

# **LEST DEATH DO US PART: THE BROWN FAMILICIDE CASE**

## **A MOCK REVIEW OF CHILD MALTREATMENT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITIES**

### **SUMMARY**

John Brown battered his wife, Mary Brown, throughout their married life. On December 15, 2000, John murdered Mary and their two sons before killing himself. Their surviving 7-year-old daughter now lives with Mary's parents.

John and Mary married on June 21, 1983, when he was 18 and she was 16. In 1991, Mary left him to live with her parents in a small house in a remote rural community. One week later, John found her there, ordered Mary and their three children into his truck and returned home. At that time, Mary pleaded with her parents not to call the Rural County Sheriff's Department. John continued to terrorize his wife over the next decade, with Mary becoming increasingly isolated.

On January 19, 2000, Mary waited until John became drunk and passed out. Mary then walked with her children to a neighbor's house to call her father. Her father went to get her and the children and arranged a secret meeting with a state trooper. The next day, John was arrested on charges of child abuse, but the charges were later dropped reportedly due to lack of physical evidence. Mary moved with her children to a domestic violence shelter and then into her sister's house. She then obtained a restraining order from the court to limit John's access to her. Mary and the children began to adjust to a new life. She planned to divorce John and pursue a GED through a local community college. The divorce was due to be finalized within the week or so following the killings.

### **NEWSPAPER ARTICLE - *Rural Herald* - December 16, 2000**

#### *Man goes on rampage, killing wife, their two sons, and himself*

The Rural County Sheriff's office reported that yesterday at 6:44 P.M., John Brown murdered his wife and sons, critically injured his daughter, and then committed suicide. The report indicates that Mr. Brown met his wife, Mary, and their three children, Billy, aged 14, Brandon, aged 10, and Susie, aged 7, in the local Wal-Mart parking lot to exchange the children for an overnight stay. Witnesses reported that a brief family conversation took place and then Mr. Brown revealed a .38 caliber revolver and began firing it at his family until it was out of ammunition. He reloaded the revolver and delivered a fatal shot to his temple. Mrs. Brown and her sons received fatal wounds to the head and chest; daughter Susie was shot in the stomach and remains in critical condition.

Court records indicate that that the couple married in 1983. Cindy Matthews, a friend of the family, recalled that Mrs. Brown confided that her husband was good to her in the early days of their dating, but that "the day after our wedding he changed...He became my boss. I had to do what he said." According to Mrs. Brown's mother, Kathy Maxwell, "(John) didn't allow them to talk to anybody. He told them who to speak to. He wouldn't let (Mary) visit nobody." Micky Pratt, whose sister married into the Brown family, commented that, "(John) kept them holed up at home like cattle. It seemed like one of the few ways (Mary) got out was when John went hunting." At

one point Mrs. Brown reportedly told her sister Norma Cole, "I ain't got no place to go, no place to stay, no way to make it."

The Brown family lived in a remote rural area. Their house, like other houses in the area, had no running water. The nearest road was a mile away. Mrs. Brown received a monthly disability check and welfare payments. School administrator Jeff Astle commented that Mr. Brown had driven a school bus in Rural County for 15 years and that he "seemed a nice enough guy."

Approximately eleven months ago, Mary Brown left her husband and filed for divorce. In March, she obtained a restraining order against her husband, restricting his contact with her. In April, the Court awarded Mr. and Mrs. Brown with temporary joint custody of their three children, which provided Mr. Brown with weekend visitation privileges. Since that time, the family met twice weekly in the Wal-Mart parking lot to exchange their children for weekend visits.

Funeral services for Mrs. Brown and her sons will take place tomorrow at 11:00 A.M. at the Clark Funeral Home. Mr. Brown's funeral service will be at the Pulliam Funeral Parlor tomorrow at 1:00 P.M.

## **AGENCIES/ENTITIES/PEOPLE**

**Arrest** John Brown - Public intoxication, 1984  
**Records:** Misdemeanor assault, 1991  
Unlawful discharge of weapon, 1998  
Drunk and disorderly conduct, 2000

Mary Brown - Shoplifting, 1999.

