BELLEVILLE -- Brian Leckie, whose award-honoured crisis-counselling career goes back more than 30 unblemished years, calls it "a therapist's worst nightmare."

And he is far from wrong.

Two troubled Bancroft-area women -- one purportedly a drug-troubled victim of domestic abuse; the younger co-accuser a "friend" with issues of her own -- put their focus on Brian Leckie, get him charged with two counts of sexual assault and then, before the ink is figuratively dry on his criminal indictment, they launch a civil-action suit to take a run at his money.

Except that it was based on fiction.

In a Bancroft provincial court the other week, Judge Stephen Hunter acquitted Brian Leckie on all charges, and admonished his accusers for having "no credible" legs on which to stand -- the court's transcripts leaving no doubt. But the damage had already been done.

Both the Bancroft Times and the local Belleville Intelligencer wrote of the charges being laid, but little if anything of his charges being dismissed.

There are, after all, no press releases on acquittals.

In a radio commentary for the Haliburton Broadcasting Group, and its collective of Moose-FM stations, I threw more fuel on the flames burning Brian Leckie following the OPP's press release on his charges by writing that he was a counsellor at Bancroft's Crisis Intervention Centre at the time of the alleged assaults, and that his two alleged victims -- both women in their twenties -- were reportedly his clients.

"While we must presume the man's innocence until proven guilty," I reported, "one must nonetheless pine for the two women who, if the facts bear out, were basically
re-victimized at the very place where they sought refuge from whatever crisis it was that had turned their lives upside-down."

Well, as it turns out, one should instead be pining for Brian Leckie who, at the age of 63, had his own life suddenly turned upside-down by two women whose allegations were determined in court to be bogus.

And it cost him big-time.

Brian Leckie’s professional CV is almost operatic. A fulltime counsellor with Victim Services Canada, working out of the Quinte Health Care here in Belleville (with a satellite office in Bancroft), the former professor for the faculty of psychiatry at McMaster University Medical Centre is a registered traumatologist specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), critical incident stress management, workplace harassment ... et cetera, et cetera.

On top of that, he has served as trauma counsellor with the RCMP, the national intelligence service, and the Hamilton-Wentworth emergency response team.

His career has been long, and seemingly selfless.

Following 9/11, for example, he took a leave of absence and went to New York as a volunteer trauma counsellor and was honoured by the New York Police Department with a Commendatory Recognition Award.

"Maybe, with all my professional experience and my hundreds of cases, a red flag should have come up when it came to these two women, but it didn't," he admits.

"Even looking back, I would not have expected this."

Brian Leckie chokes up twice, once when telling how he was called into the Bancroft OPP detachment, thinking it was to discuss a local domestic abuse investigation, and then finding himself charged with sexual assault.

The second time is recounting the costs -- the tarnishing of his good name, and the loss of virtually every dime he had to defend himself in court.

His lawyer fees, in fact, took all of the $115,000 he had socked away in RRSPs.

"No matter how bogus the charges, you need a competent lawyer to defend you," he says.

"If I did not have those RRSPs, I would likely be in jail today," he says.

"As a result, I am now bankrupt -- with an outstanding legal bill of $26,000 for those two days in court, including $6,000 for an expert witness.

"I was suspended from work for six months at Quinte Health Care because of this," he says. "I wonder how many innocent people are in jail today because they do not have the funds to hire a competent lawyer?"
"Being innocent gets you nowhere if you are represented by legal aid. It's too great a risk," he says. "Legal aid lawyers, for the most part, don't give a rat's ass.

"And that, too, is the sorry truth."

Not surprisingly, especially with his name being dragged through the mud, and with the whispers around him turning into screams, Brian Leckie has now been diagnosed with the same condition he treats -- post-traumatic stress disorder.

"This has devastated me," he admits, sitting there in his seventh-floor apartment, pulling out one defence file after another ... talking about his own trauma.

"At one point, I honestly thought I was going to jump out the window," he says. "Colleagues gave me those disapproving downward looks at if they believed the allegations against me must have been true.

"Only the ER nurses seemed to give me the benefit of the doubt, because they've seen it. They've seen the lies and the accusations that come through emergency rooms.

"They see it all the time."

Today Brian Leckie is back on the job at Quinte Health Care, but never again will he treat female trauma victims.

"All it takes is one false allegation, and it's all but over," he says. "I sit here as proof of that."

And nor will he ever return to Bancroft.

"Never again," he says. "Never, ever again."

As for the two women who brought this upon him, their names continued to be protected by a publication ban.

Today, therefore, is just another day.

MARK.BONOKOSKI@SUNMEDIA.CA OR 416-947-2445