

Release, reward would be an insult, victim's kin says

By Judy Rakowsky
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James Spinney bitterly opposes both an early release from prison and reward money for Myles J. Connor Jr., the man he holds responsible for the murder of his sister in 1975.

Connor is a central figure in negotiations for the return of stolen masterpieces stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

"I'd love to see them get their paintings back, but \$5 million to a career criminal is too high a price to pay," said Spinney, 38, who has recently called a federal prosecutor to express the family's opposition to any deal with Connor.

"Connor doesn't just deal in art, he deals in bodies," said Spinney.

Karen T. Spinney and Susan Webster, 18-year-olds from Jamaica Plain, were stabbed to death in a Quincy apartment in February 1975 by Thomas Sperrazza, now a protected witness serving life sentences for the murders.

Connor, 54, was once convicted of ordering Sperrazza to fatally stab the girls after they had witnessed a murder outside a Roslindale bar. But while a jury that would subsequently acquit him at a second trial was deliberating, Connor became a fugitive. Now Connor is serving a federal prison term on unrelated stolen art and drug charges.

"It would kill me to see him get that money," said Spinney, who pledged to go to Illinois to lobby a federal judge against releasing Connor 2½ years early.

Yesterday, Spinney fidgeted at the kitchen table in his parents' Jamaica Plain home, saying that every time the limelight falls on Connor his

grief is renewed.

Spinney said that giving reward money to Connor would insult his law-abiding family.

"We all go off to work every day, and we'll never get \$5 million on the straight and narrow," he said.

Spinney's father, John, 76, who has attended Connor's two murder trials, bank robbery trials, and even a sentencing hearing in Illinois, predicted that any reward money in Connor's pocket would merely "finance another robbery, another scheme."

"It's all a game to him," said John Spinney.

James Spinney remembers digging in the dirt in Northampton looking for Karen's body before Connor pointed out the exact location of the burial site.

Then there was the time Connor escaped a prison sentence by arranging the return of a stolen Rembrandt to the Museum of Fine Arts, James Spinney said. "He keeps getting let off the hook," he said. "He's never going to stop."

James Spinney has written letters to newspapers and has repeatedly telephoned federal authorities to lobby against them making a deal with Connor and his associate, William P. Youngworth III. Youngworth has said the terms for return of the art include immunity from criminal charges, the \$5 million reward, and Connor's early release.

James Spinney said he is determined to honor his sister's memory by reminding authorities of Connor's victims. But the battle, he said, has taken its toll.

"I'm a mess, my nerves are shot," he said. "There's no closure . . . he keeps coming back."