

SOME RESIDENTS SKEPTICAL MAN IS LANSING KILLER

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Author: JIM SCHAEFER and SUZETTE HACKNEY, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS; Chris Christoff contributed.

He fathered at least four children with three women, refused to pay child support and, with stints in prison, was a stranger to his kids.

At 28, **Matthew Macon** is a flawed man. But a serial killer?

Contrasting images emerg-ed last week in the working-class neighborhoods of Lansing, where police issued the all-clear but some residents are still nervous.

Officials said **Macon** killed five women in just more than four weeks, all single, all beaten and at least one left for dead with mortal injuries. The mayor of Lansing called **Macon** a monster. There are similarities between the crimes **Macon** is accused of today and those he committed in his past. But to two of the women who had children with **Macon** , their reaction is: No way, not him.

"He was never violent or disrespectful towards me," said a 28-year-old woman with an 8-year-old daughter fathered by **Macon** . "He had the utmost respect for me and other women around him. He's a really good person."

A 31-year-old woman who has two children with **Macon** went farther: "I've never even seen him get mad.....We've never even been in an argument."

Both women asked the Free Press not to print their names for fear of harm to their children, who don't know their father is accused of heinous crimes.

Despite their personal history with **Macon** - both women won court judgments against him for child support, one for an arrearage of nearly \$17,000 - the mothers said the accusations hit them hard.

"It hurts. ... I think they would like to think they got the right guy," said the 31-year-old, whose daughters are 8 and 3. "I haven't talked to the kids. My main goal right now is to keep myself and my kids out of this."

The 28-year-old woman, who has four other children in addition to her daughter with **Macon** , said, "I'm just going to wait to see how everything falls before I try to sit down and explain to her what's going on. Because he's always in and out of prison, I've already spent a lot of time trying to tell her stories, like that he's on vacation."

Both women said **Macon** may be an absentee dad, but they don't believe he's capable of the allegations against him. They said he was never physically abusive toward them.

The third mother, who has a 2-year-old son with **Macon** , could not be located.

Words of support from the mothers, childhood friends and even some strangers in Lansing clash with descriptions of **Macon** in court records, which detail a troubled childhood and teenage years in which he committed two sexual assaults.

At age 14, **Macon** admitted he sexually assaulted a girl younger than 13 with a stick in his mother's home. Of the five women killed in Lansing in July and August, at least one, Deborah Cooke, had been sexually assaulted with a stick, according to the Lansing State Journal. **Macon** was arrested Aug. 28 after police said he attacked a 56-year-old woman in her Lansing home on Jones Street. Her dog scared him off. He is charged in that attack, an earlier home invasion and one of the recent deaths. Police said they expect to charge him in at least four more deaths and are looking at his possible involvement in other crimes.

In 2001, **Macon** was sentenced to two to 10 years in prison for robbing a woman of her purse after grabbing her by the throat. He was paroled twice but returned to prison both times on parole violations. After his most recent parole June 26, **Macon** returned to the Lansing area, his hometown.

A month later, community activist Ruth Hallman, 76, was severely beaten in her home. She died of her injuries on July 28. Attacks on four other women followed.

Violent childhood

Violence marred **Macon** 's childhood during the early 1980s. According to court records, when he was about 4, his father sexually assaulted a young stepdaughter in their home. It is unclear whether the father was charged, but court files show the allegation was substantiated. Records describe Jim Henry **Macon** Jr., a factory worker, as a violent alcoholic. He could not be reached for comment.

Court records describe one night in 1984 when Jim **Macon** broke down the front door of his wife's home, a house from which he was barred by court order, and snatched **Matthew Macon** and his brother while their mom gave them a bath. He took both boys out into a thunderstorm, then to his home, records show. Police officers took the boys back to their mother.

Jim **Macon** returned that night and chased his wife down the road swinging a bat and threatening to kill everyone on the street, court records show.

Carletta Jackson, 31, **Macon** 's childhood friend who grew up across the street from him, said his family had its troubles, but nothing that she viewed as extreme. The boy lived with five siblings, including two sisters, and spent time with his grandmother, too.

"He had all those sisters in his family. Why would he want to come out and do something so outrageous?" Jackson asked. "For those boys and that family, women were like gold to them."

Matthew Macon spent his teen years in juvenile detention and, after the sexual assault with a stick, was placed in sexual offender programs.

Family members of a man convicted in the 2005 murder of a Lansing Community College professor have asked police to take another look at the case. Carolyn Kronenberg was sexually assaulted with a remote control and beaten to death in her classroom.

Claude McCollum, an off-and-on student at the college, is serving life in prison without parole for the Kronenberg death. A newspaper report during his trial said DNA found under the victim's nails did not match McCollum's.

Skepticism about guilt

Police have professed that the streets are again safe, yet some still worry.

They offer several arguments: A composite sketch doesn't look like **Macon**. He has yet to be charged in more than one killing. And the last death, Karen Delgado Yates, occurred a day after he was behind bars.

Yates was found Aug. 29, the day after **Macon** was arrested, lying naked on her back in the bathroom of a vacant house on Hickory Street, a few blocks from where Cooke was found dead in a park. Yates died on the way to a hospital.

It is not clear when she was attacked.

Police said the big break in the case came the day before Yates' death, when the woman was attacked on Jones Street. She gave police a description and that led to **Macon**'s arrest that day in Lansing.

Ana Maria Flores, 61, a neighbor walking her dogs last week on Jones Street, said she spoke with the woman just before the assault. Flores, who walks her four dogs twice a day, saw the woman puttering in the yard. They talked about her excitement at having time off work to do things at the house.

As they parted, the woman warned Flores to be careful because a killer was on the loose.

"I went to have lunch with my son, and by the time we came back, we saw all these cops all over our neighborhood," said Flores, who echoed skepticism that police have the right man. "Now if I see a guy coming my way ... I get scared."

As if on cue, her son, Roberto Flores, 37, pulled around the corner in his SUV. He had been out looking for his mother, concerned when she took longer than usual on her walk.

Behind her, the surviving victim's house remained shuttered. The woman likely will have to testify against **Macon**, but she is not ready to publicly talk about the attack.

Reached by phone, she simply said, "I'm doing OK."

Contact JIM SCHAEFER at 313-223-4542 or jschaefer@freepress.com and SUZETTE HACKNEY at 313-222-6614 or shackney@freepress.com. Chris Christoff contributed.

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION:

ERIC SEALS / Detroit Free Press

Linde Tucker, 32, grips a portrait of her sister Karen Delgado Yates, who was found dead Aug. 29 in a house on Hickory Street in Lansing. PROFILES OF OTHERS killed IN LANSING, 12A.

CAPTIONWRITER: **Matthew Macon**

MEMO: LANSING SLAYINGS;SEE RELATED STORIES, PAGE 12A

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