

Judge blasts 'weak act' by ATM thief

BREE FULLER

HONESTY is the best policy, especially when Big Brother is watching.

Sarah Jane Minter learnt that the hard way when she pocketed \$300 cash she found in an ATM – in full view of CCTV cameras.

The high-quality footage proved

to be the Warrawong mother of four's undoing, as it depicted her taking the \$300 from the dispenser and stashing it in a baby bag hanging from a pram.

She also made a transaction to check her bank balance, which police subsequently tracked.

Yesterday, Wollongong Local Court magistrate Michael Stod-

art was scathing of the opportunistic crime, saying it was a "weak act" to steal the money just after an absent-minded shopper accidentally left it in the ATM.

"We are talking about \$300 ... this is just a weak act," he said.

"This woman might have really needed the money, you know nothing about her."

The court heard Minter, 31, had a number of offences on her record, including theft and assault occasioning actual bodily harm, among others.

She was convicted of one count of larceny, placed on a 12-month good behaviour bond, fined \$500 and ordered to pay \$300 compensation.



DANIEL MORCOMBE

Court told of boy in red T-shirt

A WITNESS has told the trial of the man accused of killing Daniel Morcombe that he saw a boy in a red T-shirt on the side of the road on the afternoon the 13-year-old went missing.

Jessiah Cocks told the Supreme Court in Brisbane he was in a car being driven by his mother past the Kiel Mountain Road overpass on the Sunshine Coast on the afternoon of December 7, 2003.

He said he left the Cooloola McDonald's about 1.35pm and it would have taken about 10 minutes to drive to the overpass.

"There was a boy in a red shirt under the overpass. He was on his haunches," Mr Cocks told the Supreme Court trial of Brett Peter Cowan in Brisbane. "I'm not sure if he was climbing down the embankment or just sitting there."

Mr Cocks said he couldn't recall what else the boy was wearing but the red shirt "stuck out". The court had previously been told it was believed Daniel was wearing a red shirt when he disappeared about 2pm on December 7.

The witness said there was no one else near the boy but he noticed a white vehicle parked about 50 to 150 metres past the overpass. He said he wasn't good with cars but it looked like a 1990s era Landcruiser.

Under cross-examination by Cowan's defence barrister Angus Edwards, Mr Cocks said he couldn't remember on which side of the road the vehicle had been parked.

Earlier, the court heard police searched a white Mitsubishi Pajero for traces of evidence in connection with Daniel's murder but found nothing.

Police scientific officer acting Senior Sergeant Melissa Bell said she examined hairs taken from the white Mitsubishi Pajero in 2003 but no DNA profiles could be obtained.

A zoologist told the trial it was possible wild dogs could have scattered remains believed to be Daniel's found in bushland in 2011. Daniel disappeared while waiting for a bus at Woombye on the Sunshine Coast.

Cowan, 44, has pleaded not guilty to indecently dealing with a child, murder and interfering with a corpse. The trial continues. AAP

Poetic power from the heart



Mentor: NSW Poetry Slam champion Zohab Zee Khan is guiding Dapto High School students to perform their works.

Picture: ANDY ZAKELI

KATE WALSH

AT first glance, the writing on the windows of a hallway at Dapto High School looked like a vandal's handiwork.

But on closer inspection of the considered – and often moving – lines of poetry, it was clear something more was behind it.

About 20 students had scrawled their heartfelt words on the panes as part of a guerilla poetry workshop with NSW Poetry Slam champion Zohab Zee Khan, organised by poem-promoting organisation The Red Room Company.

Guided by Khan and his high-impact poetry performances, students used their own

experiences, from memories of loss to a hunger for chicken, to write and then perform their poems.

It was clear the class found Khan's words powerful, with one student raising her hand after his demonstration to simply thank him for being so inspiring.

He became interested in slam poetry a decade ago, as an interest in hip hop morphed into a love of poems.

"I believe there's always been a bit of rhythm inside me, there's always been something that's told me this is what I want to do," he said.

"I'm very passionate about human rights, about being a minority growing up in rural

Australia. I always had a different perspective on things, so I believe I have a responsibility to share it, not just me, but everyone has a responsibility to express their different perspectives.

"That's how we grow as people."

For aspiring writer Emilee Wells, 15, the workshop gave her a push to start writing poetry again, something she has enjoyed since listening to her great-grandmother read aloud from Banjo Paterson's epics.

"I've talked to people in this class before, but didn't really know their story. Now I've heard their poetry, they're deeper than I thought," she said.

"Sometimes it's easier to express stuff like that through poetry."

Dapto High has been working with The Red Room Company to foster a passion for poetry as part of a wider push to nurture creativity in students and staff.

"I don't think we have an agenda more important to the school community than nurturing a creative Dapto," said deputy principal Darcy Moore.

Students' poems will be published alongside a piece by Khan as part of The Red Room Company's *Toilet Doors* education resource.

 ONLINE VIDEO
illawarramercury.com.au

Watchdog told of blackmail claims

THE daughter of an ex-RailCorp executive who raised \$1.5 million from fellow rail workers and contractors used the money to fund her gambling habit and lavish lifestyle, the NSW corruption watchdog has been told.

But Jessica Camilleri told her father she needed the money because her identity had been stolen, she was being blackmailed and threatened, and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation was involved, the Independent Commission Against

Corruption (ICAC) was told yesterday.

Joseph Camilleri, who was in charge of RailCorp maintenance contracts until early 2013, and his sister Carmen Attard, who works at the Department of Family and Community Services, are accused of corruptly soliciting a total of \$1.6 million from people including other public officials and contractors. Both now face possible criminal charges.

Counsel assisting the commissioner Nicholas Polin told the

commission that by 2012, Mr Camilleri – who earned more than \$300,000 a year – was in financial difficulty, because he had given so much money to his daughter.

"Jessica Camilleri already had significant gambling debts as a result of a well-entrenched gambling habit," Mr Polin said.

"Jessica claimed the utmost secrecy was required as ASIO was involved ..."

The inquiry continues before new ICAC Commissioner Megan Latham. AAP

PM wraps up drought tour

FARMERS in western NSW fear the worst of the drought is yet to come, putting pressure on the federal government to act generously.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday wrapped up a two-day listening tour by visiting Mount Gipps Station, a 33,000-hectare sheep property and farm stay near Broken Hill.

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce, travelling with Mr Abbott, reflected some of the fears expressed to him about the

drought's intensity, which in some areas of Queensland is a one in 100-year event.

"We are at the edge of the drought here and it is pushing down," Mr Joyce said.

"And we have to acknowledge that the rain we are having does not end the drought."

Broken Hill grazier John Cramp said his property had not seen any significant rain since early 2012. He said farmers were interested in low-interest loans and freight subsidies. AAP