

The Super Bowl victim a city forgot - Grieving family waits for answers in unsolved murder of woman killed on busy Detroit street.

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Five weeks after **Super Bowl XL** -- after **the** parties, **the** Rolling Stones, **the** hype about **the city's** comeback -- **the** story of **a** young woman from **a** small town murdered on **a** crowded Woodward Avenue sidewalk lingers like **a** hangover.

Kyle Smith, 24, was one of two homicides during **Super Bowl** weekend -- **a** blip on **the** Detroit homicide chart. Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings described Kyle's murder at **the** time **as** " **a** tragic altercation" and an isolated incident that shouldn't interfere with **the** celebration still unfolding.

Kyle's co-worker, Angela Putnam, complains that she saw **the** shooter, and investigators haven't bothered to show her photos of suspects. Kyle's mother, Vicky Cupp of Tecumseh, says her telephone calls to investigators were not returned for weeks. Finally, **a** detective called her on Friday, after **a** reporter had contacted police, to update her on **the** investigation.

Cupp's daughter, who connected truckers with cargo **as** **a** dispatcher at **a** Taylor trucking terminal, died only **a** couple of hours after her 2-11 p.m. shift ended, at **the** beginning of **Super Bowl XL** weekend. "She'd looked forward to it all year. It was all she talked about," remembers Jessica Schulte, who was supposed to have dinner at Carl's Chop House with her that Saturday.

News accounts that weekend described shoving, **a** scene outside **a** bar, words being exchanged, then gunshots that killed Kyle Smith and wounded her childhood friend Jeff Peterson, **a** robotics technician who lives in Redford.

" **The** newspaper stories made her sound like **a** drunk with **a** big mouth, and that wasn't her," says John Paul, **a** truck driver from Wofford, Md. He describes her **as** " **a** beautiful person, **the** daughter I never had. ... **A** great listener ... someone who could keep you going on **the** road when you were down."

But Kyle's death wasn't unfortunate only for those who knew and loved her -- from **the** Trolley Plaza security guard Latonia Rumbley, who gathered condolences from fellow residents and then drove to **a** Tecumseh funeral home after work, to high school friends like Tim Clymer, who says "she was always there for me, rain, sleet or shine."

Kyle didn't just live in Detroit, she was an ambassador of good will for **the city** , whose enthusiasm for **the** pleasures of urban life captured **the** imagination of her friends. There were breakfasts every Sunday at **the** Marriott, treks to **the** DIA, Saturday night barhops. Kyle was **the** self-appointed tour guide, trying to recruit suburban friends to an urban lifestyle.

"We were talking about renting **a** loft at Kales (Lofts) -- Kyle and me and Jeff (Peterson)," says co-worker Schulte, 24, who lives Downriver in Rockwood and will not move downtown now.

Kyle wasn't cheered by corporate moguls, or courted by **the** host committee. Her death in **the** middle of **a** long-planned celebration was an inconvenience -- to **the city** and its Police Department, to **the** local media and **the** business leaders who wanted to sell **the** idea of **a** rebounding, safe downtown Detroit.

Her death was factored in **as** an event that was sad for **the** family but part of **a** big celebration in **a big city** .

Lost in **the big city**

She grew up in Tecumseh in **a** family of truckers -- her father drove trucks and, sometimes, stock cars; her mom worked **as a** dispatcher. And Kyle was **a** character -- **a** funny, strapping girl who could change **the** oil on your pickup but needed help putting on pantyhose for **a** school dance.

After high school and **a** short stint at Washtenaw Community College, she got **a** trucking job and moved to Detroit. "This small-town life just wasn't for her," says her sister, Carrie Jimenez, 30, who lives in Adrian.

The city was 71 miles from her hometown and **a** world apart. Tecumseh's last murder was in 1997. "I was terrified for her," remembers Cupp.

