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History of Convictions, Treatment

Subway suspect had been in jail, also spent time in mental facilities

By Patricia Hurtado
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He has criminal convictions and a psychiatric history dating back at least 13 years, but Jackson Roman was free to roam the city's streets. On Thursday evening, his path crossed that of Latchmie Ramsamy, 41, a nurse's assistant, with horrifying results.

Ramsamy is in Bellevue Hospital Center, her neck broken and her left foot amputated — injuries suffered when Roman, observed by witnesses, shoved her from a platform at Grand Central Terminal into a northbound No. 6 train about 7:45 p.m.

Few details about Roman's background emerged Friday. The two home addresses he gave police are phony, but near psychiatric facilities. Investigators said Roman has a history of mental illness dating back to 1988, when he was just 23 years old.

His arrests date back to October 1987, when he was arrested in Manhattan and charged with criminal possession of a weapon, reckless endangerment and willfully defacing a gun, for firing a sawed-off shotgun on the No. 7 subway platform at Grand Central. In February 1988, he pleaded guilty to a gun charge and was sentenced to five years' probation.

On April 4, 1991, Roman was arrested upstate in Bethel and charged with burglary. He later pleaded guilty to criminal trespass and was sentenced to 11 days in jail.

On Dec. 20, 1994, Roman was charged with assault with intent to cause physical injury and third-degree sex abuse for an incident police said occurred in the Bronx Psychiatric Center, in the Westchester Square section. For reasons that could not be learned Friday, the charges were dropped to a conditional discharge on Feb. 6, 1995.

In June 2000, Roman was arrested in midtown Manhattan by police working in the transit system and charged with sex abuse for fondling a woman. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge and was sentenced to 10 days in jail.

According to records at the Bronx Psychiatric Center, Roman was discharged from the facility in about July, 1999. He was last known to be at the Green Hill facility in Rockland County.

Roman's background and his alleged role in Thursday night's incident raises some troubling questions and disturbing memories for city subway riders.

In January 1999, for example, Andrew Goldstein, 30, a man with a history of psychiatric problems, shoved Kendra Webdale, 32, to her death in front of an oncoming Manhattan subway.

The state Legislature, responding to those crimes, passed "Kendra's Law," which gives the courts the power to require that a mentally ill person unlikely to function in the community without supervision accept medications and other necessary mental health services.

A key component of the law is a provision known as "involuntary outpatient commitment," by which a court hearing can be ordered for a mentally ill person whom authorities believe to be unable to care for himself or dangerous. If the court finds against the patient, the person is taken to a hospital for evaluation and a treatment plan devised.

A secretary in charge of patient intake at Bronx Psychiatric, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Friday that Roman's case is typical of many she has seen. While the law has helped, she said, hospital release policy still pressures doctors and staff to discharge patients in 40 to 60 days, regardless of the efficacy of their rehabilitation.

"They either discharge or they're out of a job," she said. "And they're putting them out when they're not ready to be out there. That's when they hurt some innocent person ... Before I can finish the discharge papers, I'm doing the admission papers again."

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