

KILLINGS OF ELDERLY SAID TO BE 'FOR FUN' \ POLICE WERE ALERTED BY SUSPECT'S SPOUSE

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WALKER -- Two months ago Tuesday, Ken Wood walked into the Walker Police Department and told a detective that his ex-wife and her lover had killed six patients at a local nursing home.

Catherine Wood and **Gwendolyn Graham** , both former employes of Alpine Manor Nursing Home, suffocated the elderly patients in their sleep not out of a sense of misguided mercy but "for fun," as a means of bonding their relationship, Wood told police.

"Nobody really believed him," Walker Police Chief Walter Sprenger said Tuesday. "Everybody treated it as a made-up story . . . made out of rumors and fiction."

But two months of what Sprenger called "sorting fact from fiction" in the case may have culminated Monday when Catherine Wood, 26, and **Graham** , 25, were charged with murder.

Wood was charged on two counts of open murder and held without bond pending a Dec. 16 preliminary hearing. **Graham** was arrested Sunday near her home in Tyler, Tex. She was arraigned on one count of open murder. Held on \$1 million bond in the Smith County Jail, **Graham** was fighting extradition to Michigan. Authorities are investigating the women's possible involvement in six other deaths.

Sprenger said Tuesday that details of the investigation would not be released until Wood's preliminary examination. He would not comment on a motive.

But from information gathered this week from authorities, Ken Wood, and court documents, it is at least clear that the investigation followed a bizarre course.

Ken Wood, a 30-year-old unemployed former auto worker, said Tuesday that Catherine Wood, whom he divorced in May 1987, told him of the murders in August of that year.

"We were talking on the phone and she said she didn't want to get back together with Gwen," Ken Wood said. "She said, 'We did terrible things together.' "

Wood said that when he asked her what they did, she replied, "What's the worst thing a person could do?"

"I said, 'Kill somebody?' " Wood said. "Then she went silent and I said, 'Cathy, no.' "

"She said, 'Try six times.' "

Wood said his wife later discussed the alleged killings with him several times, telling him the experience was "kind of fun."

"She said it was easy. Those people were defenseless," Wood said.

Catherine Wood and **Graham** worked at Alpine Manor, home to about 200 patients, many of them critically ill. Wood worked at the home from July 1985 to October 1988, most recently as a supervisor of nurses' aides. **Graham** was a nurse's aide from June 1986 to July 1987. She moved to Tyler after leaving the nursing home.

The two women were living in an apartment on Grand Rapids' northwest side during the period in early 1987 when the murders are alleged to have occurred.

Ken Wood said the women became friends and later lovers while working together and that his ex-wife indicated the alleged murders created a bond between them. He said he finally went to police because his ex-wife "needs help."

"When I turned her in, it wasn't because I wanted to solve a crime," he said. "All those people were suffering. It wasn't going to help their families to bring it up."

"I did it for Cathy because she doesn't know what she's doing. I don't want Cathy made out as a ruthless killer who went on a rampage with her lover."

During questioning by police Oct. 7, Catherine Wood said **Graham** had suffocated six elderly patients in their beds, according to search warrants. She said **Graham** told her "that each of the killings provided an emotional release for her," with the exception of the death of 97-year-old Edith Cook, who was killed to end her suffering from gangrene, the warrants said.

Wood told police she saw **Graham** kill Marguerite Chambers, 60, an Alzheimer's disease patient, "by pressing a washcloth beneath the chin of Chambers and another washcloth over Chambers' mouth and nose," the warrants said. She told police she did not intervene.

Wood told police **Graham** would tell her of the killings either just before or after they occurred.

Sprenger said Tuesday both women "played a role" in each of the deaths, but declined to explain why Wood has been charged with two counts of open murder and **Graham** just one.

Sprenger said, "No one thing makes it all come together." Police relied on statements from other witnesses, including another former aide at Alpine Manor who moved to Texas with **Graham**, he said.

A Tyler woman described in search warrants as **Graham**'s current lover told investigators she heard Catherine Wood and **Graham** discuss the murders.

Police also investigated the possibility that **Graham** had kept souvenirs from each of the victims, according to the warrants. Sprenger declined to comment on whether the items were now in the hands of police and a part of the case.

Assistant Kent County Prosecutor David Scheiber declined to comment Tuesday on evidence or motives.

"We have a theory about motive and we'll present it at trial," Scheiber said. "But it's complicated and we may not know all of what went into it."

Ken Wood said his ex-wife visited his apartment Sunday to speak to him and their eight-year-old daughter. She spoke alternately of her imminent arrest and of a future that didn't account for it, Wood said.

"She said she had to call her lawyer every four hours to see if the police wanted her, then she'd tell me she was going to get promoted at her job."

Wood said she knew the investigation was touched off by his contact with police.

"In a way, I got the feeling she's relieved that it's over," Wood said. "She's not mad at me. I think she wanted it out in the open."

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