

HOW CRYSTAL LEFT THEM FRIENDS AND FAMILY WONDER: COULD THEY HAVE SAVED HER LIFE?

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, July 1, 1992

Author: ROGER CHESLEY Free Press Staff Writer

The fragile, broken body of the young girl lay on a west side Detroit street, clothed only in a pair of white socks, a gold ring adorning her finger.

Shot in the head, she lay in front of 8844 Woodmont, across the street from an abandoned garage full of discarded tires.

For 10 days after the March 8 slaying, nobody claimed **Crystal** Linda Kendrick's body in the Wayne County Morgue. In a sense, not enough people had claimed the 14-year-old girl in life.

Police detectives think they know who killed her. But **Crystal** was slowly dying long before she encountered a suspected serial rapist, who police say shot her when she resisted him.

Abandoned by her mom at about age 8, never raised by her father, **Crystal** ran away frequently. Those who knew her say she always seemed to be searching for something -- perhaps love -- that she thought she could find on the streets.

Nearly everyone agreed she shouldn't have died so young, so violently, so alone.

In painful hindsight, relatives and neighbors say they feel guilty they didn't do more to nurture **Crystal**, or to save her.

"I've taken other girls in," says former neighbor Pamela Paige, 33. "I think I could've saved that girl's life."

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"I can't understand why my daughter was out there that time of night. . . . Nobody tells me why she was out there in the first place, what was going on in her head." -- **Crystal**'s mother, Emma Belle Kendrick

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As a young girl, **Crystal** was loved, says her uncle, William P. Kendrick, 28. She was fed, kept clean and taken care of by her mother, Emma Belle Kendrick, 31.

But relatives say things changed about six years ago for **Crystal** and two of her brothers. Emma Kendrick was lured away from her children by crack cocaine, heroin and marijuana. Prostitution helped support her habits. The children were locked in a bedroom as Emma and a boyfriend did drugs, says Vickie Sharpe, who became one of **Crystal**'s guardians.

" **Crystal** said they ate only once a day," Sharpe says. "They were skinny. Their clothes were dirty."

Emma Kendrick acknowledges that she was in bad shape back then. "I was using drugs really heavy. I wasn't in any condition to take care of any kids," she says. She's now a health-care worker in Portland, Ore. She and her family say she is off drugs.

None of her relatives came forward to take care of her children while she was in the throes of addiction. "My sister had her own kids to take care of," Emma Kendrick says. "My father was too old to raise kids."

In 1986 or 1987, Edward Sharpe, now Vickie's husband, began caring for **Crystal** and the two Kendrick brothers.

Edward Sharpe, 46, is the father of another one of Emma Kendrick's sons, and already was raising him.

Had he not stepped in, Edward Sharpe says, protective services workers would have sent the children to foster homes. This way, he reasoned, at least the family would be together.

In December 1987, Emma Kendrick officially asked Wayne County Probate Court to name Edward Sharpe the legal guardian of **Crystal** and her brothers, "till I can take care of **them** ."

The Sharpes lived at 15438 Ilene, in a house owned by Emma Kendrick's father. At first, things seemed to go smoothly for the family, which also included Vickie Sharpe's son, now 10, and later Vickie and Edward's own son, now 3.

Edward Sharpe says he expected Emma Kendrick to return for her kids in a year. But a year became two, and then three, and she still didn't have her act together. She lived a nomadic life, sometimes on the streets, sometimes with relatives. By all accounts, the separation deeply hurt her only daughter. **Crystal** couldn't understand why her mother's priorities placed drugs above her own children.

William Kendrick remembers, "When I'd see her on Ilene, she'd ask, 'Is my mother still getting high on drugs?' "

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"I really do miss you a lot. I know it's been hard on you; well, it's been hard on me, too. Hope you really do come down to see us this year. I have learned on these streets, you can't get anything here but yourself killed or into trouble." -- Letter from **Crystal** to her mother, Jan. 27, 1992.

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Her early years in school were good ones. **Crystal** made A and B grades, attended classes and stayed out of trouble at Ilene Elementary.

A Guest Middle School typing instructor remembers **Crystal** as a student who worked well with her hands and dreamed of being a hair stylist; others say she fancied herself a future singer.

She grew to a slender 5 feet 5 1/2 inches. "She was very cute," Vickie Sharpe says. "Beautiful. Big teeth, big smile, always wanted to wear earrings."

Her friends were role models, instead of her parents. She believed everything other girls told her, including about boys and sex. She started skipping school, running away from home.

"At that point, we never got things under control," Vickie Sharpe says. "She ran away from our home seven times."

Sometimes the Sharpes went out and found her on the streets. Other times, after Vickie filed missing persons reports with police and posted fliers with **Crystal**'s picture, Vickie would find her somewhere in the neighborhood.

"When kids get to become teenagers, parents become obsolete," Edward Sharpe says. "I lost her to the streets."

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After **Crystal** lost her virginity at age 11, "our biggest conversation was about sex, because **Crystal** used to think that was the most important thing. . . . She had a reputation, because different boys were having sex with her, and she stayed with **them** when she ran away from home." -- Vickie Sharpe, **Crystal**'s guardian.

