

## MOM'S DEATH IN FIRE IS TIED TO DAUGHTER'S ILLS

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Brent Chrite remembers raking leaves under a big oak tree **in** the side yard of the home he grew up **in** on Pinehurst **in** Detroit, and hanging out with buddies **in** the den.

"That was just home," he said.

On Friday he and his brother sifted through the rubble of their childhood home. The sight brought them **to** tears, and now they're demanding answers from their older sister.

Chrite's 71-year-old mother, Betty Williams, died **in** a blaze after someone tossed three firebombs through the front windows about 3:30 a.m. Thursday. Police say Chrite's sister may have been the target.

"This **is** beyond cowardly," said Chrite, 46, who flew **to** Detroit late Thursday night from Arizona after hearing of his mother's slaying.

Chrite and his younger brother, Alan, 45, who flew **in** from Denver, both said their sister Susan Chrite has struggled with drug and alcohol abuse and other medical problems for years.

Susan Chrite, 47, had been living **in** the west-side home and had friends **in** the basement at the time of the incident, police said. It was the second firebomb **to** hit the home **in** one week. The first one landed on the lawn.

Neighbors said Susan Chrite screamed **in** the driveway that she knew who was responsible for the fatal bombing.

"Obviously we love our sister, but we know that she had issues," Brent Chrite said Friday. "We're confident that this **is** a direct result of her lifestyle."

Alan Chrite had more trouble controlling his anger.

"She needs **to** tell the police everything she knows," he said.

Police said Friday they were investigating whether the firebombing was connected **to** a drug debt. No one was **in** custody, and Susan Chrite had not been charged with any crime. She could not be reached for comment Friday.

Her brothers said they weren't sure where she was but that Brent had spoken **to** her several times on a cell phone.

Sister a source of consternation

Brent Chrite, who **is** an associate dean at the University of Arizona and once worked at the University of Michigan, said his only argument with his mother during his adult life centered on problems with his sister.

About a year ago, he said, someone came into the home with his sister and stole money, credit cards, antique guns and Betty Williams' car.

"That's really the only time my mother and I have had a falling-out," Brent Chrite said. "I told her that she needed **to** get Susan out of the house."

Williams, who recently retired as a certification coordinator for the Michigan Minority Business Development Council **in** Detroit, couldn't imagine kicking her daughter out, her sons said.

According **to** Brent Chrite, Susan Chrite has a master's degree from Michigan State University **in** speech pathology and worked **in** the insurance business before falling victim **to** substance abuse about 15 years ago. She consistently refused treatment and wound up associating with a dangerous crowd, he said.

"She threw her life away," Alan Chrite said.

Funeral instead of wedding party

Friday was like no other visit home for the brothers.

Instead of sharing time with their mother or visiting friends, they did interviews with homicide investigators, sifted through the charred mementoes of the family home and made funeral arrangements.

They also had **to** identify their mother's body at the morgue.

The brothers were planning a trip **to** Detroit for next weekend for their younger sister, Diane Peoples, 32, a newlywed who was **to** have a reception at the family home. Instead, they plan **to** bury their mother after a funeral at Presentation-Our Lady of Victory Church on Sept. 2.

"That's the terrible irony," Alan Chrite said. "We were all already supposed **to** be here next week with our families."

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Brent Chrite surveys his mother's home Friday, a day after she died **in** a firebomb attack. His older sister may have been the target.

Alan Chrite, who arrived from Denver after his mother's home was firebombed **in** Detroit, says he was due **to** visit next weekend for his younger sister's wedding reception. Now he'll bury his mom instead.

CAPTIONWRITER: Photos BEN SCHMITT / Detroit Free Press

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