

A MAN OF MANY FACES IS STARING AT MULTIPLE MURDER COUNTS

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On the night of Aug. 12, **Reco Jones** had much to get off his chest.

He left three messages on a girlfriend's answering machine. The first told her she could keep the television he had given her. The second had him ending their relationship -- to her surprise -- and imploring her to remember him. The final message was an angry complaint. Why, he wanted to know, wasn't she answering the phone?

"It was like he was going somewhere and he was getting me out of the way," said the girlfriend who asked not to be identified.

Hours later Jones, 22, went to the home of another girlfriend, Yolanda Bellamy. When he left, Bellamy, 24, lay in a puddle of blood with 11 gashes across her head and neck, according to police. Scattered about her were four smaller bodies: children, not one older than 5, whose heads and necks had also been cut.

Jones is charged with five counts of first-degree murder. On Thursday he faces a judge for the first time.

A Free Press examination of his life based on numerous interviews, court documents, and the police investigation reveals a man of many faces.

He had a steady, decent-paying job and supported his mother, sister, and autistic little brother. He was well-spoken and polite, said acquaintances.

Yet he sometimes used force to make his point, said friends. He had two arrests for fighting and drug possession.

And his relationships with women were confused. Near the time of the killings, he was trying to date four women.

With each he had a different persona, by turns polite and street tough -- and prone to bursts of rage.

Still, if he is found guilty, Jones' life does not provide a clear answer to the question: Why?

"It was the devil's work," said the Rev. James Flakes from his pulpit at the Joy Road Missionary Baptist Church during the funeral for the five victims.

"The devil's work."

Romance blooms

Jones dated and lived with Maliaka Martin off and on for three years. One of Martin's close friends was Yolanda Bellamy. In December, Jones and Bellamy began dating.

By all accounts, they made a splendid couple.

"He was nice-looking, clean-cut, wore decent clothes," said Nicole Mosely, a close friend of Bellamy's. "What a boyfriend should be."

Jones is a slightly built man. He is not a flashy dresser, favoring football jerseys, jeans, and Nike basketball shoes.

He was a high-school graduate and had good relationships with his mother, who he lived with, and his father whom he occasionally saw, as well as his cousins who lived nearby.

He was a welder at American Axle, an auto parts plant in Hamtramck. He made about \$32,000 a year -- enough to support his mother, Janet Jones, 40, sister, LaShaunda, 16, and, brother, Michael, 10. Michael is deaf and autistic.

They live in a modest two-story white house on a tree-lined street in northwest Detroit. Jones was trying to buy the house for his family. He also had recently bought a burgundy BMW, which he kept clean, inside and out.

Jones and Bellamy spent last New Year's Eve at a bar. They brought along Bellamy's closest friend, her sister Ericka, 22.

"Everything seemed fine. They were a couple. They were doing their thing, I was doing mine," said Ericka Bellamy.

Just over two months into the relationship, something came between them.

Prison time

Months earlier, Jones and some friends went bowling at an alley in Warren. An argument erupted between one of his friends and a bowler in the neighboring lane. Jones got between the two women who were about to come to blows.

A chair was thrown. The argument spilled into the parking lot. Someone threw a bowling ball at Jones. He dodged it. It shattered a car window.

Then a woman slugged him in the mouth. He put her in a headlock and rammed her into the car. He required three stitches on his lip. She was treated for bruises.

Jones was arrested and found guilty of aggravated assault. He began a six-month prison term Jan. 15.

In jail, he began calling Bellamy collect. At first the calls were wistful. Then they took on a more demanding tone.

"Who are you seeing? Are you cheating on me?" That's what he'd ask. Yolanda started complaining about it," said Mosely.

Jones was itching to be released. After two months he requested a work release. He claimed he would lose his job at American Axle if he remained in prison. Furthermore, he said, he had never before been in trouble with the law.

It was a lie.

Another **Reco Jones**

In 1993, police were conducting a sweep of a crack house on Detroit's west side. As they arrived, they saw a young man run off. They caught him. He was carrying a plastic baggie containing nine crack rocks and \$336 in narcotics proceeds.

Richard Clark was charged with possession with intent to deliver cocaine. Clark, who had been released on bond, failed to appear for his preliminary exam and police never caught up with him.

According to fingerprint records, Richard Clark was an alias for **Reco Jones** .

Though the court did not discover this when Jones requested an early release, it still denied his release request.

From prison, he kept calling Bellamy. He also began hating jail. Though he had lifted weights before, he did not while in jail. He ate less. Prison "was not for me" he told friends after his release.

Freedom came June 15. He immediately went to see Bellamy, to rekindle the relationship.

She had other ideas.

Mother and wife

Bellamy was, according to her friends and family, a "free spirit." She favored bright clothes with leopard and tiger stripe prints. Her favorite haunt was the Blue Note, a fashionable nightclub on the west side that featured -- to Bellamy's delight -- free fried fish on Fridays.

Since age 15 she had been dating Nathan Burns, the nephew of the Rev. James Flakes, pastor of her church. They were married in 1991, when she was 18, and had two children, Nathan Burns Jr., 5, and Nathan Burns III, 3, affectionately known as Big Nate and Little Nate.

