

TROUBLE ALWAYS MANAGED TO FIND GRIFFIN FAMILY

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In a childhood marked by periods of chaos, perhaps the strangest event in **Allen Lane Griffin Jr.**'s young life was the day he found his infant sister lying facedown on the floor, her head jammed between her bed and the wall.

It was September 23, 1983, and Allen was 7; his 3-month-old sister JoAnn was not breathing.

Their mother, Paulette Griffin, then 26, suffered from schizophrenia. She could never adequately explain how JoAnn got hurt. Neither could she provide a stable home for Allen, his brother and sisters.

It was the documented beginning of 13 years of trouble for Allen Griffin Jr., much of it the result of problems within his family.

His father, Allen Griffin Sr., was killed some time after being released from prison. Like his father, Allen Griffin Jr. would have run-ins with the law, and he also had marital problems, according to interviews with family members and a review of court records.

And within the past two weeks, after the collapse of his marriage and a stint in jail for failure to pay child support, Allen Griffin Jr. told family members he wanted to die.

In 1983, in the aftermath of his sister's injury, Allen was an innocent bystander as authorities tried to deal with his mother's inability to care for her four children.

Children's Protective Services placed Allen, his younger brother Edward and sister Breanna with relatives while their mother's mental problems were being treated. JoAnn was adopted by an aunt, and the other children spent years shuffling between the homes of their grandmothers -- Erma Doyle in Ferndale and Bertha Griffin in Detroit.

Relatives said Allen went to live with his father while in junior high school. His father apparently had been released from prison, although court records are unclear on when.

A psychiatrist at North Central Community Mental Health in Detroit was treating Paulette Griffin with a combination of counseling and drug therapy. In 1984, she was hospitalized twice for psychiatric problems.

She was evaluated by Juvenile Court's Clinic for Child Study, but there was only one reference to Allen in a clinic report:

"Allen appears to be mildly agitated and is aggressive with peers in school. Such behavior will require firm guidance to prevent its escalation."

Paulette Griffin's children were returned to her in March 1987, after she agreed to take her medicine. But her mental health deteriorated in 1992.

Living with his grandmother in Ferndale, Allen played basketball on teams at Coolidge Middle School and Ferndale High School. When he was 12, he was arrested in Detroit for burglary, but charges were dismissed in Juvenile Court.

Allen dropped out of school when he was 16.

When he was 18, Detroit police arrested him for selling crack cocaine and carrying a concealed weapon. He pleaded guilty to the drug charge and was sentenced by Recorder's Court Judge Harvey Tennen to a boot camp, Camp Cassidy Lake near Chelsea. He did three months at the boot camp before being released Feb. 16, 1994.

Paulette Griffin said Tuesday that Allen had changed when he came out of boot camp.

"He went in there eager to work and get his life on the right road, but I think he got involved with the wrong kind of people," she said.

Allen Griffin Jr. fathered two children -- Portia Norman, 3, and Antwan Norman, 2 -- with his girlfriend, Candy Norman. Portia lives with her mother and Antwan stays with Griffin's relatives who said Tuesday that Griffin saw his son every day. Last year, Griffin married Vikki Ratliff with whom he had a third child, Allen Griffin III.

But his family troubles continued, relatives said. He and Vikki split up last fall, and Griffin moved in with his aunt for two months and then with his uncle.

His grandmother's death in October and the failure of his marriage made him depressed and moody, family members said.

His depression was compounded when he fell behind in his child-support payments. Earlier this year, he was arrested and jailed for a week for failing to pay the support. Two child-support cases involving Griffin's children are pending in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Two weeks ago, Griffin hit a new low. He went to see Allen III, but Vikki wouldn't let him, he told his uncle, Charles Griffin, 37. She could not be reached for comment.

Recalls Charles Griffin: "We talked for six or seven hours. He said, 'You know, I'm thinking about doing something to hurt myself.' " The older Griffin was grooming his nephew to take over the family-owned car wash on East 8 Mile.

"I thought if I talked to him and kept him around me that he would be level-headed again," he said. "I'm sorry I was wrong."

Griffin's aunt, Bonita Griffin, said even a therapist couldn't have helped her nephew. "He was too far gone. . . . He was very suicidal. He didn't want to kill himself. He wanted somebody else to

do it for him."

His mother said Allen struck her twice recently, but she stayed loyal.

"He was my son. Whatever he did, I still love him," Paulette Griffin said.

She said he told her last week that he "didn't have anything worth living for; he felt like he wanted to die."

Caption: Allen Griffin Jr. ***

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