

INTRUDER'S KILLER: 'I HAD NO CHOICE'

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Their eyes locked.

Then Barbara Holland saw the barrel of the gun.

She lay on the floor in her house after an intruder had knocked her down while pushing through her side door. While on her back, she drew a 9mm handgun from a holster on her waist.

Her assailant's glare suddenly changed.

"He looked surprised," Holland said.

Then she pulled the trigger.

Holland, a 38-year-old Detroit business owner and mother, remembers firing three shots. Detroit police told her she fired six.

Either way, she killed the 42-year-old man, Clabe Hunt -- who had shoved into her home on Troester, near Hayes, on Detroit's east side at 8:10 p.m. April 13.

He was an ex-con with five children and was armed with a loaded, nickel-plated semiautomatic handgun that was not registered to him. Autopsy reports indicate he was shot in the head multiple times. He never fired his weapon.

Police officers said Holland's gun was licensed, and they determined the shooting to be self-defense. Wayne County prosecutors continue to investigate, which is routine in most fatal shootings.

Citizens defending themselves are precisely what backers of Michigan's controversial concealed-weapons law had in mind when they worked to pass the legislation in 2001. The law makes it easier for anyone without felony convictions or mental illnesses to obtain a permit to carry concealed weapons.

"The more the criminal element knows that Michigan residents can protect themselves and will protect themselves, the more crime goes down," said state Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-Dewitt.

Some opponents of the law predicted a large increase in self-defense-type shootings. Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who opposed the measure when she was state attorney general, has acknowledged that has not occurred.

Even a justified shooting takes its toll, though, as Holland has discovered.

She is slowly coming to terms with the fact that she took a life. Sometimes she has tinges of remorse. Mostly she feels as though she had to protect herself and her 15-year-old daughter, who was home that night, hiding in the living room after the shots.

Hunt's family members are also hurting. They want more answers from police.

"Was someone else with him? Where is his car?" said Hunt's 40-year-old sister, who requested anonymity because she is the owner of a business.

"I'm not necessarily mad at her, but I don't know enough. Why unload the gun on him?"

'Like Friday the 13th'

Holland still remembers the words of the man whom she says she never met before he charged her.

Using a vulgarity, Hunt said: "I got you, I got you," Holland recalled.

"I kept wondering if he was talking to me, but he came running right up at me," she said. "It didn't seem real."

The shooting was the first in an unusual night of violence, even in Detroit, which is experiencing a rise in homicides this year. In four hours, nine people were shot. Four, including Hunt, were killed.

"It was like Friday the 13th," Holland said. "Only it was Tuesday the 13th."

When police homicide officers arrived at Holland's home, Hunt's feet were inside her side entrance. The rest of his body lay in the driveway, investigators said. Hunt still had a gun in his right hand.

Holland's daughter, Tabitha, heard her mother scream, "Oh, Lord," as the shots rang out. She eventually ran outside, thinking the worst. Instead, she found her mother alive.

"I had normal feelings about taking a life, if you can call that normal," Barbara Holland said. "But I'm not losing sleep over it any more. I really had no choice."

'I had a strange feeling'

Holland owns a small used-car lot on Hayes and Troester with rent-to-own deals. She employs three workers and has about 20 cars and a couple of motorcycles for sale.

What sticks with Holland is something she is calling divine intervention.

Before she closed April 13, Holland said, two suspicious men came into the office asking about cars and then a Kawasaki motorcycle. One man said he had \$1,000 in cash.

Holland said she told him to go outside and pick out a car.

"But he never left," she said. "He just stared at me."

Then the man asked about the motorcycle inside the office. Holland told him it cost \$2,500. He asked about a payment plan but let the matter drop. "Then, they both just left," she said. "I had a strange feeling and I said a prayer."

She then checked to make sure the gun, which she has owned since 1992, was loaded.

Holland got into her 1998 Ford Escort station wagon and drove home. She pulled into her driveway and walked toward her side door. A video cassette fell out of her laptop computer case.

As she bent down to pick it up, she saw Hunt running toward her, pointing the gun.

She screamed for help and tried slamming the door. Hunt blocked the door with his foot, pushing it open. Holland fell back onto a landing leading up to her kitchen.

Then she fired.

When Hunt's funeral took place a week later at Swanson Funeral Home on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit, Holland closed her shop.

"I did it out of respect for his family," she said. "I don't know them, but I thought it was the right thing to do."

Hunt's wife, Cynthia, did not attend the funeral. She could not be reached.

"It's been hard on everybody," Hunt's sister said. "We had just seen him two days earlier, on Easter. He called me on the day of his death and asked me to watch his kids. I'm not saying my brother was a great guy, but he didn't bring his problems near us."

Hunt's five children range in age from 27 to 2, his sister said.

He lived near 8 Mile and I-75 and was not working. Before going to prison in 1985 for armed robbery, he had attended the now-closed Northeastern High School in Detroit but never graduated.

He was released on parole in 1996, went back in a year later for violating parole and spent 1999 through 2002 in a halfway house, according to state Department of Corrections records.

Hunt's sister is still baffled that police have not been able to find her brother's red 1990 Ford Tempo. The missing car makes her think someone else was involved in the robbery attempt.

Police said they are still looking for the car but have no evidence of other suspects.

Meanwhile, Holland said she's considering selling her business and moving west.

"I think I'm ready to move on now," she said. "California."

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Caption: Photo SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

Barbara Holland, 38, of Detroit shot and killed Hunt in this doorway April 13. Her daughter was in the house at the time. Clabe Hunt, 42, of Detroit was armed with a loaded gun.

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