

4 SHOT KIDS KNEW SUSPECTS - ACQUAINTANCE AND FAMILY FRIEND ACCUSED IN DRIVE-BY

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Thursday, February 28, 2002

Author: BEN SCHMITT FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The four children who were victims of a drive-by shooting this week knew the men accused of the fatal ambush. One man was a good friend of the family, the other an acquaintance, family members said Wednesday.

And one of the men -- Joel Allen, the alleged getaway driver in Monday's shooting -- was accused of another violent run-in with the family three years ago, according to court records. Allen was arrested in 1999 and charged with assault and battery stemming from a fight at the same Dolphin Street home in northwest Detroit where Monday's shooting occurred. The misdemeanor was dismissed.

Allen and **Willie Robinson**, both 24, were arraigned Wednesday by video from the Wayne County Jail on charges of first-degree murder and assault with intent to murder in 36th District Court. The men stood beside each other as Judge Charles Anderson III entered not-guilty pleas on their behalf and ordered them held without bond.

The shooting Monday afternoon killed 7-year-old Ajanee Pollard. Her 6-year-old brother, Jason Pollard Jr., was upgraded from critical to serious condition Wednesday at Children's Hospital. Jason's grandfather said Jason is awake and alert. Alyah Pollard, 4, is in good condition with injuries to her right leg. Six-year-old Aerica Pollard, shot in the hand, was released Monday.

Back at the home where the crime occurred, Anthony Niebrzydowski, the children's uncle, described how he and his sister, Aelizabeth, were preparing to go to the mall around 12:30 p.m. Monday. That's when, police say, Allen sped around the corner in Robinson's Cadillac. Robinson jumped out with a rifle and began shooting, Niebrzydowski said.

Niebrzydowski said he was walking toward the car with his nephew, Jason, who is nicknamed B.J., when the shooting started. "There was nowhere else to go, and I threw B.J. in the back of the car," said Niebrzydowski, who wasn't shot. "The kids had nothing to do with this, and they are the ones who suffered."

Aelizabeth Niebrzydowski was shot in the hand and ear and has been released from the hospital.

Niebrzydowski said that shortly before the shooting, he had tried to break up an argument between Robinson and another man who lives nearby. Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan identified that man at a news conference Tuesday as Donnell Brown. Prosecutors say the argument stems from the \$40 sale of a radio to Robinson that also involved counterfeit money.

"I had nothing to do with that," Niebrzydowski, 22, said. "Willie kept yelling, 'I'm going to have to handle you. I'm going to take care of this.' "

Allen, accused of driving the car, was a close friend of the children's father, Jason Pollard, said Pollard's brother, Harold Pollard III. "I knew Joel a lot better than Willie," Harold Pollard said. "He seemed like a regular kid."

However, Allen was accused in 1999 of striking Harold Pollard's sister, Alicia Pollard, "in the face with an open hand," according to court records. The misdemeanor charge, stemming from a Feb. 21, 1999 incident, was dismissed in May 1999 after Alicia Pollard, then 25, failed to appear at a preliminary hearing.

She could not be reached for comment.

Robinson's attorney, Marvin Barnett, declined comment on specifics of the case.

"I will tell you that this is not as simple as it appears -- it never is," he said.

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-222-6597 or schmitt@freepress.com.

Caption: Photo PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press

Joel Anthony Allen, 24, at left, and Willie James Robinson, 24, both of Detroit, are arraigned Wednesday by video in Detroit on charges of first-degree murder and assault with intent to murder. Robinson's attorney, Marvin Barnett, is in the inset image. Cherie Pollard, back to camera, grandmother of the children shot Monday, hugs a friend near the courthouse. Harold Pollard, Jr., grand-father to the children shot in a drive-by on Monday, speaks to reporters outside of the courthouse following the arraignment Wednesday for the two men accused in the shooting in northwest Detroit.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

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Index Terms: JOEL ANTHONY ALLEN ; JAMES ROBINSON ; HOMICIDE ; INJURY ; CHILD ; FATALITY ; SHOOTING ; DETROIT

Record Number: 0202280409

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