

FAMILY MOURNS WOMAN SLAIN IN CAR THEFT ATTEMPT

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Ruth Wahl refused to become the latest victim of a gunpoint **car theft in** Detroit.

But Wahl became a homicide victim instead, shot to death after she drove away from two men who had demanded her 1991 Suzuki Sidekick, her first new **car** .

Wahl, 22, of Fraser was the second person killed **in** Detroit this month for defying an order to give up a **car** at the point of a gun, police said.

Another **woman in** Wahl's **car** was wounded.

Police said two men were **in** custody **in** connection with the shooting, which followed the robbery **attempt** around midnight Tuesday **in** Comstock Park, near Schaefer and 8 Mile Road.

Police said the two men who demanded Wahl's **car** trailed her **in** a brown station wagon, catching up to the Jeep-style Sidekick at Schaefer and Chippewa, where the shooting began.

Wahl was hit **in** the head. Another shot hit Jeroma Harris, 17, of Mt. Clemens, **in** a leg. Harris' sister, Arleen, 22, and an unidentified male friend **in** the **car** were not hurt.

The two suspects, Detroiters ages 17 and 21, were caught shortly after their descriptions were broadcast to squad **cars** . Police said they would seek charges today.

The killing was the latest violence spawned by a crime trend that has grown so fast police have formed a task force to battle it.

In 21 days, from July 28 through Aug. 17, police said armed thieves stole 205 vehicles from Detroit drivers. Several victims were shot. At least one **woman** was raped. Last Tuesday, a 23-year-old man was killed **in** a Detroit **car** wash when he refused to surrender his **car** .

On Wednesday, Donald Wahl, 58, said that because of the **thefts** , he had been worried about his daughter **in** her new **car** . But he never expected trouble when she left Tuesday night, saying she was going to the Michigan State Fair with her longtime girlfriends.

It was not clear why the group had stopped at the park, a few miles west of the fairgrounds.

The phone rang at the Wahl home around 3 a.m. Ruth's sister Karen answered. It was Arleen Harris, barely able to speak.

"She was stuttering. She couldn't even say her words," said Karen Wahl, 21. Finally, they came out. " 'Ruth got shot!' That's all I heard."

Ruth Wahl's other survivors include her mother, Joyce; two brothers and two sisters.

Ruth Wahl was a pharmacist's technician at Concord Drugs **in** Mt. Clemens, her father said. She attended Fraser High School, but dropped out around the 11th grade and later obtained her diploma at night school.

Suspect's trail is traced

Police **in** at least four communities were piecing together the trail Wednesday of Karl Travis, 29, of Ypsilanti, who was arraigned on charges that he took a 20-year-old **woman** 's **car** at gunpoint Tuesday **in** Livingston County's Green Oak Township.

Travis, who police said has at least one previous conviction for armed robbery, also is expected to be charged **in** a similar incident **in** Bloomfield Township and is under investigation for a **car theft in** Redford Township and an attempted robbery **in** Van Buren Township.

Police said Travis, who said he works for a Detroit potato chip manufacturer, confessed to the Green Oak and Bloomfield **car thefts** . **In** each one, he allegedly bumped his **car** into the rear of a **car** driven by a lone **woman** , pointed a gun at the driver, then took their purses and **cars** and fled, leaving behind a stolen **car** .

He fired at but missed the victim of the Bloomfield **theft** , whose 1989 Cougar was left behind when Travis allegedly committed his next **theft** , that of a Brighton **woman** 's 1986 Fiero **in** Green Oak Township.

Travis was arraigned before 53rd District Judge A.J. Pikkarainen **in** Howell on charges of armed robbery, possession of the stolen **car** and using a firearm during a felony. He faces up to life **in** prison if convicted of armed robbery.

He was ordered held **in** lieu of \$1 million bond.

Detroit police also are checking whether two men charged with similar gunpoint auto **thefts in** Center Line may be responsible for such crimes **in** Detroit.

The two are suspected of following a 23-year-old Mt. Clemens **woman** from the Woodward and 8 Mile area of Detroit to a party store on Van Dyke **in** Center Line on Aug. 23, then threatening her with a gun before stealing her 1990 Ford.

Julian Short, 17, and Edward Jett, 18, were arrested **in** Detroit and face armed robbery charges **in** Center Line.

Jerry Solai, director of public safety for Center Line, said it appears armed auto thieves are "all over and I think they are getting bolder all the time."

BE AWARE

Detroit police advise:

- * When driving or at a pay phone, gas station, mall, bank machine or driveway, look around. Be ready to drive on.
- * Stay **in** well-lit areas, including when buying gas. Make sure you have enough gas to get to a safe location.
- * If involved **in** a minor accident, consider motioning the other driver to follow and go to the nearest police station.
- * Give up your wallet, purse or **car** rather than risk your life.

Caption: Photo Color JOHN LUKE, Photo CRAIG PORTER

: FAMILYMOURNSWOMANSLAININCARTHEFTATTEMPT

The **family** of 22-year-old Ruth Wahl -- her mother, Joyce, sister, Karen, and father, David -- grieve Wednesday **in** their Fraser home after learning of her death. Ruth Wahl, shown **in** picture on table, was killed after she tried to escape two men who demanded her vehicle. Arleen Harris Karl Travis, 29, of Ypsilanti attends a preliminary hearing Wednesday **in** 53rd District Court. Travis was arraigned on charges that he took a **woman** 's **car** at gunpoint Tuesday **in** Green Oak Township. Ruth Wahl

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