

# and a motorcycle

*Some things in life just can't be forgotten*

By MARIE CHAMBERLAND  
Tribune staff writer

WELLAND — A faceless 13-year-old boy often drifts in and out of Bob Sauder's thoughts.

The 49-year-old police officer hasn't seen the boy since he was a tyke — just ready to start kindergarten.

But he can't help wondering how the kid's making out.

Sauder never knew the boy's mother. Yet she's the one who forged an invisible link between Sauder and her son.

It's an arm's length connection, which for Sauder, will last a lifetime.

Sauder, who's now an inspector, is also acting superintendent of the Welland Niagara Regional Police detachment.

That makes him top dog at the local station.

"I'm very happy to be here," Sauder says.

Back in 1967, when he first met that little boy, he was lead investigator on a Welland murder case.

The victim was the boy's mother — 19-year-old Paula Deschamps.

It was the most frustrating and consuming investigation of Sauder's career.

"She just disappeared out of her apartment," Sauder recalls.

Paula's teenaged brother was asleep in another room when she disappeared. He'd been babysitting her four-year-old son that night.

She'd gone nightclubbing with a girlfriend, then came home and started to get ready for bed.

She and her son had a big day ahead of them. It was his first day of school.

Frustration over Paula's disappearance came early on. Some thought police weren't taking it seriously enough.

Family and friends posted her picture throughout the region.

And they organized a search party, which hit the bricks a month after Paula went missing. Some 300 civilians and two dozen police officers gathered in an east-side parking lot on a damp fall Sunday morning.

Less than an hour later, a 14-year-old boy found Paula's naked and partially decomposed body lying near a ditch a short distance away from where the search started.

"I remember making a promise to her mother when we found the body that we would find out who did this," Sauder says.

"We did. It took 14 months. But we did."

"It was a tough one, because we had absolutely nothing to start with."

A 29-year-old auto body repairman who lived in the apartment below Paula's was convicted of second-degree murder a year after his arrest.

According to the court testimony about the man's confession, he had delusions about other tenants in the building.

He thought they were rerouting his cable TV service into their apartments, siphoning gas out of his car, and stealing his tools.

He choked what he thought was a shadow in Paula's apartment the night she disappeared.

that he was locked up."

Since the year Paula Deschamps died, Sauder has moved around alot.

In 1988, he was transferred to St. Catharines to work as a duty officer. A year later, he made inspector — one of nine on the 765-member force.

In May, 1991, he came back to Welland.

With each move the Crown brief on Paula's murder, which is a sort of blueprint for the prosecution at trial, went with him. Every once in awhile he pulls it out and has a look through it.

To remind himself of the reasons he's stayed in the police business for so long.

Raised on the outskirts of Port Colborne, Sauder joined the air force at age 17. He quickly hooked up with the military police, and when military services began amalgamating he looked for a job closer to home.

At age 19, the son of a shoe factory worker was walking the beat with the Welland police, and he wasn't even old enough to get into the local watering holes.

In 1972, he became a plainclothes investigator in Port Colborne. A few months later, he was transferred to headquarters in St. Catharines, where he spent the next two years on the undercover drug and morality squad.

In 1974, Sauder returned to plainclothes work in Port Colborne. At about that time, he and his wife started a family.

They have a son in university and a daughter who is almost finished high school.

In 1977, Sauder was transferred to the plainclothes division in Welland. He made sergeant the same year.

1980 brought another promotion, to staff sergeant. It also brought another transfer — back to St. Catharines where he was in charge of the citizens' complaints bureau.

In 1983, Sauder went back to Port Colborne, as detachment commander.

"That was probably the most satisfying for me, because it was like coming home," Sauder says.

"I guess being a detachment commander in Port Colborne would be as close to being the chief of police as I would get."

Later, there was restructuring, and inspectors replaced the detachment commander model.

In 1984, Sauder came back to Welland, where he was in charge of the detective team in what had become known as the Criminal Investigation Branch, or CIB.

In 1989 — the year the Deschamps murder investigation closed — Sauder and his wife bought a scenic piece of lakefront property up north, and began building a cottage.

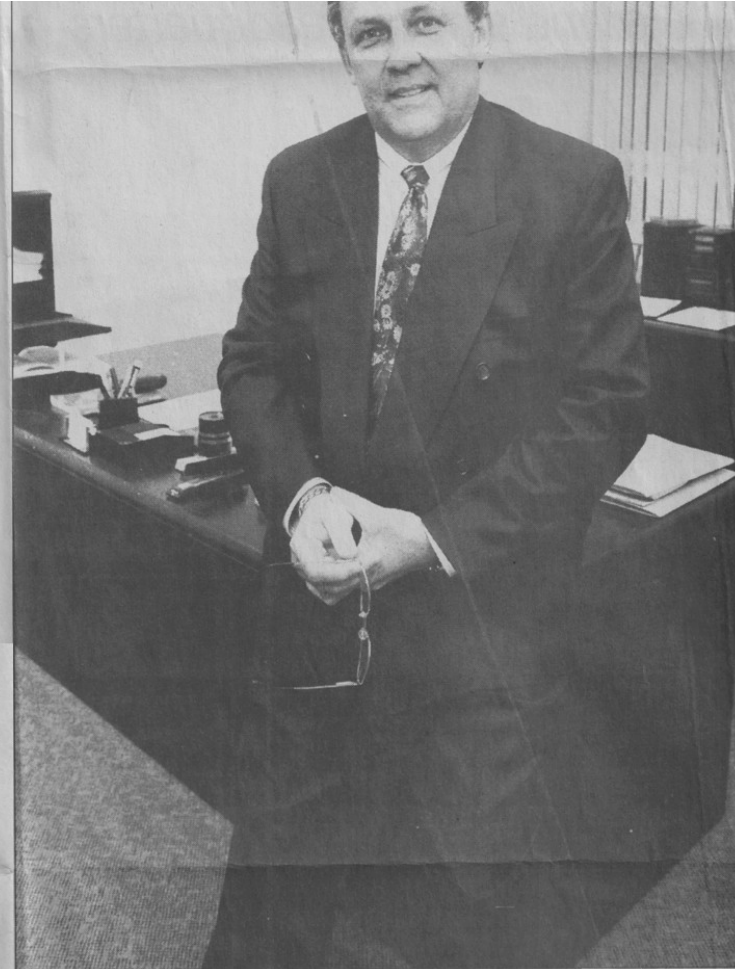
"It should be finished this year," he says.

He divides his spare time between there, and horseback riding in Port Colborne.

The riding began a few years ago, when Sauder's daughter pressed for lessons. She eventually got a horse, and Sauder decided to get one for himself, since he had to take his daughter to the stable several times a week anyway.

"The first two weeks, I wouldn't go into the stable with this horse, because I was completely frightened of it," Sauder admits.

But he faced his fear and he's glad of it.



Tribune photo/Dave Hanischuk

Inspector Bob Sauder: 'I'm very happy to be here'

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