

5 KILLINGS EXPOSE FAMILY'S TROUBLES - LIVONIA POLICE QUESTION MOM ROBBERY SEEN AS POSSIBLE MOTIVE

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Before five people were killed, there was a split marriage, a personal protection order and a mother addicted to crack cocaine.

Police said they didn't have any answers Monday to why someone shot and killed three generations of a Livonia family, but robbery of the jewelry store owner was a likely motive. The crime, detectives said, was not random.

Someone ransacked the house on St. Martins Street where the five bodies were found.

No one has been arrested in the **killings** of a grandmother, a father and his three children, all of whom were shot Saturday night, Livonia Police Chief Peter Kunst said. Some items are missing from the home, Kunst said.

Police said Marco Pesce, the father, was at the jewelry store Saturday when his son called about 5 :45 p.m. and asked him to come home. Someone at the store called the Pesce home about 7:15 p.m. There was no answer, police said.

Police suspect the family was shot around that time.

Wayne County Circuit Court records show Pesce, 38, had filed for divorce from his wife, Diane, three times, saying she was addicted to crack cocaine and had taken their children to drug houses while she purchased narcotics.

In January, Pesce won a court ruling granting him temporary custody of their children and ordering his wife to move out of their home because of her drug use.

Livonia Police Lt. Ben McDermott, the lead detective in the investigation of the **killings** , said the woman was not a suspect.

He also said: "We have not ruled anything out, yet."

Detectives have questioned her at length and intend to talk to her again, he said.

Family life troubled

Married in August 1989 in Livonia, Marco and Diane Pesce had three children. When they died, Carlo was 12, Sabrina was 9 and Melissa, 6. The fifth victim was Pesce's mother, Maria Vergati, 68, who was visiting from Italy.

Marco Pesce first filed for divorce in January 1998. At the time, he asked for and was granted a personal protection order against her. The court file explaining why he sought the order was not available Monday.

The case was dismissed in April 1998, apparently because the two reconciled.

In September 2000, he filed for divorce again, asking for custody of the children because of his wife's crack cocaine use and saying that she had abandoned her obligations to the children. He removed her name from all of the couple's bank accounts, cutting off her access to their money, court records show.

But the following April, the pair again reconciled and dropped plans for the divorce. Six months later, in October 2001, Marco Pesce filed for the final time.

Diane Pesce fought for custody, saying in court records that she was no longer using crack cocaine. She said she had completed a drug rehab program and had passed drug tests ordered as part of her probation. She was earlier convicted in 16th District Court in Livonia for possession of narcotic paraphernalia, records show.

In January, Wayne County Circuit Judge Kathleen McCarthy ordered Diane Pesce to move out of the home and gave Marco Pesce custody of the children. McCarthy also ordered Diane Pesce to see a psychiatrist and enter an in-patient drug abuse program.

In April, McCarthy granted the divorce. The judge gave the Pesces joint legal custody of the children, but said they must live with their father until they turned 18.

Harvey Hauer, a Bingham Farms lawyer who represented Diane Pesce in the divorce, wouldn't discuss her problems but said he thought the case was settled satisfactorily.

"As far as divorces go, this was far from the worst," Hauer said.

In a separate court matter earlier this year, Marco Pesce successfully petitioned the Livonia Police Department to return to him a .38 Special handgun that police confiscated in October 2001. It was unclear Monday how police got the gun, but it was returned to him in March.

Big dreams realized

The **killings** mark the third time Livonia has been rocked by violence since July. Two men were shot outside a bowling alley this month. In July, two employees of a steak house were killed before the restaurant opened. The city ranks as one of the nation's safest, according to FBI statistics.

On Monday, friends and colleagues recalled details of Marco Pesce's life and pieced together bits of information about his **killings**.

"I'm in total disbelief," said Karen Oliver, a 43-year-old lifelong Livonia resident who runs a hair salon next to Pesce's jewelry store, Italia.

"I cut his hair Friday," she said. "We talked about Christmas gifts we were getting for our kids."

Pesce owned the strip mall -- 7 Farmington Plaza -- that housed five businesses, including the salon and jewelry store. Most knew him as a landlord, but at Hair Studio, stylists and customers knew him as a dapper, savvy entrepreneur with big dreams who loved talking about his children.

"It makes me physically sick to think those babies died," said Debby Benson, a hair stylist.

Sandi Tomlinson said she couldn't believe Pesce's white sport-utility vehicle wasn't in the parking lot.

"It's strange not seeing it," said the manicurist.

Sometimes, his kids bounded out with him. He often dropped in the salon, even when he wasn't getting a trim.

"He was just easygoing and always had time for everybody," Tomlinson said.

The landlord had recently expanded and remodeled the strip mall on 7 Mile and had moved his jewelry business into the mall a few months ago.

Not far from the strip mall, in Pesce's neighborhood, residents recalled his family.

"Nice, normal and neat," was how one neighbor described Pesce and his three kids. They were a close-knit group, well-behaved and active in their church, St. Michael Catholic Church in Livonia. The children attended the church's school.

A reward of at least \$50,000 was being offered for information leading to an arrest and conviction, police said. Anyone with information may call police at 734-466-2470.

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OTHER KILLINGS

July 1968 -- A Lathrup Village family of six was found shot in an isolated cabin in Good Hart, north of Petoskey.

June 1971 -- Eight people were shot execution-style at a drug house in Detroit.

October 1978 -- A son killed his parents and three other people during a six-hour shooting spree in Washtenaw County.

March 1982 -- A married couple and their three children were shot in Allendale, just west of Grand Rapids, by a Nazi sympathizer who called himself a "hit man for God."

April 1982 -- A 16-year-old shot a woman and her four children in Yale in northern St. Clair County. He gave no clear motive for the shootings.

February 1982 -- An estranged husband killed his wife and six of her relatives at the family farmhouse in Clare County.

August 1982 -- Four people, including a 12-year-old, were shot at an apartment on Detroit's east side. Robbery was suspected as the motive.

February 1987 -- A Flint teenager killed six people after a drug deal went wrong.

April 1990 -- Six people were shot at a house on Detroit's east side. A former girlfriend of one of the victims was one of three people convicted.

August 1997 -- A Detroit mother, her two children and her sister's two children were killed on the city's west side. The mother's ex-boyfriend was convicted in all five deaths.

November 1998 -- A teenager shot and killed his parents, his grandfather, his brother and his brother's girlfriend in Dalton Township, north of Muskegon.

Caption: Photo WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press; Photo

A note at Italia jewelry store tells customers the business is closed indefinitely. Five people, including the owner, Marco Pesce, 38, were found dead in his Livonia home Sunday. **FAMILY OF 5 WHO DIED IN LIVONIA**

Police say all were shot in a home on St. Martins Street. Marco Pesce Maria Vergati Carlo Pesce, 12 Sabrina Pesce, 9 Melissa Pesce, 6

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