Their marriage was mercurial much of the time.

"When it got hot they broke up. When it got cooler they got back together. They just needed space to breathe sometimes," said Michelle Randolph, Bellamy's sister.

Bellamy's focus was her children. She was constantly moving between jobs, at Kmart, Bob Evans, McDonalds, Toys 'R' Us. She had just gotten a position as a telemarketer for Utilities Analysis Inc. of Redford Township, where she was well regarded.

By the time Jones was released, she had decided to reconcile with Burns, to whom she was still legally married. She dumped Jones.

"Their relationship wasn't that deep. She was on the verge of getting back with her husband," said Randolph.

At the same time, Jones began a relationship with a 26-year-old woman whom he met while she was dropping her daughter off at school. This was the woman he called just before the killings.

Soon, Jones and the woman were tight, spending almost all their free time together. He bought her a necklace that had a small sign attached: "I belong to Reco."

But Bellamy was not far away.

Escalating feud

Bellamy began demanding that Jones pay all the collect call bills he had run up while in jail. She would page and call him frequently, said friends.

"She did pick with him all the time," said a friend of Jones.

Jones began having erratic reactions to this prodding. Occasionally he would "blink out," said friends. He would have sudden outbursts of profanity and crude, violent insults toward antagonists. The behavior was usually in public and in front of female friends.

He began to privately rage at Bellamy.

"He had told me he was going to do something bad to her. I didn't take him seriously," said a friend.

He showed one friend a switchblade he had purchased. Still, because he was otherwise mild-mannered, his friends did not worry.

Jones began to tell friends that he was thinking of getting back together with Maliaka Martin. She was his wife, he told them. There is no record of a marriage, though.

At one point, Bellamy showed up at his house with two carloads of people. She slashed the back tires of his BMW. He watched her do it and did nothing, according to several witnesses.

Still, in late July, they reunited.

The final days

On Monday, Aug. 11, Jones went to the doctor. He said he had bronchitis and got a prescription for antibiotics.

In the past two weeks, his relationship with Bellamy had deteriorated once again. He accused her of cheating on him. They argued loudly and Bellamy held her own. He occasionally slapped her. She hit back. He would vent to friends that she did not respect him as a man.

That Monday, Aug. 11, she dumped him again.

"It was a real messy breakup. She was mad at him. He didn't want to leave her alone," said Mosely.

Tuesday was a quiet day. Jones did not go to work at American Axle. That evening, a girlfriend took him to the Super Kmart in Dearborn. They bought batteries for the remote control to the television he had bought her.

While standing in line at the checkout, Jones' beeper went off.

"It's her again," he said.

The cast of characters

The main people involved in this case:

Reco Jones, 22. Charged with five counts of first-degree murder.

Yolanda Bellamy, 24. Victim. Off-and-on girlfriend of Jones.

Nathan Burns Jr., 5. Victim. Yolanda Bellamy's son.

Nathan Burns III, 3. Victim. Yolanda Bellamy's son.

Ericka Bellamy, 22. Yolanda Bellamy's sister.

Delvontay Bellamy, 5. Victim. Ericka Bellamy's son.

Shafontah Bellamy, 3. Victim. Ericka Bellamy's daughter.

Others

Maliaka Martin. Jones' on-and-off girlfriend.

Nathan Burns. Married to Yolanda Bellamy, father of two of the slain children.

Girlfriend (name withheld). Dated Jones for the two months before the killings.

Janet Jones. Jones' mother.

Michelle Randolph. Sister of Yolanda and Ericka Bellamy.

AT ISSUE

On the morning of Aug. 13, a young woman and four children, all 5 or younger, were stabbed to death in a northwest Detroit home, a crime that made seasoned homicide investigators shudder.

What happened that morning and why? Today, the Free Press looks at the events leading up to the killings.

Thursday, the day **Reco Jones** faces a judge to determine if he will stand trial for the five killings, we will look at what happened the day of the killings and in their aftermath, including Jones' leap from a fifth-story window at downtown police headquarters.

Thursday: The Killings

Staff writer Raja Mishra can be reached at 1-313-222-6487.

Caption: Photo

Reco Jones

Slain last month: From left: Shafontah Bellamy, 3; Delvontay Bellamy, 5; Nathan Burns Jr., 5, and Nathan Burns III, 3.

Yolanda Bellamy

Memo: FIRST OF TWO PARTS; SIDEBARS ATTACHED

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Correction: To our readers The headline over a box on page 8A of Wednesday's Free Press listing the people involved in the Reco Jones story was insensitive and offensive. It referred to the murdered children as part of a cast of characters. They were victims of a horrible crime and should have been identified as such. We regret the error and the fact that it diverted attention away from the important issue of domestic violence. -- Robert G. McGruder, executive editor.

Index Terms: MURDER ; MULTIPLE ; DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ; ABUSE ; CHILD ; DEATH ; HOMICIDE ; STABBING ; RECO JONES; MAJOR STORY

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