**Police:** Neighbors reported local sheriff's deputies made a number of visits to the Brown residence over the years. Neighbors knew of the domestic violence directed at Mary and had reported it to deputies on several occasions. However, deputies only arrested John Brown for drunk and disorderly offenses. The dispatch log at the sheriff's office classified the calls as drunkenness and disorderly conduct.

**Court:** Judge Hannon issued an emergency order of protection against John Brown on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000 after hearing testimony from state trooper Rory Callaghan, victim's advocate Mary Jones, and Mary Brown herself. The order became permanent on March 20<sup>th</sup>, restraining John Brown from contact with his wife. Judge Hannon warned Mary not to breach the terms of the order by inviting John to her new residence or to meet with John.

In February 2000, Mary filed for divorce. Mary and John separately petitioned for sole custody of their three children. On April 1, 2000, Judge West awarded temporary joint custody to Mary and John.

**Probation:** Mary was put on probation in 1999 for her shoplifting offense. She told her probation officer that she needed to steal food to survive because her husband drank away the little money they had. John was also on probation in 1998 for unlawful discharge of a weapon.

- Family/  
Friends:** Mary's parents knew of their daughter's victimization during the early 1990s but had lost touch with her except for Christmas time when they exchanged cards and the occasional telephone call. Mary's mother said she did not know that things were "still as they once were."
- Child  
Protective  
Services** A CPS caseworker interviewed Brandon Brown after the boy had "inadvertently" shared with his teacher he had received three lashes of the belt from his father. The caseworker took a statement from Brandon and followed up with John. Charges were filed and then dropped.
- Domestic  
Violence  
Shelter** The shelter staff had detailed information regarding Mr. Brown's abuse of Mrs. Brown and the children. They helped her develop a safety plan and provided on-going support for her.

## MEDICAL INFORMATION

- Billy Brown:** Review of medical history unremarkable; healthy, 14 year old male. Autopsy findings – Close range gunshot wound of forehead surrounded by soot and stippling. Bullet track represents through and through perforation of brain with posterior exit wound. No other recent or remote trauma. Toxicology screen negative.
- Mary Brown:** Review of medical history notable for multiple emergency room visits for injuries inadequately explained by reported histories. Three separate fractures (jaw, right radius, left wrist) between 1994 and 2000. One emergency room visit was for a self-induced abortion. Autopsy findings – An intermediate range gunshot wound above right eye is surrounded by widely scattered stippling and exits just above the right ear. A second gunshot wound perforates the right hand. Postmortem x-rays confirm presence of old fractures as noted above and reveal additional healed fractures of the right 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> ribs previously undiagnosed. No products of conception in uterus. Cervix shows moderate to severe dysplasia with focal carcinoma *in situ*. No other gross or microscopical pathology. Toxicology screen reveals presence of *Xanax* at low levels.
- Brandon  
Brown:** Review of medical history unremarkable; healthy 10 year old male. Autopsy findings – Indeterminate range gunshot wound of left side of back with perforation of the left lung. Deformed, medium caliber bullet recovered from left chest cavity. Postmortem x-rays reveal a healed, paired fracture of the distal right radius and ulna. No other recent or remote trauma. Toxicology screen positive for ephedrine.
- John Brown:** Autopsy findings – Tight contact gunshot wound of right temple with perforation of skull and brain. Moderate emphysema and early cirrhosis of liver are the only additional findings. Toxicology reveals a blood alcohol concentration of 0.14 mg/dl and the presence of cannabinoids.

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TEAM CASE REVIEW

1. List the red flags or danger signs that indicated this was a lethal or high risk situation. Put an \* by the 3 that your group thinks were the highest risk factors.
- a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What agencies, people, or entities knew that violence was going on in this family? In what ways did they assist or fail to assist this family?

Agency/Person/Entity: \_\_\_\_\_  
How they assisted or failed to assist: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Agency/Person/Entity: \_\_\_\_\_  
How they assisted or failed to assist: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Agency/Person/Entity: \_\_\_\_\_  
How they assisted or failed to assist: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Agency/Person/Entity: \_\_\_\_\_  
How they assisted or failed to assist: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How preventable was this murder/suicide?

0      1      2      3      4      5  
Not at all    Totally

4. If you believe this murder/suicide could have been prevented, list 5 ways:
- a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_