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Hemingway

Murder suspect had violent past

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Burlington was breathing easier last week after police announced the arrest of the man they believe was responsible for the rape and murder of Laura Winterbottom on the snowy night of March 8.

The public's concern about whether the crime was random seemed less important after the suspect, Gerald T. Montgomery of Burlington, was arraigned in Vermont District Court on Tuesday morning and ordered held without bail.

Police have not said how they think Montgomery got into Winterbottom's car that night, though the lead investigator, Detective Shawn Burke, said, "I did not find any information connecting the victim with Montgomery."

What we do know is that police are well acquainted with Montgomery. His court record includes several cases of sexual and physical violence, and one instance in which he helped police bring a charge against a former girlfriend.

Jan. 2, 1996, Montgomery was charged with simple assault after grabbing and striking a female friend of his girlfriend in the kitchen of a Peru Street apartment. He later pleaded guilty.

Aug. 14, 1996, Montgomery was charged with sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl in an Isham Street garage. The girl told police she had tried to fight off Montgomery's advances. She also claimed he had raped her a year earlier, but that she had kept the incident to herself. Montgomery later pleaded guilty to lewd and lascivious conduct.

June 5, 1997, Montgomery was charged with violation of an abuse prevention order after witnesses said he grabbed the neck of an ex-girlfriend and "slammed the head" into the hood of her car, parked near Chittenden County Superior Court. He pleaded guilty to the charge.

Aug. 18, 1998, another ex-girlfriend obtained a relief-from-abuse order after she told a Family Court judge that Montgomery had "punched me in the face, bit my face, threw me into walls." She admitted she also hit him during the incident and that both of them were intoxicated at the time. No criminal charges were filed.

Jan. 19, 1999, Montgomery was sent to prison. He was released in 2002.

The court record also shows Montgomery was the victim of a violent act.

Jan. 21, 1996, Montgomery told police he had been stabbed in the hand by his then-girlfriend, Katina Houle, at a Park Street apartment when Houle became jealous after a three-way sexual encounter between the couple and a second woman. Houle was charged with aggravated domestic assault; the case was later dismissed.

Houle and Montgomery then parted company. When Montgomery heard Houle was spreading stories about his Isham Street encounter with the 17-year-old girl later in 1996, he told police that Houle was involved in a 1993 beating of a man in City Hall Park.



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According to Montgomery's statement to police, Houle lured the victim to the park, where two male accomplices beat and robbed him. The man, struck in the head with a cement block, was left for dead but survived. After Montgomery gave his story to the police, Houle was arrested. She later pleaded guilty to assault and robbery.

A footnote: One of the two accomplices in the City Hall Park beating was Jose Rodriguez. In 2002, Rodriguez made headlines when he was convicted of recruiting teenage Vermont girls to be prostitutes in New York City.

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