

MURDER TANGLE UNRESOLVED AFTER WIFE'S KILLING, COP'S SUICIDE

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, October 22, 2008

Author: BEN SCHMITT and SUZETTE HACKNEY, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Detroit Police Sgt. **David Cobb** went to his grave maintaining his innocence **in** his wife's murder, but law enforcement sources say he masterminded the slaying - and was about to be charged.

Before hanging himself **in** a secluded suburban **park** last month, **Cobb** mailed two letters to his younger brother: one addressed to his family and the other addressed to his **dead** wife. Even **in** death, he professed his love for Rose **Cobb** .

But sources said plea negotiations were under way with two people already charged **in** her death that would have led to murder charges against **Cobb** - charges that would stick this time. **Cobb** knew these charges were looming when he took his life, those sources said.

"It was our belief that it was imminent and inevitable that he was going to be rearrested for the murder of Rose **Cobb** ," said a Detroit police veteran familiar with the investigation. "I think he also knew that."

In an interview with the Free Press, Rose **Cobb** 's family said it views **Cobb** 's suicide as nothing more than an admission of guilt. His father said he did not believe his son would ever be charged.

Rose **Cobb** , 47, was shot four times **in** the head on Dec. 26 while she waited for **Cobb** inside his minivan parked at a CVS on Detroit's east side. Self-professed hit man Vincent Smothers confessed to using a tire iron to smash the window and shoot her as she clutched her purse, silently screamed and tried to claw her way to the back seat.

David Cobb , 38, was arrested April 20, a day after Smothers told police **Cobb** hired him, orchestrated the killing and paid him through a middleman for his services. But the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office declined to charge **Cobb** , citing a lack of evidence. **Cobb** remained suspended without pay from the Detroit Police Department.

"If you didn't do anything then why'd you kill yourself?" said Taneeka Gary, Rose **Cobb** 's 35-year-old niece. "We never got to see him brought to justice."

Cobb 's father, Arthur, said **Cobb** was distraught about his employment status and his inability to support himself. **Cobb** told his father he was toying with relocating to West Virginia to become a blackjack dealer.

"He seemed happy that things had changed because he had been running into a lot of **dead** ends," Arthur **Cobb** recently told the Free Press.

Yet, on Sept. 26, **Cobb** drove his white Nissan 350 to **Dodge Park in** Sterling Heights, walked to a dirt path about 120 yards off the main trail, attached an orange rope to a tree and hanged himself. Two bikers spotted him around 7 p.m. When police arrived, they found **Cobb** 's body - his feet still touching the ground - and a half-empty Absolut vodka bottle and cranberry juice container near him.

Nobody knows why **Cobb** chose **Dodge Park** as the place to end his life on that Friday evening. **Cobb** had stopped by his father's west-side Detroit home four days earlier and spent the night. **In** hindsight, Arthur **Cobb** said his son may have come by to say good-bye.

The letters offer some insight.

"He felt life would not be worth living without Rose there," said Arthur **Cobb** , 67. "I think he wanted to be with her."

Late-blooming love

The couple's love affair began **in** the corridors of Wayne State University, where Rose Bennett was a graduate student, then around 37, and **David Cobb** , who had a bachelor's degree **in** economics, worked as a security guard. He was attracted to the quiet, yet self-assured woman, and the two got to know each other, though she was uneasy about dating a man 10 years her junior.

"She asked me about him being younger, I said, 'He's nice, he's educated, he's got stuff going for him,' " said sister Sheryl Gary, 54. "The next thing I knew, they were getting married."

The couple drove to Toledo to elope, and were seemingly happy for most of their 8-year marriage. By family accounts, Rose **Cobb** took care of her husband, offering support as **David Cobb** planned his rise through the ranks of the Detroit Police Department.

"She was a very sweet woman and she was good for him," Arthur **Cobb** said. "I think she provided an anchor for him."

Cobb acknowledged as much **in** Rose **Cobb** 's funeral program.

"You always supported me. You always believed **in** me. When we first met, I had nothing, not even a car, only my plans and dreams," he wrote. "You saw past that and loved me for who I am and not for what I could offer."

Cobb , who grew up on Detroit's west side, played the viola, wrote poems, enjoyed tennis and excelled at mathematics. He was an accomplished boxer, winning a Diamond Glove amateur bout **in** 1988.

Cobb 's parents divorced when he was **in** middle school. But they lived only two blocks apart and **Cobb** and his two brothers had strong relationships with their parents, Arthur **Cobb** said.

When he joined the Detroit Police Department, **Cobb** declared he would someday be police chief. To further his career, **Cobb** enrolled **in** law school at WSU.

Rose **Cobb** 's family said the marriage began to disintegrate because Rose **Cobb** suspected infidelity, and was **in** tatters by the time **David Cobb** went to trial **in** 2006 on accusations that he solicited a 15-year-old girl for sex.

Cobb was charged with accosting a child for immoral purposes, a felony that carries a sentence of up to 4 years **in** prison, and malicious telephone use, a 6-month misdemeanor.

During the nonjury trial, the girl claimed **Cobb** offered her a ride **in** what appeared to be an unmarked patrol car and asked about her sexual experiences and whether she wanted to go to his house. She said **Cobb** later called her cell phone and sent lewd text messages.

He was acquitted by Wayne County Circuit Judge Bruce Morrow, who could not be reached for this report.

Cobb vehemently denied ever having sex with the girl, but his wife was skeptical.

