

Harmless vagrant or serial killer? - Prosecutors to outline case today against man accused in attacks on prostitutes in Detroit.

Detroit News, The (MI) - Tuesday, September 19, 2006

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DETROIT -- On a winter day more than a decade ago, somewhere along Mack Avenue, a homeless **Shelly Andre Brooks** saw familiar faces in a stopped car: his mother and brother.

"He was going to walk over to them. They just looked at him and drove off. That's the kind of relationship he has with them," said Detroit Police Detective Michael Carlisle.

Over the past month, Carlisle, the chief investigator in the case, has talked with Brooks about the rotting corpses of aging prostitutes. Police said bodies were found with Brooks' DNA, and in other cases the DNA was found on objects nearby. Some of the women had been raped.

Today, prosecutors are scheduled to outline their evidence against Brooks in a preliminary examination in the deaths of seven prostitutes he is charged with murdering on Detroit's east side between 2001 and June. Brooks, 37, is also suspected in the slayings of seven other prostitutes.

The man who may have confounded Carlisle and others in the Police Department for years has been homeless for most of the past decade, the detective said. Prostitutes and drug dealers on the east side remember the 6-foot-4 Brooks, but never considered him a danger, Carlisle said.

He said that changed when a woman who survived an attack in late June recovered from a coma and identified him. She is the most recent victim in the cases he has been charged with. "If this victim didn't survive, I would have died never arresting this guy," Carlisle said.

Officers have said Brooks confessed to the killings, but it is unclear whether his lawyer, Mark L. Brown, will dispute that. Brown did not return calls for comment Monday.

A man at Brooks' former home on Garland Street who identified himself only as Brooks' brother-in-law disputed the allegations, saying Brooks "wasn't like that." He said Brooks' mother was hospitalized, in part because of the stress on the family over the accusations. She could not be reached for comment.

"I suspected his background would be such," said Chaunci Cline, a community activist who feared early on that a serial killer was at work on the east side.

She was relieved by Brooks' arrest, saying it could offer a measure of relief to the families of the victims.

"These women had children and other family members," she said Monday. "I think this could bring them some closure."

Mohan Nair, a clinical psychiatrist in Beverly Hills, Calif., who has studied serial killers, said such criminals are not typically homeless, as Brooks apparently was.

"A lot of these guys are somewhat better functioning, so being persistently homeless is not usually what seems to go with these guys," he said. Still, many serial killers do have trouble forming normal relationships, and troubles with their mother can trigger rage. Prostitutes are a common target, Nair said.

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy has called Brooks a "quintessential serial killer" who may have projected his anger toward a drug-addicted mother onto his victims.

Whatever her troubles, his mother left their home when he was about 14 and moved in with a boyfriend, leaving Brooks with his maternal grandmother on Garland Street, according to a family member. His grandmother since has died.

Brooks dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, Carlisle said. His only previous serious criminal trouble happened about that time, when he was caught concealing a gun as a juvenile in the late 1980s.

Brooks served no more than 60 days in jail for the crime, and it appears he began living on the streets afterward, Carlisle said.

Brooks worked a succession of menial jobs, at fast food restaurants and a laundromat, until troubles with co-workers led to his departure, the detective said.

"He will tell you he was let go because there was a lot of teasing about him being homeless," Carlisle said. "These things really weigh on him."

To this day, Brooks is proud that he survived on the streets, Carlisle said.

While Brooks scavenged for bottles on the east side, the slain prostitutes were equally luckless. Carlisle said they were the type "who begged for cigarettes."

In the summer of 2001, Sandra Davis, 53, agreed to trade sex for money with Brooks in an abandoned apartment building on St. Paul, police say he told them.

According to his alleged confession, Brooks said he became angry at her and wanted his money back. When she tried to leave, he struck her in the head repeatedly until she collapsed, then dragged her into a closet, court records show. Davis' decomposed remains were not found until Aug. 31, 2001.

Five months later, a man cleaning asbestos from the same building discovered Pamela Greer, 33, whose body wasn't found until a stray dog had eaten her right leg.

In April 2002, Marion Woods-Daniels, 36, was killed with a brick to her head in an alley on Crane Street. She tried to run off with money for a sex act, Brooks allegedly told the police.

Eight days later, Rhonda Myles, 45, was found in a vacant building on Manistique apparently beaten to death with the leg of a wooden chair. Brooks' DNA was found on the weapon, court records show.

Police ticketed Brooks in May 2002 for entering a building without permission, but had no idea that he may have had more serious problems.

In November 2002, a person walking near Mack and Holcomb found the body of 30-year-old Thelma Johnson. Brooks allegedly told police he hit her in the head "a couple of times."

By then, Cline, the activist, believed a serial killer was targeting prostitutes in the neighborhood and posted fliers and held news conferences in an effort to stop the attacks and warn people. Meanwhile, the Police Department's cold case unit was piecing together the separate killings.

In early 2003, the Michigan State Police confirmed that DNA from the same person was present at each killing.

For nearly three years, the killer may have paused.

Carlisle said Brooks told him that he had a job and a steady girlfriend during that time. But Carlisle said he is still investigating other cases that may show that Brooks remained on the prowl in those years, too.

Police did ticket Brooks three times in 2003 for alcohol-related violations, but still didn't suspect him of murder.

After several cases didn't pan out -- the victims were found on the west side or the bodies were left in a different way -- Carlisle learned of a new victim in October 2005.

Melissa Toston, 38, was found in a vacant garage on Flanders, about four days after she died. Brooks later said he hit her with a cement object, cut his hand and searched her purse for money, according to court records.

On June 5, the body of a still unidentified woman was found on Harding about a thousand feet from the house where Brooks' grandmother raised him. Brooks allegedly said he wanted his money back from the woman and choked her to death. A neighbor reported hearing screams in the night about three weeks earlier.

Later that month, Brooks allegedly raped and beat another prostitute in the head and left her to die. She survived and, after she recovered, described her attacker as tall and known as "E," Carlisle said.

The name was just one of several Brooks may have used, but the description led police to arrest him when he entered an abandoned building in late July.

Confronted with DNA evidence that police said tied him to the slayings, Brooks admitted the crimes, Carlisle said.

"He never cried," Carlisle said. "He never showed remorse."

Seven who died

Shelly Andre Brooks is charged with murdering seven prostitutes on Detroit's east side. A woman who survived an attack in June may have helped crack the case. A chronology:

Aug. 31, 2001: Sandra Davis, 53, found at 9700 St. Paul.

Jan. 22, 2002: Pamela Greer, 33, found in the same building.

April 14, 2002: Marion Woods-Daniels, 36, found at 4804 Crane.

April 22, 2002: Rhonda Myles, 45, found at 1382 Manistique.

Nov. 5, 2002: Thelma Johnson, 30, found at Mack and Holcomb.

Oct. 18, 2005: Melissa Toston, 38, found at Chalmers and Flanders.

June 5: Unidentified victim at 2646 Harding.

June 26: A woman survives a rape and beating near Hickory and Linnhurst.

Caption: Brooks

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Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: MURDER-SERIAL ; TRIALS ; DETROIT ; PROSTITUTION ; CHRONOLOGY

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det26483637

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