

## SUSPECT MAY HAVE KILLED IN THE PAST - TRIALS ORDERED IN LIVONIA CASE TESTIMONY INCLUDES NEW DETAILS

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Saturday, January 11, 2003

Author: NIRAJ WARIKOO FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Moments after he allegedly executed three children, their father and their grandmother, **John Wolfenbarger** turned to a partner and delivered a chilling postscript, court testimony revealed Friday.

"The last time I did something like this, I smoked 'em," **Wolfenbarger** said, according to a statement that police say they took from Dennis Lincoln, who is charged in the killings with **Wolfenbarger** .

Lincoln's statement has prompted police to look into whether **Wolfenbarger** might have killed others.

Lincoln, 27, was ordered to stand trial for the murders Friday after his preliminary exam in 16th District Court. His attorney, Cornelius Pitts, argued that police might have compelled him to talk by offering to reduce or drop charges against him.

Livonia Police Lt. Ben McDermott testified Friday that no such deal was made.

**Wolfenbarger** , who was ordered to stand trial after his preliminary exam last week, was again the main focus of testimony Friday. According to McDermott, Lincoln told police he wasn't in the Pesce home on Dec. 21 when **Wolfenbarger** allegedly killed the five family members. It was one of the city's most brutal crimes.

Both men, who have histories of armed robbery and burglary, have been charged with five counts of premeditated and felony murder in the deaths of jeweler Marco Pesce, 38; his son, Carlo, 12; his daughters, Sabrina, 9, and Melissa, 6, and Pesce's mother, Maria Vergati, 68, who was visiting from Italy.

**Wolfenbarger** , 31, of Detroit and Lincoln of Flint were believed to have been cellmates at Boyer Road Correctional Facility in Carson City, Mich. Both were paroled last year, according to prosecutors.

The following account is based on what police said Lincoln told them during interviews on the night of Dec. 26 and in the early morning hours of Dec. 27. The account describes new details in the case.

After **Wolfenbarger** was released from prison, he contacted Lincoln and told him he was planning another crime, according to the statement. The only problem, the statement said, was **Wolfenbarger** often had problems opening safes.

" **John** was frustrated," Lincoln said in the statement.

The two then teamed up to scout various jewelry stores in Dearborn and Livonia. They settled on one at the Livonia Mall.

There, while munching on hot dogs, they monitored a jewelry store owner and later followed him toward his home.

At some point, they lost track of the man and decided to drop their plan to rob him. Later, they decided to track Marco Pesce, who owned Italia Jewelers in a Livonia strip mall.

The night of Dec. 20, the men followed Pesce to find out where he lived, according to the statement.

The next day, **Wolfenbarger** called Lincoln and said: "Let's do the Italia jewelry thing," Lincoln's statement read.

On their way to the home, the two men bought a teddy bear from a Hallmark store, a clipboard at Kmart, and ski masks and headbands from Meijer's, where they contemplated a carjacking, according to the statement.

Their plan was to pose as deliverymen bearing a toy animal as a Christmas gift.

They fooled Vergati, the grandmother, who let them in through the garage door.

As they entered, Lincoln said, **Wolfenbarger** reached for a handgun in his pocket.

"Maria looked confused," Lincoln said.

Lincoln then went back to the car and drove to Pesce's jewelry store. About 15 to 20 minutes later, **Wolfenbarger** called.

"I'm cool," he said, according to the statement.

Later, **Wolfenbarger** told Lincoln: "Dad just dropped off the kids," referring to the fact that Pesce had just driven his kids home.

**Wolfenbarger** then forced one of the kids to call his dad and say that one of the jeweler's daughters chipped a tooth and needed help, according to the statement.

Pesce was found later, facedown on his basement floor, along with his mother and three children. Each victim had a bullet in the back, police said.

Lincoln later picked up **Wolfenbarger** , who at one point said clearly: "Five dead."

**Wolfenbarger** then gave Lincoln half of the \$3,200 cash stolen from the Pesces. He also tried to melt down and pawn stolen jewelry, the statement said. Police have said that robbery appears to be the motive behind the murders.

In court Friday, Lincoln's lawyer Pitts often sparred with prosecutors and McDermott. He argued that his client was unfairly arrested and interviewed.

Members of the Pesce and Lincoln families were in the courtroom.

At one point, as Lincoln was led away, an observer shouted out: "Are you happy with what you did?"

Contact NIRAJ WARIKOO at 734-432-6501 or [warikoo@freepress.com](mailto:warikoo@freepress.com).

Memo: SHORTER VERSION RAN IN METRO FINAL EDITION, PAGE 1A

Edition: STATE EDITION

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: JOHN WOLFENBARGER; HOMICIDE ; MULTIPLE ; LIVONIA

Record Number: 0301110233

Copyright (c) 2003 Detroit Free Press