

After the rape and murder of his wife, a father carries on

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Richard Nunez is up almost every morning at 4 to feed his 6-year-old son and change his diaper.

Thiago Nunez was born with severe disabilities that left him unable to walk on his own and functioning at the level of an infant. He relies almost entirely on his father, a 51-year-old former gym instructor who was left to care for Thiago and two other children after his wife was raped and murdered by a former neighbor in Mattapan in 2011.

“I’m alone with Thiago and it is hard,” Nunez said. “I have three children to take care of and they’re all destroyed emotionally.”

Last week, Nunez settled a lawsuit with the Dolben Company in Woburn, the firm that managed the complex on Fairlawn Avenue where Nunez’s wife, Rosanna Mirielle Camilo, was killed. The confidential agreement was reached on the second day of jury deliberations following a two-week trial. The terms were not disclosed, but the family had asked the jury to award them over \$22 million.

A lawyer for Dolben, who argued in court that the company could not have prevented the killing, declined to comment on the settlement. Whatever financial reward the settlement produces, it cannot erase the years of hardship, past and future, that are the legacy of the violence of one afternoon six years ago. Crime victims often fall quickly from the public eye, left to deal alone with the emotional aftermath.

This was especially true of Richard Nunez.

The trial over the suit in Suffolk Superior Court earlier this month revealed the struggles the family has endured since the murder of Camilo,

who was 34 when Eldrick Broom came into her basement apartment, raped her, then strangled her while Thiago lay in a crib in the next room. Camilo's daughter found her half-naked and bound body when she came home from school.

Camilo and Nunez had met in 1994 in their native Dominican Republic and already had two children when she became pregnant with Thiago in 2009. Doctors warned there could be complications. An energetic, affectionate woman with a deep Catholic faith, Camilo left behind a comfortable job arranging schedules for the country's president to have her baby in New Jersey, where she had family and access to better medical care.

Nunez stayed behind to care for the other children — a girl who is now 21, and a boy, who is now 16.

Thiago's condition was even worse than the couple had feared: He was born with a rare genetic abnormality so severe it kills most who have it.

Camilo moved to Boston to be near Children's Hospital, and her daughter, then 16, moved to the city to help.

Camilo was placed in the Mattapan apartment in July 2011 by Action for Boston Community Development, a nonprofit that helps low-income families and families with special needs find housing.

The 347-unit complex, which is off Cummins Highway, had no surveillance cameras or guards despite a long history of problems, including the 2008 shooting of an infant being held by her father.

But Camilo could not afford to live anywhere else. Broom was among the more cordial residents, according to testimony at the trial. He lived across the hall with his pregnant girlfriend and had once helped Camilo carry groceries and Thiago's heavy stroller.

Camilo had no idea that in August 2011 Broom had attacked his girlfriend, grabbing her by the throat and cursing at her in front of her children, according to arrest reports. But the girlfriend later recanted, saying Broom only pushed her. She did not want to press charges or kick

Broom out of the home, and Dolben lawyers argued during the trial that managers could do little under those circumstances.

But Albert Farrah, the family's lawyer, told jurors that managers had an obligation to keep him from the property and warn other residents about his arrest.

Instead, Dolben managers moved him to another apartment in the complex.

Convicted of killing Camilo in 2013, Broom was sentenced to life in prison.

Nunez, who had come to Massachusetts after the murder, eventually moved into a small apartment in Stoneham with Thiago and his two other children. Too overwhelmed by grief and the needs of his children to search for a job, Nunez relied on the local food pantry and second-hand stores for clothes. With the civil case behind him, Nunez said he is hopeful he can pay for his children's college education and Thiago's medical needs.

Thiago, who could live to be 40 to 45 years old, will need round the clock care for the rest of his life, according to his doctor, Ronald Samuels of Children's Hospital, who testified during the trial. "I think it's very likely he will not develop much beyond the range of a toddler," Samuels said.

The family is now planning to leave Massachusetts for a fresh start and Nunez said he is anxious to start looking for work. The family is fiercely protective of Thiago, a joyful boy who craves affection. During the day he goes to the Campus School at Boston College for children with disabilities. Each day he is dropped off from school by a van, but before the driver even unbuckles him, Nunez rushes in to grab the boy and wrap him in a bear hug, singing his name. At his wife's funeral, Nunez swore he would always be there for Thiago.

"When I was putting my wife six feet down I made a promise to her," he said. "She was crazy about that boy."

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