

## Relatives of U.S. Judge Slain in Chicago Home - White Supremacist Had Ordered Judge Killed

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Author: Peter Slevin, Washington Post Staff Writer

Last year U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow spent weeks under federal protection after a white supremacist in her court threatened to have her killed. But when the suspect was behind bars, Lefkow felt safe enough to drop the security detail provided her by the U.S. Marshals Service.

On Monday night, Lefkow returned from work to discover the bodies of her husband and her elderly mother in the basement of her home on Chicago's North Side. Both had been shot. On Tuesday, as marshals were again providing Lefkow with around-the-clock protection, and dozens of detectives and FBI agents began searching for a motive and suspect in the homicides, speculation centered on the followers of Matthew Hale, convicted last year of obstruction of justice and ordering Lefkow's killing.

Lefkow had enraged Hale and his supporters when she ordered Hale's group to change its name after it lost a trademark-infringement suit to an Oregon church with a similar name, and later held Hale in contempt and fined him \$200,000. More than once since then, someone posted the judge's address on the Web and pasted in a biography and photograph of her husband, Michael Lefkow, 64, a lawyer.

Careful not to push the evidence too far too fast, a police supervisor said Tuesday that investigators are looking in "many, many directions."

"The case is too new. The evidence is still being worked up," said James Molloy, chief of detectives. He said police found much to study at the crime scene near Chicago's lakefront.

Molloy said the killing took place sometime between 10:30 a.m., when Lefkow's mother, Donna Grace Humphrey, 89, took a call from one of her granddaughters, and about 5:30 p.m., when Lefkow returned home. At 4 p.m., one of the Lefkows' four daughters hurriedly entered the house to grab a gym bag, but did not see her father or grandmother before she left for a workout.

At the federal courthouse, where Joan Lefkow had worked since her 2000 appointment to the bench by President Bill Clinton, disbelief defined the day.

"She is one of the loveliest, most principled human beings who has ever walked the face of this Earth," said one friend, who described the Lefkows, married in 1975, as "caring and compassionate people. They are family-oriented people, very religious people, but not in a judgmental way."

Because of the notoriety of the Hale assassination plot, few seemed to believe the killings could be a coincidence. In the upscale, tree-lined Edgewater neighborhood where Lefkow lives, Eddy McDonough said he had seen squad cars parked outside the judge's house in the past. He considered it a targeted attack.

"This is a hit," McDonough said. "Most people living here don't feel threatened, since this wasn't aimed at them, but we're in shock."

On average, about 700 threats are made against court officers each year, according to the Marshals Service, which secures federal courthouses across the country. In 2003, marshals managed special security for 20 federal judges and prosecutors.

If the Chicago killings are eventually connected to Lefkow's work on the bench, it will be the first time that relatives of a federal judge have been killed. Three judges have been assassinated.

Mark Potok, chief of the hate group monitoring project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, said he believes it is "highly likely that a follower or sympathizer of Matt Hale is responsible. This is a group with a really remarkable record of criminal violence. The members of this group have been involved in murder, bank robbery, innumerable beatings and aggravated assaults."

Hale is now being held in a federal prison under rules that severely restrict his contact with outsiders and is scheduled to be sentenced for the murder solicitation conviction April 6.

He became widely known in 1999 when a supporter named Benjamin Smith went on a racially motivated shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana, killing two people, including former Northwestern University basketball coach Ricky Byrdsong, and wounding nine others.

Hale, who called himself the Pontifex Maximus of his self-styled World Church of the Creator, said Smith was a martyr "who gave his life for us." After Lefkow ordered the group to change its name, Hale said a "state of war" existed between the judge and the organization.

Hale's dispute with Lefkow began with a civil lawsuit filed by an Oregon church with a similar name that feared people would link it to Hale's racist message. Lefkow sided with Hale, but an appeals court overruled her. When Hale and his colleagues refused to stop using the name, she ordered them held in contempt.

While the case was working its way through the courts, prosecutors said later, Hale -- who called Lefkow "corrupt" and a "probable Jew" -- asked his security chief for Lefkow's home address and tried to persuade him to assassinate her. The security chief was a federal informant who secretly taped Hale soliciting the judge's murder.

White supremacists viewed Hale as a political prisoner and raised money for his defense. Slurs against Lefkow and her family were common. A relatively mild one called her a "sycophantic cow" who did the "Jews' bidding."

At least three times, Potok said, the Lefkows' home address was posted on the Web.

Lefkow refused to pass the trademark case to another judge, writing in 2003 that Hale should not be allowed "to intimidate a judge off the case." She noted that Hale had said he wanted to "exterminate" her, but said his "is a one-sided war in which this court is not embroiled."

Besides, she wrote, she had not seen or heard of "any suspicious conduct by any member of World Church in or around her home, her office or places that her immediate family members frequent."

Hale's conviction in April 2004 brought a sense of relief to the judge and her family. Michael Lefkow thanked the law officers and friends who had helped the Lefkows and said, "We hope Mr. Hale will repent of his advocacy of evil."

Staff writer Christopher Lee contributed to this report, as did special correspondent Kari Lydersen in Chicago, news researcher Madonna Lebling and research editor Lucy Shackelford.

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