appearance at Carlisle Crown Court, he learned that the case would be dropped.

He was freed immediately, but, speaking to the Herald this week, he said the stress had left him close to a nervous breakdown.

Mr. Lamb, known to both friends and relatives as “Porky”, is one of five brothers in a family which originally hails from Hackthorpe, near Penrith. Although he was employed as a refuse collector and at the Oasis holiday village at Whinfell some years ago, he has been unemployed for a period of time.

The alleged incident occurred at his home in Penrith. Mr. Lamb appeared before Eden magistrates a few days later and was remanded to a bail hostel in Lancashire which he said also housed heroin addicts and murderers. “I was just in a daze and couldn’t believe what was happening to me,” he said.

After just two days away from Penrith his home was ransacked and many of his personal belongings taken. At the hostel his room mate began stealing items from him. Mr. Lamb confronted him but a fight broke out and the two were arrested, although when the matter was dealt with in the court room the other man broke free from custody before smashing furniture in his attempts to attack the prosecutor.

Mr. Lamb was moved to a hostel in Manchester, where he was able to spend time tidying the grounds of the building and growing his own vegetables. Indeed he received a college achievement award in recognition of his work.

But with the rape allegation still under investigation he was forced to endure several more routine court appearances in Penrith before the matter was committed to Carlisle Crown Court and listed for trial in early September. A fortnight before that date, however, he learned that the Crown Prosecution Service had opted to drop the charge, offering no evidence.

Mr. Lamb said: “It was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.”

Despite being exonerated, Mr. Lamb said he was shunned by people he used to call his friends. In pubs and shops he was aware of people whispering behind his back. Without the help of his family, whom he described as “fantastic”, Mr. Lamb admitted he might not have got through the experience.

His brother, Nigel, who lives in Penrith, bemoaned the lack of support available for his brother from agencies and organisations.

And at a time when rape allegations have hit the headlines, with television presenter John Leslie cleared after a similar ordeal and a group of Premiership footballers under scrutiny after an incident in a London hotel, Nigel argued that a change in the law was perhaps needed to protect potentially innocent people.

Currently, the victims of any alleged sexual offences have their identity protected for their lifetime, whether or not the case is proved. There have been calls for some protection to be afforded to the accused in the light of several high profile acquittals.

“The whole family has been affected by it,” said Nigel. “They should wait until the matter comes to court. You sympathise now with what people have had to go through whether they are innocent or not.”