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Former Peterborough County OPP probationary officer files human rights complaint over treatment at detachment

By SARAH DEETH Examiner Police Writer

A former Peterborough County OPP probationary officer has filed a human rights complaint against the detachment, alleging that his former fellow officers treated him as a second-class citizen because of his race.

Michael Jack, a Jewish, Russian-born man, said the oppression and harassment he experienced from his colleagues almost destroyed his life.

Peterborough County OPP Const. Iain McEwan, the detachment's media relations officer, said he wouldn't comment on the issue because it is before the tribunal.

The three-day hearing is set to begin in Toronto next week.

Jack, 39, was born in St. Petersburg, Russia and moved with his family to Israel in 1990.

"My life was ruined, totally."

Michael Jack

As a young adult he served in the Israeli Navy.

Jack said he came to Canada in 2000 and moved to Peterborough, putting himself through school and earning a science degree at Trent University.

By chance he met the police chief for York Regional Police at the Trent University gym in 2007, Jack said, and he convinced him to try a career in policing.

"I never thought of becoming a police officer before this meeting," Jack said.

With his education, and Israeli military background, Jack said he, and the hiring crew at the OPP thought he was an ideal candidate.

His application was fast-tracked, he said, and he cancelled interviews with the York and Halton police services.

He joined the OPP as a probationary constable in 2009.

Jack said problems began almost immediately.

“It was not the Canada I was used to,” he said.

Jack said he was treated like a nuisance, particularly by his superior officers, and his colleagues called him “Crazy Ivan” behind his back.

He tried addressing issues inside the detachment, he said, and eventually sought help from the Ontario Provincial Police Association.

But that only escalated problems, Jack said.

Jack alleges that other officers and superiors falsified documents and fabricated complaints against him.

Jack’s position with the Peterborough County OPP detachment was terminated at the end of his probationary term.

It was a black mark that ruined any potential career in policing, he said. No other service would hire him because he hadn’t passed probation.

“My life was ruined, totally,” he said.

Jack said he’s been working on his case for the past two years. He doubts a three-day hearing will be sufficient.

He said the OPP has asked for mediation on three occasions.

“They want to whisk it under the carpet,” he said. “We don’t.”

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That comment that "It was not the Canada I was used to," is an interesting one by Mr. Jack. I am on a committee and attend meetings of the Peterborough Partnership Council on Immigrant Integration (PPCII). One aspect of race relations that has been brought to the council's attention is that a culture of tolerance (or intolerance as the case may be) can differ within professional environments. The example brought to our attention was that visible minorities have experienced discrimination in the teaching profession as they move from their teacher education programs into participation in professional settings. The difference between the tolerance and integration efforts at a university as compared to what can sometimes be a very conservative environment in professional sectors like teaching or policing are quite marked and often come as a shock to newcomers as they make this transition.

This is not to say I am drawing any particular conclusions about this case. That would certainly require a great deal more information and context. It has been acknowledged however that these pockets of heightened discrimination do exist and remain a challenge for us all in terms of fostering a culture of acceptance everywhere.

I know of a minority officer who was with the Peterborough Detachment. He came from Toronto Police after service almost fifteen years there. He was shocked at the blatant violations of the Code upon joining the OPP. While in Toronto he was lost in the cultural diversity of its workforce. Having his dignity humiliated and violated he filed complaints with the Tribunal and they set his complaints for a five day hearing. The OPP settled with him on day three. That says a lot without having to get into details. However, he was shocked at the reprisals he suffered. Having been transferred to Lindsay detachment he was called into the Inspector's office within five days of the settlement and served with formal papers stipulating that he was being charged under the Police Services Act for certain remarks he made to a uniformed officer during day two of the five day hearings at the Tribunal's headquarters in Toronto. Basically he exercised his constitutional rights as a Canadian Citizen under section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and gets charged under the Police Services Act. What a FARCE. Now they are trying to get rid of him.

Based on what he has gone through he is now an advocate for anyone going through similar circumstances with their employer especially his employer. For more information on his experiences or on that of others kindly visit: www.discriminationopp.org

It is truly poignant how Webster's and or Dictionary.com defines the word MAFIA: (often lowercase) any small powerful or influential group in an organization or field; clique.

After reading this article and having dealt with this Officer on occasion he truly was not much different than any of the other cocky officers I have been in contact with. One time he was great pleasant to deal with then there was the next time. This Officer's English is that of a second language so I am sure for all there was communication barriers. Unfortunate that it has to go to these lengths. Good luck to him on a fair resolution. That said I have always said Peterborough is so VERY white and it seems intolerant as a whole. After working in Toronto and often times being one of the few white people working when coming in contact with a patient that was from this area and was white they were thrilled to have a white nurse.

Very old school, not very politically correct but it is still out there.

"This is not the Canada my family and I had in mind"

This doesn't really surprise me. Being a minority here in Peterborough I have encountered discrimination on various occasions whether it was from Peterborough locals or at my work place. One example that I will never forget was at a job interview with CRA for a summer student position. The one interviewer openly discriminated me as soon as he knew where my country of origin was and did not write a single word of my answers on his question sheet as if I did not exist in the room. When I left the room I knew they will not give me the job. I very much regret that I did not write a complaint letter at the time, that's why I am here to show my support against the violation of human rights. I might be able to get over discrimination and racism I

have encountered from let's say a grocery store clerk but not from government employees and/or authorities. These are the individuals who have been "supposedly" selected with care to represent the Canadian Government or the Justice System.

If the leaders and authorise of this county can't seem to set an example for the society then who will?

"the oppression and harassment ... almost destroyed his life". It sounds like Mr Jack put up with a lot more than a few nick names. In such circumstances who do you turn to? I would have thought such treatment would have been dealt with swiftly inside a police department. Sadly that was not the case "that only escalated problems".

I am not a minority. I was born and raised here and I am proud to be a Canadian. I am not proud of the way you were treated Mr Jack and I am sure the majority of Canadians feel the same. I am not sure if any thing can restore that which was taken from you. I hope that after two years of preparation and mental torment you can find some justice and peace of mind.

Any organization that is big enough will have pockets of corruption form from time to time, even the best intentioned groups. Which is why it is important for brave people to stand up and ensure it gets cleaned up properly, rather than ignored or brushed under the carpet. Hopefully this will set an example to other OPP who might be tempted to abuse the system.