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Neighbors on Ilene, where **Crystal** stayed until last November, say the girl could be loud and sometimes undisciplined. But **Crystal** was never mean or malicious. She seemed to crave being older -- living the life of an adult in a growing teen's body.

Vickie Sharpe says she tried to discipline **Crystal** by refusing privileges -- like phone calls from boys -- instead of spanking. "I think about it. Should I have taken an extension cord to her? What good is that going to do?"

After her seventh flight from home, late last year, **Crystal** showed up at her grandmother's east side home. That's when she alleged something sinister.

On Nov. 13, **Crystal** told relatives she'd been sexually molested by Edward Sharpe, according to Detroit police and Wayne County Juvenile Court records. One of the relatives notified authorities. No charges were ever filed against Sharpe; officials say there wasn't evidence to support a charge.

Both Sharpes strongly deny the abuse allegations. Edward Sharpe says that at a Juvenile Court session last fall, **Crystal** "said she was sorry, and had lied about it."

On Nov. 14, authorities took **Crystal** to Vista Maria, a residential treatment center for adolescent girls with emotional and behavioral problems. She ran away within a day.

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"We like to think God looked down on her and took her, because I think he looked in her future and saw she didn't have a future." -- Vickie Sharpe.

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Early last December, Vickie Sharpe decided to move to Los Angeles to be closer to relatives. Her husband went with her, taking their three children but not the three Kendrick children. The Sharpes say that was partly because they had no legal rights to take **them** out of state.

On Jan. 17, Emma Kendrick's mother, Nancy Hairston, became **Crystal** 's new guardian; William Kendrick became the guardian of **Crystal** 's two brothers.

William Kendrick wasn't sure he had the financial -- or parenting -- resources to keep a teenage girl.

"I'm not a rich man. I'm just barely making it with these two," Kendrick says. He was reluctant to take **Crystal** , "because she was a runaway from Edward's house, and then Nancy's house. I didn't want the pressure of keeping three kids."

Now **Crystal** 's death has **left** him with feelings of guilt. "If I had taken her, it wouldn't have happened . . . but you can't change what happened."

Nancy Hairston, 50, lives in a cluttered, aging east side home, in a neighborhood devastated by drugs. Vacant lots dot the City Airport-area block. Another of Emma Kendrick's children, a 4-year-old boy, scoots around on a toy in the living room. A couch there has been sat on too many times.

Crystal 's life with her grandmother was far from idyllic. "She'd stay away a week, two weeks, and then come back," Hairston says. "I put her on punishment once, but it never did any good."

In the three months she was there, **Crystal** ran away three times. The last time was several days before she was slain. This time, Hairston didn't file a missing persons report.

LaRinda Smith, a neighbor on Ilene, says **Crystal** stopped by a few nights before she was killed. Before the Sharpes moved, **Crystal** would baby-sit for Smith's two children.

After walking around in the rain, **Crystal** "was wet from head to toe . . . she looked exhausted," says Smith, 27. "If I had known she was walking the streets like she was, I wouldn't have let her leave."

Crystal slept that night on Smith's couch.

"She was so peaceful."

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"Scout 6-2 received a police run (to front of 8844 Woodmont), 'Investigate the female bleeding from the mouth, may be dead.' -- Detroit Police report, March 8, 1992.

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The man who police believe killed **Crystal** is in jail -- charged with several rapes in Detroit but not in **Crystal**'s slaying. It is unclear why the additional homicide charge has not been sought.

Police say he grabbed **Crystal** by her jacket on the street late March 7 or early March 8, pushed her into a vacant home and tried to force her to perform oral sex. As she tried to flee, the 19-year-old man pulled her back and shot her in the head. No one seems to know why **Crystal** was on Woodmont that night.

Emma Kendrick decided not to come to **Crystal**'s funeral.

"I could either use the money to help bury her or to go there," she says. "I sent every penny I could." She says she sent \$150 to a sister to help pay funeral expenses.

"It wasn't that she didn't care about her daughter," says William Kendrick. "It just wasn't possible for her" to come. "I think that was the best decision."

Vickie Sharpe came back to Detroit for the services with her youngest son, taking a 2 1/2-day bus ride from Los Angeles. "**Crystal** was my life," she says. "I had to go. I had to be there with her."

Neighbors went door-to-door, raising \$300 for flowers and the obituary.

Neighbor Richard Nance couldn't help notice the 25 or so relatives -- many of **them** youths -- who attended **Crystal**'s funeral.

"To see all the other family at the funeral," Nance wonders aloud. "Where were they earlier?"

Caption: Photo Color JOHN A. STANO

"If I had known she was walking the streets like she was, I wouldn't have let her leave," says LaRinda Smith, above. **Crystal** Kendrick had baby-sat for Kellie Smith, 9, and Wayne Bowman, 2. Police say 14-year-old **Crystal** Kendrick was shot to death while resisting a rape.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: WWL

Page: 1C

Index Terms: MAJOR STORY ; DEATH ; CRYSTAL LINDA KENDRICK ; SHOOTING ; DETROIT

Record Number: 9201250063

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