

# Family, police work to put murder-suicide to rest

BY KEVIN BROWN  
STAFF WRITER

Hiding under her bed, Janette Madsen's 15-year-old daughter told the 911 operator on Wednesday, "My mother's just been shot... several times."

"Who did it?" the operator asked.

"I think my dad."

Police played the tape of the 5:40 a.m. call from the home on Paciocco Court in Plymouth Township for reporters on Thursday — just hours after Madsen's estranged husband, Donald, committed suicide after a police standoff in Northville.

Donald Madsen, 41, told police over his cellular phone on Wednesday he'd shot his wife, a teacher, over a custody fight. The couple was in court seeking a divorce.

After locating him in his condo on Seven Mile Road near Sheldon, area police surrounded the unit, cut off his phone and electricity, and eventually found him dead in his Cadillac after he shot himself.

Don Tappan, Janette Madsen's brother, said after the standoff, "We're all relieved it's over."

"The children can grieve the loss of their parents and get on with their lives," he said Thursday. "They're still basically in shock; we've had a few tears."

Asked if Donald Madsen had demonstrated behavior that suggested he could murder, Tappan said no.

**Thanked counselors**

"I don't want to sit up here and trash the father of my niece and nephew," he said.

He thanked counselors who've talked with the Madsens' children, ages 15 and 8, during the ordeal.

While Donald Madsen sounded remorseful in some conversations Wednesday afternoon with police, Plymouth Township police Chief Carl Berry said that Madsen also issued threats — to himself, Berry, the judge who was presiding over the divorce, and others.

After leaving a shotgun at the

scene of his wife's shooting, Madsen was holding a 9 mm automatic gun and a .22 caliber pistol.

Not long after the shooting, police were able to determine he was in a three-mile radius north of Plymouth — even though he told some friends over his cellular phone that he was at another residence in Brighton.

"We think he was at his condo in Northville the whole time," Berry said.

By 4:30, the calling stopped — Madsen decided to take a nap.

After waking, "He would call many times, angry and despondent, saying he did not want to go to jail."

Police agreed to Madsen's wish to see his children without being handcuffed — but this never happened because he didn't turn himself in to police.

Janette Madsen's divorce attorney, Garth Jackson, said that while Donald Madsen maintained the shooting was over a denial of his rights to see his children, this wasn't true.

**Had visitation rights**

"He had spent three weeks with the children in Australia in November 1992," Jackson said, adding Madsen also had weekly visitation rights.

It was 6:30 a.m. Thursday after an all-night stand-off with police that they found Donald Madsen had used a gun to kill himself as he had killed his estranged wife Janette 24 hours earlier in Plymouth Township.

In between the two shootings, Madsen admitted to his wife's shooting in calls to local police and to Detroit television station TV-2.

A crying Madsen told a Detroit TV anchorman from his condominium in Northville Township, "I died eight months ago, when the divorce started."

"There were three loud gunshots," said Janette Madsen's next-door neighbor Sharon Krause.

The shooting happened on Paciocco Court, just north of Powell Road and west of Beck, in a pale

gray house with dark gray accents. It is typical of the upscale dwellings that have sprouted on Plymouth Township's west side in recent years.

Krause said that in the year she lived next door to the Madsens, the husband and wife did not get along.

In February, she said, police were called to the house during a domestic dispute the couple were having.

In talking with the victim in recent days, "She said (her husband) had just lost his job and was going to do something," Krause said. He was reportedly the manager of a Livonia electronics firm.

Krause said the victim told her that by the divorce agreement, she was to leave by June 2.

Of the shooting, Krause said, "I really was not surprised; he liked to torment her."

Krause said the husband once took the victim's Ford Explorer, leaving her with no transportation.

The judge handling their divorce case then ordered Donald Madsen to give her his red Porsche, the victim told the neighbors.

"He said it wasn't operating; then for three days in a row, he revved it in her driveway," Krause said.

The victim told the neighbors that to further torment her, her husband had cut telephone wires and had taken everything with him when he moved out.

**'A special teacher'**

Janette Madsen was a special teacher, said Sheri Kruger, principal of William Ford Elementary School in Dearborn, where the flag flew at half-staff Wednesday. Madsen had taught for 18 years in that district.

"She was very committed to the idea of parental involvement," Kruger said Wednesday morning.

"Just yesterday she came in in the afternoon — she had been in court in the morning and the day before — and did a parent workshop for parents that would have kids coming in in the fall."



Victim's brother: Don Tappan, brother of shooting victim Janette Madsen, challenged statements Donald Madsen made to the press.

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