Within **a** couple of years, all of Cupp's fears about her youngest daughter moving to **the big city** would come true: For weeks at **a** time, Kyle would disappear into **a** netherworld of dope houses and dives, migrating from jobs, often without **a** phone or permanent address.

As Cupp talks at **a** table in her big, homey ranch house outside Tecumseh, she visibly shudders.

Kyle hit bottom and then rebounded, kicking drugs and succeeding at work. In 2003, when Kyle was **a** government witness in **a** corruption case against William "Robocop" Melendez, one of 17 Detroit police officers prosecuted, she appeared to be " **a** sweet person who seemed to have her life together," says Michael Bullatta, **the** assistant U.S. attorney prosecuting **the** case.

"She was **the** consummate survivor," says Valerie Wagner, who worked with her at Discover Trucking in Dearborn. "She had so much adversity and got beyond it. She kicked **the** drugs, she had great friends, she loved her job."

For years, Vicky Cupp had worried about knocks on **the** door in **the** middle of **the** night. But after her daughter's recovery, she no longer worried. That's why she didn't know what to expect when she heard **the** deputy at her door, at 6:45 **a** .m. Feb. 4.

"She was doing wrong at one time, but not now. Not in years. She survived all that and now, to go out like this is crazy," says Cupp, her eyes welling with tears.

Downtown seemed safe

Kyle Smith didn't die because she was **a** small-town girl who couldn't handle **the** streets. But she may have died because, for once, that **Super Bowl** weekend, even **a** streetwise girl could imagine herself to be perfectly safe after midnight on those Detroit streets.

The streetlights were on, Woodward was teeming with people and, to her friends, it seemed **as** if there were police stationed every few feet.

Even her co-worker Putnam, who typically felt fearful in **the city** , says "that was **the** first time I ever felt really safe there."

That Friday night, after **a** couple of drinks at her apartment on **the** 12th floor of Trolley Plaza, Kyle and her three friends walked to Woodward. "She wasn't drunk," insists Putnam. "We didn't go into any bars. They were too crowded."

After seeing **the** lines at **the** bars, two of them decided to go back to her apartment. They changed their minds and were catching up to Kyle and Peterson when **a** young man on **the** crowded sidewalk accused Kyle of jostling him.

He called her **a** name. She swore back at him. Words flew back and forth, **as** Putnam watched 10 or 20 feet away.

"He shoved her to **the** ground, took out **a** gun and shot her, rapid fire, **a** bunch of times. It sounded like **a** machine gun," she says. **As** he tried to shield Kyle, Peterson was hit twice, in **the** leg and abdomen.

Mourning her daughter in sleepy Tecumseh, Cupp finds it difficult to imagine that saying "F-you," to **a** belligerent stranger could end with her daughter's death.

James Tate, Detroit's second deputy police chief, says **the** investigation is continuing. "We want to catch **the** person who did this," he says. "We've got to get that person off **the** streets."

Peterson, who, like Kyle, loved **the city** , is more fearful now. By **the** standards of Tecumseh, with its once- **a** -decade murder rate, Detroit is hard to fathom. "I never hear from **the** police," he says. "I have to call them, and it's like pulling teeth. I can't even explain how it is."

Kyle's story is **a** sad one, not only for her family and friends. Unlike wars, parties aren't supposed to have collateral damage.

What happened to Kyle Smith could have, might have happened anywhere, even -- perhaps -- in Tecumseh.

But it's Detroit's curse to have won **a** reputation for shrugging off cold-blooded, senseless killing. **The** loss of Kyle Smith -- **a** fierce, funny believer in Detroit's rebirth -- lingers because it hurts.

Caption: Carrie Jimenez of Adrian, Kyle Smith's sister, says of **the** slain woman's years in Tecumseh, "This small-town life just wasn't for her." "She was **a** lot of fun, **a** good person," says Greg Koch, 24, **a** high school classmate who works at Basil Boys in Tecumseh. "If you were on her side, she was on your side."

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