

Sketches of Men Are Released In Inquiry Into Double Killing

New York Times, The (NY) - March 3, 2005

Author: JODI WILGOREN ; Ariel Hart contributed reporting from Atlanta for this article.

Abstract: Chicago police release composite sketches of two men they want to question in connection with execution-style slayings of mother and husband of Federal District Court Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow; authorities are questioning sympathizers of Matthew Hale , white-supremacist imprisoned for soliciting Judge Lefkow's assassination in 2003; authorities said to be pursuing telephone call made to judge's home from correctional facility on night before murders; photos (M)

The police released composite sketches Wednesday night of two men they want to question in connection with this week's execution-style slayings of a federal judge's mother and husband, in an investigation that has included interviews with relatives, friends and sympathizers of a white-supremacist imprisoned for soliciting the judge's assassination.

The authorities would not say where or when the two men, one in his mid-20's and the other age 50 to 60, were seen or whether they were suspects or witnesses. The younger man, described as 5-foot-8 to 6 feet with a medium build, is shown in the sketch to have narrow eyes, heavy brows, a flat nose and close-cropped strawberry-blond hair; the elder, 5-foot-10 to 6 feet with hazel eyes, has a large build and was last seen wearing a black watch cap, dark green coveralls and a grayish/green coat, the police said.

The police refused to discuss whether the two men might be connected to the hate groups that have been a prime focus of the investigation. The mother and brother of Matthew Hale , the man convicted last year of plotting the murder of the judge, Joan Humphrey Lefkow, said Wednesday that federal agents had asked them whether Mr. Hale might have communicated something from prison in code. In addition, a white-supremacist radio host who said in 2003 that it would be illegal but not wrong to kill Judge Lefkow, said Wednesday that federal agents had also questioned him about his whereabouts at the time of the Monday killings.

Mr. Hale's mother, Evelyn Hutcheson, recalled the agents asking Tuesday at her home in East Peoria, Ill., "Does he have a code, did he tell me something in code, which is about the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

She added, "It's obvious they're trying to link Matt to the killings."

Mr. Hale's brother David, 36, who has spent time in prison on charges related to domestic violence, told the authorities that he came home from his maintenance job at 1:30 p.m. Monday, took a nap, ate dinner and watched a movie with his children, then went to a local convenience store that has a security camera.

"They know where I was, and I've been cleared," David Hale said Wednesday. "They asked if there was an encrypted code, a cryptic message or an encoded thing. I told my mother not to answer. They said they were going to leave no stone unturned."

According to a report in Wednesday's Chicago Sun-Times, the authorities are also pursuing telephone calls made to Judge Lefkow's home Sunday night from a correctional facility. Prison and police officials refused to discuss the matter, but one of the judge's daughters confirmed that her mother picked up the phone to find an unknown prisoner on the other end the night before she found her husband, Michael F. Lefkow, and her mother, Donna Humphrey, dead of gunshot wounds in their basement.

"Somebody called and you have to accept the charges, and my mom did because, I don't know, she's my mom and she's so trusting," Maria Lefkow, 27, said Wednesday morning.

Judge Lefkow, 61, spoke publicly Wednesday for the first time since the killings, telling The Sun-Times that she was "just furious" that the killings might be linked to her job.

"I fear that to be true, and that's the great tragedy of it," Judge Lefkow said, according to an article posted Wednesday evening on The Sun-Times Web site. "If someone was angry at me, they should go after me. It's not fair to go after my family."

In a separate interview with The Chicago Tribune, Judge Lefkow said she knew that her appointment to the federal bench in 2000 put her at risk, but never considered that it endangered her loved ones.

"I don't know of any other instance when the attack was on the judge's family, not themselves," she said, according to The Tribune Web site. "I think we all sort of go into this thinking it's a possibility, but you don't think it's going to happen to you because it's so unthinkable."

She declined to discuss details of the investigation but said the crimes were particularly cruel because her husband was on crutches after surgery on his Achilles tendon and her 89-year-old mother used a walker.

"They didn't have a chance," The Sun-Times quoted Judge Lefkow saying. "It was just cold-blooded. Who would do this? I'm just furious."

The Lefkows have four daughters, and Mr. Lefkow has a fifth from a prior relationship. The judge said the family, secluded under armed federal guard, has been sobbing and laughing over old memories, heartbroken that he would miss his daughter Helena's summer wedding.

"He had gotten himself a tux to wear to the wedding, and was so looking forward to walking his daughter down the aisle," Judge Lefkow told The Sun-Times. "And now he won't be able to do that. The daughters cry and say, 'I never had a grandfather, and I wanted my children to have a grandfather.'"

As the investigation continued, some of Judge Lefkow's colleagues called for heightened security around those involved in the criminal justice system, not just inside the courtroom but also at home. The United States Marshals Service provided Judge Lefkow with a protective detail during Mr. Hale's trial last year for plotting her murder, but disbanded it after a few weeks.

"What happened was a Sept. 11 for the judiciary, fortunately on a smaller scale," said Judge Wayne R. Andersen of the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. "When you take this job, most of us probably step across a line where we feel we're not going to worry about it because what can you do? The fact that family members were attacked here creates a feeling with the people we live with that they're in jeopardy, so it makes us say what can we do to shave the odds looking forward."

Judge Andersen said the government should consider ways to cleanse public records of identifying information about judges and their relatives. Judge Lefkow's address and family photographs were posted on white-supremacist Web sites.

Ms. Hutcheson said that in addition to her and her son David, the F.B.I. had interviewed Kathleen Robertazzo, who has been close with her son Matt for years. The agents, Ms. Hutcheson said, asked about frequent telephone calls between the two women. Ms. Robertazzo did not return telephone calls or answer the door at her home in Hoffman Estates, a Chicago suburb.

"The F.B.I. went to her house last night and they frisked her; she felt very intimidated by it," Ms. Hutcheson said of Ms. Robertazzo, who organized a speech by Mr. Hale at her local library in 2001. "They wanted to know why we talk so much on the telephone. We talk because both of us love Matt, and we comfort each other, we console each other."

Hal Turner of North Bergen, N.J., the host of a short-wave radio program that has vilified Judge Lefkow, said he was also visited by F.B.I. agents on Tuesday.

"They wanted to know if I had any information about this killing, and they wanted to know where I was when the killing took place," Mr. Turner said, adding that the same two agents had visited him about twice a month for a year regarding his Web site or his radio show.

This time, he said, "there was an urgency to their approach."

"No small talk, no casual conversation, very direct, very businesslike, and rather stern," he said.

Caption: Photos: Matthew Hale , second from left, in January 2003, shortly before his arrest for plotting a judge's murder.; Evelyn Hutcheson, Matthew Hale 's mother, at his trial in 2004. (Photographs by Jenny Warburg)

Edition: Late Edition - Final

Section: National Desk

Page: 14

Page Column: 01

Page Subsection: A

Index Terms: Murders and Attempted Murders; Fringe Groups and Movements

Location(s): Chicago (Ill)

Personal Name(s): Wilgoren, JodiLefkow, Joan Humphrey (Judge)Lefkow, Michael FHumphrey, DonnaHale, Matthew

Dateline: CHICAGO, March 2

Record Number: 2005-03-03-459984

Copyright (c) 2005 The New York Times Company