

## Aurora students face off in trial of drug dealer murder ? but all in good fun



**By Brock Weir**

It's not every day that Aurora's Natalie Ganzhorn's fate was in the hands of the courts ? and herself.

That is just what happened, however, taking the stand last week as a ?suspect? in a murder trial.

Given the facts of this case, a description of the night in question, and possible motives, it was up to her to face down the prosecution and convince them why she should not face first degree murder charges for throwing a known drug dealer off an apartment balcony.

For the aspiring lawyer, however, it was all in good fun as students from across York Region participated in a mock trial tournament at the Newmarket Courthouse.

Natalie was one of several York Region students singled out for their prowess in the courtrooms after the mock trials concluded last Monday. She was awarded ?Best Witness? when all was said and done and her convincing testimony brought her character's First Degree Murder charge down to manslaughter.

A lucky break, but a reassurance her public speaking and debating training at Country Day School has served her well.



Aurora students Natalie Ganzhorn (top) and Grant Kavanagh (above) received honours after a series of mock trials last week. (Auroran photos by Brock Weir and Jeff Doner)

?You are given the basic information like age, occupation, and an outline of the night in question,? says Natalie. ?There is a lot of room for you to think on the spot and you have to develop the story as you go. It requires a lot of impromptu thinking and it is up to the witness to answer any questions however they want when they are put on the stand.?

As an aspiring actress as well, who will be appearing in a life imitating art portrayal of a high school student looking to become a lawyer in Andrea Martin's new sitcom 'Working The Engels', which premieres this week on Global TV, she had no trouble portraying 'Wally' who was accused of the murder.

'I allegedly went over to a drug dealer's house and pushed them over the balcony of their apartment,' she explains. 'My character was drunk at the time and the motive behind Wally going over to this man's house was my character's brother had been charged with dealing drugs, but the drugs my brother had been dealing had actually belonged to the man I was accused of murdering.'

It was really 'cool' as a learning experience, she says, to be able to watch lawyers for both sides jostle and seek out an advantage in the process, but although she wants to be a lawyer herself, being on the other side was enlightening and provided a different perspective.'

'I probably would have tried to talk more about how I went to the apartment unarmed,' she says with a chuckle. 'Since I was initially charged with first degree murder, you have to show a plan prior to the night in question. I probably also would have better tried to hide the fact my character was drunk!'

Poking holes in stories from the other side of the table was fellow Aurora student Grant Kavanagh who studies at Pickering College. Grant too received an award last Monday night as part of an eight-member team of lawyers receiving the 'All Star'.

Grant also took on 'Wally' and other witnesses to try to discredit what they had said. His team was also given the same information to work with, but Grant went a step further in putting his own dad through the paces, having him memorize the witness statements and then face a barrage of questions from his son.

'He wasn't very good ' but the witness was a lot better on the stand!' says Grant.

'The main thing we learned was the importance of preparation because when you are going against all the different schools, all the schools are operating on a different level of intensity and the pressure they put on their teams and how much success they have had in the past. Every single lawyer is so well-versed in what they are going to say. They have different options, so when somebody throws a curveball, they are ready for all that stuff.'

Curveballs were almost his own undoing this time around, he adds.

'In my first trial, there was a guy who was in jail and most people would want to stay out of jail,' he says. 'I made that assumption but the witness said he wanted to stay in jail [to continue practicing his religion]. That was nowhere in the witness statement, so I had to roll with that and throw out all of my questions I had prepared! It was a pretty big thing I could have anticipated coming and I had two seconds to figure out what I was going to ask for the next two-and-a-half minutes, so that was a bit rough! It didn't matter what I was going to say, it was the sneer in which I said it! I wanted to appear cynical so people would understand how ludicrous it was.

'I am definitely pursuing this as my career. It is so adversarial having a direct opponent [in court] and you will either win or lose and that makes it all the more real.'