

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women



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1997 Femicide Report Women and Children Murdered in Minnesota

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women monitors information about women and children murdered in our state to educate the public about the lethality of woman abuse and child abuse. We pledge to remember the women, children, and family members and/or friends who die each year from domestic violence and the woman and children who die while being used in prostitution - a system of violence against women and children. Women used in prostitution are battered women in need of protection from abuse. We also remember the women and children who were murdered by acquaintances, strangers, or unknown perpetrators.

We challenge communities to respond to battered women and their children by providing safe shelter and advocacy services, prevention education for all elementary and secondary students, laws to protect women and children, effective enforcement of those laws, and aggressive prosecution of all domestic assault crimes and all prostitution crimes targeting perpetrators, pimps, and "johns".

In Minnesota in 1997:

At least 17 women were murdered in cases where the suspected, alleged, or convicted perpetrator was a current or former husband, boyfriend, intimate partner or household/family member of the deceased woman.

At least 5 children were murdered in cases where the suspected, alleged, or convicted perpetrator was their mother's husband, boyfriend, or intimate partner, or was the parent, foster parent, guardian, babysitter, or household/family member of the child.

WOMEN MURDERED:

1. Janel Wonsewicz, 26

St. Paul

January 7, 1997

Janel Wonsewicz's nude and bloody body was found lying in the snow in an equipment yard at 1400 Jackson St. in an undeveloped industrial park owned by the city of St. Paul. She had last been seen at a Minneapolis bar and a pair of bloody shoes, thought to belong to her, were found in a parking lot in Lino Lakes. Janel died of blunt force trauma to the head. Mike Patrick Welsh, 27, has been arrested and charged in the slaying.

2. Catina Faye Henning, 24

Lakefield

March 1, 1997

The Jackson county Sheriff's Department found 24-year-old Catina Faye Henning dead in her southeast Lakefield home. She had been shot once in the face. When Catina did not show up for work on the morning March 1, her mother went to her house but the door was locked. She also noticed Catina's car was missing. Her mother returned later in the day with Catina's grandmother and entered the home and found Catina's body. Lynn Allen Wehmeyer, 29, of Lakefield was charged with the shooting death. He had been convicted of fifth-degree assault against Henning in the past and had also been charged with violating a restraining order. Wehmeyer is the father of Catina's 11-month-old daughter. Wehmeyer fled the state and committed suicide during a chase with South Carolina police.

3. Jamie Sawatsky, 20

Redwood Falls

March 3, 1997

Authorities found 20-year-old Jamie Sawatsky dead in her apartment in Redwood Falls. Jamie was shot with a 44 Magnum revolver found at the scene. Todd Hastings, 30, Jamie's former boyfriend, was also found at the scene with a gunshot wound to the head. Police believe he killed Jamie before turning the gun on himself. Jamie and another woman gave Hastings a ride to a farm in the area, and the second woman told police that Hastings physically assaulted them and wouldn't let them leave the farm. The three returned to Redwood Falls the next afternoon and Hastings let the woman go. She then notified authorities. Todd Hastings died from his wounds.

4. Nancy Marie Hart, 34

Minneapolis

May 29, 1997

Myron Hart had been ordered to stay away from his estranged wife but went to her home, kicked in the door and, while three children watched, fatally shot her and then killed himself. Their 14-year-old son attempted to revive his mother after she had been shot. Nancy Hart and her children had been in a shelter, but had returned home because they believed Myron Hart was in jail. Instead he was living with his mother a block away. This was the third time in the past month that Myron Hart had assaulted and/or threatened his wife.

5. Dorothy Sandberg, 61

Burnsville

June 13, 1997

Dorothy C. Sandberg, 61, was found dead in the doorway of her Burnsville home. Her sister found her body after telephoning her and getting no answer. Neighbors said Dorothy had a "nasty" divorce and that her former husband had moved out last fall. The cause of death has not been established and the investigation continues.

6. Linda Lambert, 30**Crosby****June 29, 1997**

A police officer responding to a disturbance call found Linda Lambert, 30, dead from a knife wound. Lambert was apparently stabbed to death by her boyfriend Lyman Carlson, 47, who committed suicide. The couple was living in Crosby with four children.

7. Brenda Lang, 35**Litchfield****July 4, 1997**

Police found Brenda's truck in a water-filled ditch with Brenda dead in the driver's seat. Kelly J. Maurer was arrested later at a farm 9 miles from the ditch after a farmer reported someone matching his description hiding in an abandoned barn on the farm. Maurer was carrying shotgun shells and a shotgun was found nearby. He later told authorities that he had shot Lang with the gun and the pickup went into a ditch. Maurer was charged with second-degree murder with bail set at \$1 million. Maurer had told his sister that he planned to kill himself and "would be taking someone else with him".

8. Carla Dunn, 28**Minneapolis****July 21, 1997**

Carla Dunn was found stabbed at 417 Lowry Ave. and later died at North Memorial Hospital. Denver Pratt, her live-in boyfriend was arrested at the scene and has been charged with second-degree intentional homicide. Carla's four young children watched as their mother was attacked and stabbed.