"She said to me, 'What else is he hiding?' " said Rose **Cobb** 's sister Elizabeth Haygood, 50.

Months before her death, Haygood said, her sister again confided **in** her.

"She said: 'I want a divorce,' " Haygood said.

Police: 'This was a hit'

On the day Rose **Cobb** died, **Cobb** called her and asked her to be dressed and ready to go to the store, according to the confessions of Smothers and alleged middleman Marzell Black. **Cobb** had already schooled Smothers on police interrogation techniques, the importance of getting rid of the gun and wearing gloves and arm sleeves to avoid gunpowder residue, they told police.

Cobb told them he'd be at CVS within the hour. When Black and Smothers arrived at the store on Jefferson and Dickerson, they sat **in** the car as **Cobb** walked by.

" **David Cobb** gave me a slight nod indicating that it was time to go," Smothers said **in** his confession.

Despite the confessions of Smothers, 27, of Shelby Township and Black, 21, of Detroit, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy declined to charge **Cobb** . She said at the time that, even with the statements, Black and Smothers could not be forced to testify.

Worthy declined to comment for this report.

But Detroit homicide investigators said evidence pointed to **Cobb** from the beginning: The minivan was intact other than the broken window, Rose **Cobb** 's purse wasn't stolen and CVS

surveillance cameras showed that **Cobb** entered and exited the store three times - never purchasing anything - before the shooting.

"We could tell this was a hit," the Detroit police source said.

Police said Black introduced **Cobb** to Smothers. **In** his confession, Black said he met **Cobb** through his mother, Sheila Black. **Cobb** first approached Marzell Black about obtaining a gun and later said he needed someone killed.

In his confession, Smothers said he learned **Cobb** was having an affair with Sheila Black.

"I will say that there is evidence that he had a relationship with Black's mother," **Cobb**'s attorney, Elbert Hatchett, told the Free Press. "I can't go any further than that."

Smothers' attorney Gabi Silver acknowledged plea-deal discussions with prosecutors. Her client is facing six murder charges. He and Black are due **in** court Nov. 6 for a final pretrial conference.

"There were discussions but there had never been any agreement at all," Silver said of the negotiations.

Black's original attorney, Todd Flood, who was later replaced by Wright Blake, declined to comment. Blake did not return repeated phone calls for comment.

However, sources close to the case said Black had been offered a deal **in** which he would plead guilty to solicitation of murder **in** exchange for his testimony against **Cobb** and dismissal of the first-degree murder charge. Black would have served a minimum 17 years **in** prison under the deal that was never completed.

Hatchett said he was unaware of any such deal.

Families apart

On Oct. 4, **Cobb**'s distraught family gathered with about 80 people at Detroit's Hartford Memorial Baptist Church for his funeral. They tucked a picture of a smiling Rose and **David in** a four-page glossy funeral program.

" **David** , I love you and I believe **in** you," his father wrote **in** the program. "I believe **in** your love for Rose and that you wanted to be with her."

His mother, Delores **Cobb** , wrote: "I know the heart lives on and you are at peace now with Rose."

Rose **Cobb**'s loved ones said the **Cobb** family remains **in** a state of denial about his guilt.

Following Rose **Cobb**'s shooting, **Cobb**'s behavior was inappropriate, her family said.

"He didn't do anything for her - he didn't see if she had a pulse or if she was breathing," said Adrian Gary, 34, Rose **Cobb** 's niece. "You didn't have a speck of blood on you. You would have asked people: Did they see anything? It's just like the movies, you're going to get down, hold her, holler, scream 'somebody help' or something. He just went back **in** the store to call 911."

Her family members said they had no input **in** planning Rose **Cobb** 's funeral - they wanted her buried but he had her cremated.

To this day, Rose **Cobb** 's family has no idea where her remains or any of her personal possessions are. They didn't go to **Cobb** 's funeral, but did attend the viewing. They said they just had to see his body.

Adrian Gary signed the registry.

She wrote: "The family of Rose Bennett/ **Cobb** . May she now rest **in** peace."

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-223-4296 or bcschmitt@freepress.com. Contact SUZETTE HACKNEY at 313-222-6614 or shackney@freepress.com. Staff writer Christina Hall contributed to this report.

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION:

KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL / Detroit Free Press

Displaying a photo of the late Rose **Cobb** are her family members, clockwise from left, Adrian Gary, 34; Taneeka Gary, 35; Sheryl Gary, 54, and Elizabeth Haygood, 50, all of Detroit. They believe her husband's family is **in** denial over his role **in** her killing.

Funeral programs for Rose **Cobb** , left, and **David Cobb** mark the end of a love gone wrong. Law enforcement sources say he masterminded her slaying - and was about to be charged when he committed suicide.

KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL / Detroit Free Press

Taneeka Gary, 35, of Detroit, left, and her aunt, Elizabeth Haygood, 50, also of Detroit, at their grandmother's home **in** Detroit on Oct. 16. They talked about the suicide of **David Cobb** , who they feel is responsible for the death of their sister and aunt Rose **Cobb** .

CAPTIONWRITER: The late Detroit Police Sgt. **David Cobb**

DISCLAIMER: THIS ELECTRONIC VERSION MAY DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE PRINTED ARTICLE

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS; NEWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: Detroit Police Department; officer crime;homicide; Rose Cobb ;shooting; woman victim;spouse;suicide; David Cobb

Record Number: dfp0000639876

Copyright (c) Detroit Free Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.