

VICTIMS LED DIFFERENT LIVES, HAD SIMILAR FATE

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Author: DAVID ASHENFELTER and L.L. BRASIER, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS; Staff writers Joe Swickard and Chris Christoff contributed to this report.

Five women. Five different lives. Some seemed already lost, turning tricks to support their drug and alcohol habits. Others were enjoying their later years after years of working and raising children. But mostly, they were alone. And that is how their killer found them - in their homes, in a vacant house, in a desolate park. Police said **Matthew Macon**, a 28-year-old parolee, bludgeoned them during a stealthy, monthlong rampage through Lansing's rougher neighborhoods. So far, he has been charged in one death, that of 64-year-old Sandra Eichorn, but more charges are expected. Police also consider him a suspect in the 2004 beating death of Barbara Tuttle.

Ruth Hallman

A courageous soul

Ruth Hallman, 76, spent much of her life fighting drug dealers who threatened to take over her west-side neighborhood and won accolades for it.

"She was not afraid to shake a finger in somebody's face," said her pastor, the Rev. Dan Johnson. His Grace Lutheran Church is across the street from Hallman's home on West Lapeer Street. A widow with two grown children, Hallman had lived there since 1959.

In the days before her death, her grandson Jason Wood and great-granddaughter Emily, 7, visited from out of state. Hallman's daughter, Carol Wood, a Lansing councilwoman who lived next door, spoke with her mother on July 26, the morning after Jason and Emily left.

"We talked three or four times a day," Carol Wood said. "I told her I loved her and that I would call later."

But midday, police called Wood at her office to tell her that her mother had been injured. When she arrived at the house, she found her mother being placed in an ambulance, her head bandaged and covered in blood. She died of her injuries two days later.

"The same violence that she fought against most of her life is the violence that took her," Wood said. "She was very courageous. People used to ask her if she was my mother. Today, I say, 'I am Ruth Hallman's daughter.' She was a hero. She was an example of how one person can touch many people's lives."

Deborah Cooke

'She gave up caring'

Deborah Cooke, 36, had no known address, no driver's license, no place to call home. She sometimes worked as a waitress but never for long. People who knew her say she had once been married and had a child taken from her because of neglect.

Police officers on routine patrol Aug. 7 discovered her partially nude body in Hunter Park, a place plagued by prostitution and drug use. She had been sexually assaulted with a stick, the Lansing State Journal reported.

Kurt Brunton, 51, a recovering addict living at the City Rescue Mission of Lansing, said he knew Cooke from the streets and last saw her on the Fourth of July, when they watched fireworks together. She was still getting high, he said, and he worried about her.

"She gave up caring about anything," he said. "She had a death wish."

When he heard that another woman had been murdered, he worried it was someone he knew. "Then I learned it was her," he said with a sigh. "She was a good person."

An Eaton Rapids funeral home said Cooke's remains were taken to Washington state by her mother and brother, who could not be reached for comment.

Debra Renfors

She always made do

Debra Renfors, 46, wasn't big on small towns.

Though she enjoyed fishing and hunting near Negaunee in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, family members said she decided to move to Lansing 20 years ago after going to night school to get her GED.

In Lansing, she worked low-paying jobs in nursing homes and restaurants. Family members said she was a good cook. She also had lived in a homeless shelter.

The third of five children, she never married or had children, but she had many friends, family members said.

"Debbie never had an easy life, but she made the best of what she had," said her sister, Renee Brewster of Marquette. "She didn't have much money, but she would give to someone on the street who needed it worse than she did."

Renfors had many run-ins with the law for intoxication, trespassing, begging and prostitution, court records show, but family members knew her as a caring person.

Her father, Ronald Renfors, 73, a retired miner who lives in Negaunee, said he worried about her safety.

Police found Debra Renfors' body about 1 p.m. Aug. 9 when they responded to an emergency at her home in the tidy, 3-story gray house she shared with a boyfriend several blocks north of the state Capitol. She was killed in the same house where her good friend, Barbara Tuttle, 45, was beaten to death in December 2004.

Paula Renfors, who lives on Lansing's south side, said she spoke to her sister the night before her death. Debra Renfors was excited about planning Paula Renfors' upcoming birthday party and moving to a new apartment.

"She didn't do nothing to deserve this," Paula Renfors, 44, said through tears.

Sandra Eichorn

Life was simple, low-key

Sandra Eichorn, 64, had a favorite spot at Harry's Place, a neighborhood bar and grill around the corner from the yellow clapboard house where she was living out her retirement from General Motors Corp.

When she dropped by two or three times a week, she took her place at the bar where she could see the Keno screen and sip a Miller Lite.

"She was just a nice person, always happy," said bar manager Harea Bates. "We all liked her."

So when word came that she was found Aug. 27 bludgeoned in her home on South Genesee Drive, friends and family were filled with anguish.

"Everybody around here took it really hard," said Rick Peters, a fellow GM retiree who knew Eichorn for 20 years. "She wouldn't have hurt a fly."

Eichorn's son, Jerry Lehman, 40, discovered her body.

"It's been real hard," he said Friday as he stood on his mother's front porch, near a box of cleaning supplies and a small statue of a dog with a welcome sign around its neck.

"She was a simple person, and she lived a simple life," he said. "She would have hated all this publicity."

Karen Delgado Yates

Down and out, but upbeat

Karen Delgado Yates, 41, grew up poor in Paris, Ill., the oldest of four children. Her siblings said they survived on welfare and their mother kept them close.

The family moved to California, then Michigan. Along the way, Yates dropped out of high school, married twice and had two children out of wedlock. She lost custody of the children because she couldn't provide for them.

In Lansing, she worked as a nurse's aide in homes to make ends meet.

Despite her difficult financial circumstances, her sister Linde Tucker, 32, of Lansing said Yates stayed upbeat until their mother died in 2005. A year later, after Yates was forced to give up a relative's child she was caring for, Yates lost hope, stopped working and wound up in a homeless shelter. In the weeks before she died, she was charged with accosting and soliciting and drug possession.

Yates' brother Doug Redmon, 38, of Holt said she was trying to get back on her feet. Friends were helping, Tucker said.

About 2:30 p.m. Aug. 29, a real estate agent showing a vacant house on the south side of Lansing to prospective buyers found Yates naked and gasping for air in the bathroom.

On the living room floor was a blood-smearred ceramic toilet lid, a blue latex glove, a condom wrapper and shorts, shoes and a pursue. Yates died on the way to the hospital.

Family members were upset by media reports that described Yates as a prostitute.

"She wasn't the way people are making her out to be," her brother said.

Contact DAVID ASHENFELTER at 313-223-4490 or dashenfelter@freepress.com and L.L. BRASIER at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com. Staff writers Joe Swickard and Chris Christoff contributed to this report.

CAPTION:

ERIC SEALS / Detroit Free Press

On Friday, Sandra Eichorn's son, Jerry Lehman, sits on his mother's porch outside the home where she was found dead Aug. 27.

Debbie Renfors

Sandra Eichorn

Karen Delgado Yates

CAPTIONWRITER: Ruth Hallman

MEMO: LANSING SLAYINGS;SEE MAIN STORY PAGE 1A

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