9. Tina Simmons, 20**Minneapolis****Body found Oct. 13, 1994
Perp. charged Aug. 3, 1997**

Tina Simmons, 20, and her daughter Reneshia Featherson, 1, were found dead in their apartment when a caretaker noticed a foul odor coming from the apartment. James Thomas got away with murder for almost three years, until his girlfriend told police that he had killed a woman. Thomas was a suspect early on but police lacked evidence to arrest him until last August when he was picked up on a domestic abuse charge. At that time his girlfriend told police that Thomas had told her that he killed Simmons. When police confronted Thomas with DNA evidence he told them he had "freaked out," cut Simmons on the wrist and throat and covered her face with a pillow to stop her from moaning. Thomas said he left and returned the next day and gave Reneshia a bottle, cleaned up the apartment and left. The bodies were found about two weeks later and the baby had starved to death. Thomas is charged with first- and second-degree murder.

10. Rhonda Overall, 23**Minneapolis****September 7, 1997**

Rhonda Overall was shot to death in the head during a domestic dispute. An autopsy revealed that she had bruises on her back, legs, arms, feet, and face. Her left eye was bruised and swollen shut. Overall had a restraining order against Corey Bradford that had recently expired. Bradford had called an aunt who lives out of state and threatened to hurt Overall. Bradford, 27, was charged with two counts of murder in the shooting death.

11. Nirmala Singh, 19**Brooklyn Park****September 8, 1997**

Nirmala Singh was abducted from her Brooklyn Park home at gunpoint by a male friend who wanted a romantic relationship with her. Her cousin, who had come to give Nirmala a ride to work, was also abducted. The abductor, David Dwarka, held a gun to "Mala's" head and told the cousin to drive to their place of work. When they got to the plant he told the cousin to go get Mala's parents (who also work there) but before the cousin got into the building, Dwarka shot Nirmala. Dwarka then shot himself.

12. Linda Boykins, 39**Rochester****September 13, 1997**

Linda Boykins was knocked down by the door of a car that was being driven by her boyfriend, who then ran her over and dragged her a short distance into the street. Witnesses heard them arguing in the minutes before she was run over. Linda Boykins left behind nine children. Kenneth Michael Wilson, 37, was charged with third-degree murder, second-degree manslaughter and two counts of criminal operation of vehicle.

13. Ilka Mondane, 48**Minneapolis****September 29, 1997**

Ilka Mondane was shot to death in her driveway by a man who police said should have been in jail on other charges. Over a prosecutor's objections, bail had been lowered after Douglas Mondane, Ilka's former husband, pled guilty to a gun charge. The gun charge stemmed from a case in which he admitted shooting at Mondane. The alleged perpetrator remains at large.

14. Deonna Jones, 17**Minneapolis****October 3, 1997**

Deonna died of a gunshot wound to the head. She was visiting at her former boyfriend's house, with a cousin and two friends. They had spotted a gun on a bed in the basement and said they wouldn't sit down until the gun was moved. Deonna's former boyfriend and another boy moved the gun and the four girls sat and played Nintendo. They were laughing and joking when a bullet came through the door, hit one girl in the collarbone and Deonna in the head. A friend of Deonna's said that the night before the shooting Deonna had confided that the former boyfriend had threatened to kill her if she didn't break up with her new boyfriend. The 15-year-old former boyfriend is in police custody and a second teenager is being sought.

15. Theresa Carpenter, 19**Calumet****November 27, 1997**

Theresa's former boyfriend, David Pavich, crashed a gathering of several neighbors saying he was looking for Theresa. According to a witness, Theresa and Pavich argued briefly and Pavich began shooting, fatally wounding her. The party host was paralyzed by one of Pavich's shots before another person fatally shot Pavich while trying to disarm him. Theresa Carpenter is remembered for her outgoing and bubbly personality. The teen who shot Pavich, to protect himself and others, acted in self-defense and is not being charged.

16. Sharla Koski**Duluth****December 5, 1997**

When Sharla Koski didn't come to work, a co-worker became concerned and stopped by Koski's home and then called police, who entered the home and found the bodies of Koski and her boyfriend, Daniel Pawlowicz. Police said the victims died of gunshot wounds consistent with a murder-suicide. This murder-suicide was almost three years after he had shot and killed his wife of 30 years. Pawlowicz was cleared of wrongdoing in that death, claiming he shot his wife in the back while cleaning the firearm; four days later he attempted suicide by asphyxiation, but was found and survived.

17. Jane Rhodes, 35**Mankato****Died August 2, 1996
Perp. charged 12/97**

With their two sons asleep and vacation almost over, Jane and Thomas Rhodes set out for a late night boat ride that turned tragic when he said she fell into the lake and disappeared. The death certificate for Jane Rhodes indicates she could have been injured before midnight, saying she received several "soft injuries" and a brain hemorrhage about 9 p.m. that led to the drowning that caused her death at about 12:30 a.m.

