

## **BANK KILLINGS REMAIN A MYSTERY SUITS BRING SETTLEMENTS BUT MOTIVE NOT CERTAIN**

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Friday, July 2, 1999

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Despite two years of litigation, the cause of a 1997 shooting that left four people dead at a Comerica **Bank** branch on Detroit's east side **remains a mystery** .

Lawyers for the victims assert the **killings** were prompted by the breakup of an alleged sex-for-money relationship between branch manager Stanley Pijanowski III of Bloomfield Township and the gunman, Allen Griffin Jr. of Detroit, who both died in the incident. But **as** one lawyer in the case acknowledged, proving it has been difficult.

The lawyer, Cy Weiner of Southfield, said two of Pijanowski's acquaintances have recanted statements that Pijanowski had received threats from Griffin and feared for his safety.

"There's a mountain of evidence pointing toward the cause of this tragic event," Weiner said Thursday. "But there's little motivation for the key witnesses to step forward. Their motivation is to bury the story and protect Stanley Pijanowski's memory."

Weiner said he hopes someone with reliable information about the relationship will come forward.

Despite the problems, Weiner said he has still managed to win payments for his clients.

In one case, he said, he recently settled a lawsuit against Guardsmark Inc., the **bank's** security firm, for hundreds of thousands of dollars to be paid to the estate of James Isom, 25, who was killed in the shooting.

The settlement will be submitted soon to Wayne County Circuit Judge Michael Callahan. Comerica and Guardsmark have settled two other lawsuits for nominal amounts.

At about 10 a .m. on March 11, 1997, Griffin, 21, a car wash employee, walked into the Comerica branch at Duchess and Morang with a 12 gauge shotgun.

By then, Griffin, who lived nearby with his uncle, had already shot and wounded a 23-year-old jogger, stolen a Volvo and driven to the **bank**.

Once inside, Griffin ordered everyone onto the floor and began shooting up the customer service area. Isom, a customer service representative, was the first to die. Griffin then walked into the office of Pijanowski, 53, and shot him in the head, apparently without saying a word.

After shooting assistant branch manager Lisa Griffin, 38, in the hand, and making security guard Virene Brown lead terrified witnesses and customers in the Lord's Prayer, Griffin walked out. He

grabbed customer Stanley Hays, 77, and shot him dead before police killed Griffin in a hail of gunfire.

The shootings resulted in at least six lawsuits in Wayne County Circuit Court. The lawsuits, filed by employees, customers or their estates, claimed Comerica, Guardsmark or both failed to provide adequate security.

Although the **bank** had several robberies in the months before the shooting and employees had expressed concern about their safety, Comerica or Guardsmark failed to take adequate preventive steps, the lawsuits said. The **bank** should have armed its guards, assigned more to the **bank** and enclosed the customer service area with bulletproof glass, the suits said.

Several suits were especially critical of Brown, saying the security guard saw Griffin get out of the car with a weapon, yet made no attempt to lock the doors of the **bank** or cry out so customers or workers could flee to the safety of the bulletproof teller cage. When Brown spotted Griffin, she put up her hands and got on the floor, witnesses said.

Lawyers for Comerica and Guardsmark declined to comment because of pending litigation.

But they said in court papers that there was no way to foresee or prevent the incident. Comerica said Michigan law does not require businesses to protect its customers and employees from random criminal acts committed by third parties or provide a 100-percent crime-free environment.

Brown, who was so traumatized she spent the night hiding in the basement, said Thursday that there was no way to lock the doors or warn anyone because Griffin was watching her as he approached the **bank**.

"There wasn't enough time to get to the doors and had I cried out, he would have killed me and the other people in the **bank**," said Brown, who hasn't returned to work and **remains** on disability. "There wasn't anything I could do. What can you do in three seconds?"

Brown also is suing Comerica, saying Pijanowski was on the phone with Griffin on the morning of the shooting and should have told her to lock the doors. Her lawyer, Paul Condino of Southfield, said he's still trying to corroborate the claims.

"It's tough because the only two people who really know what happened aren't living now," Condino said Thursday. "I think it's an uphill battle."

Condino, like Weiner, said he's convinced that Griffin killed Pijanowski because their relationship soured. Weiner said his investigators interviewed dozens of witnesses who said Pijanowski and Griffin had a relationship.

Griffin and Pijanowski apparently met at the Jax Kar Wash on South Hunter in Birmingham, where Griffin worked before getting another job at his uncle's car wash in Detroit.

The best witnesses, Weiner said, were two of Pijanowski's gay acquaintances who said Pijanowski had received threats from Griffin after breaking off a sex-for-money relationship. But both men later provided a Comerica lawyer with affidavits repudiating earlier statements.

One of the men said in a deposition that he had been threatened by other gays for talking about Pijanowski's involvement with Griffin. Weiner said he thinks the men recanted to protect Pijanowski's memory.

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Caption: Photo; Photo File photo

Police fatally shot Allen Griffin Jr. after he killed three people in 1997.

Allen Griffin Jr. terrorized a Comerica **Bank** branch in Detroit in 1997. Four people were killed, including Griffin.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

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Index Terms: COMERICA ; SHOOTING ; LAWSUIT ; SETTLEMENT

Record Number: 9907020036

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