

'This family is shattered' - Hundreds gather to mourn a judge's husband and mother, killed in what many fear was an act of terror against the U.S. justice system

Chicago Tribune (IL) - March 6, 2005

Author: Matt O'Connor and Rex W. Huppke, Tribune staff reporters. Tribune staff reporters Ana Beatriz Cholo, Andrew Zajac and freelance reporter Sean D. Hamill contributed to this report.

In preparing a eulogy for the murdered husband of a federal judge, Rev. Jacqueline Schmitt struggled more than she has in 25 years as an Episcopalian minister.

How do you speak with love and empathy to friends and family members robbed of a loved one, and still capture the broader implication of an attack on a judge's family?

"This whole assault and who did it does threaten American justice," said Schmitt, who was to preside Saturday over the funeral in Evanston of U.S. District Judge Joan H. Lefkow's husband. "It's a terrible assault on the principles of American democracy and openness."

Though police still have no motive for the execution-style slayings of attorney Michael Lefkow and Joan Lefkow's elderly mother, Donna Humphrey, sources said the investigation is focusing primarily on people connected to past cases the judge has heard.

The judge found her husband, 64, and her mother, 89, shot to death Monday night in the basement of their Edgewater home.

The deaths have resonated across the country, forcing members of the judiciary and others to consider the scope of such a personal tragedy and the ramifications of such an attack.

A wife lost her husband and her closest friend. Five daughters were abruptly left fatherless, with only memories of a man who rarely went anywhere without a Brooks Brothers suit, a hat and a tie.

And if it is learned that this attack is the result of Lefkow's role as a jurist, then the murders are nothing short of an act of terror against the United States' judiciary.

"Any act where you kill somebody because you're mad at somebody else is an act of terrorism," said Judge William Bauer, 78, of the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals.

The investigation has focused on followers of white supremacist Matthew Hale, 33, who was convicted last year of soliciting the murder of Joan Lefkow after she had found Hale in contempt of court for refusing to comply with a copyright-infringement lawsuit.

A law-enforcement source familiar with the case said that although officials are focusing on white supremacists, they have not discounted that the killers might be an "aggrieved or disgruntled" party from another of the judge's cases.

Evanston police have been working with other agencies since Wednesday on security coverage for the funeral service and procession. Police Chief Frank Kaminski said the preparation is like nothing they've ever handled, possibly on par in terms of security and resources with a visit from the president.

Kaminski said his officers--who will be familiar with sketches of two potential suspects--will be joined by federal marshals, state police and Cook County sheriff's

officers. Parking will not be allowed within several blocks of St. Luke's Episcopal Church for several hours before and after the service.

Judges from across Chicago and the country planned to attend and pay respects to their colleague, whose response to the murders has been nothing short of defiant. Lefkow insists she'll return to the bench, and other judges join her in their refusal to allow this attack to keep them from their role as arbiters of justice.

"It has affected me personally much more in the sorrow that I feel for this family than in any kind of apprehension for my personal safety or my family," said U.S. District Senior Judge John Grady, 75, a 29-year veteran of the federal bench. "It's not going to change my behavior in any way. There's some risk involved in the job. It's certainly no more risky than many other jobs."

One of the Lefkows' daughters said it was never an option whether her mother would go back to work, or whether the daughters would move on with their lives.

"My dad would not have allowed that," she said resolutely. "He wouldn't want our lives to be stopped by this senseless thing."

Members of St. Luke's have prepared Communion bread for more than a thousand people, though the 99-year-old gray limestone church at 939 Hinman Ave. can seat only 500. Church officials said overflow crowds would watch the service on closed-circuit television in anterooms.

Richard Webster, the organist and choirmaster at St. Luke's for 30 years until he left in 2003, is a close friend of the Lefkow family. He was to return and play the church's pipe organ during the service, accompanied by a choir 100 strong.

He said the service would open with a hymn containing the lyric "for all the saints, who from their labors rest." Webster's reason for that selection was simple: "I think Michael was a saint."

Nearly five years ago, Webster performed as the Lefkows renewed vows on their 25th wedding anniversary. The family also had asked him to play at the coming wedding of one of the Lefkows' daughters.

"This family is shattered, and I wanted to do all I could to help them through this," Webster said. "The point of this service is to offer comfort to these people who are experiencing unimaginable grief, and to offer a message of hope to the family, to the community and to those whose calling it is to administer justice that good can overcome evil."

Schmitt, a former Episcopalian chaplain at Northwestern University and now chaplain at Harvard, got to know the Lefkows when she worked in Evanston. She said evil is a subject that would have to be addressed in her sermon, and it was the subject she struggled with the most.

"That's where forgiveness becomes difficult," she said. "It's very difficult to comprehend that these killers are so dehumanized that they'd do this. The motives for evil are just incomprehensible, and obviously there's a lot of evil in the world."

"It makes it all the more poignant," she added, "that the Lefkows, too, dedicated their lives to justice."

Caption: PHOTOS 7

PHOTO (color): A memorial to Judge Joan Lefkow's husband and mother stands near the home where the two were found shot to death. Tribune photo by Jose Osorio.

PHOTOS (color): The execution-style slayings of Michael Lefkow and Donna Humphrey jolted the nation. PHOTO: Attorney Richard Goldman is one of hundreds who signed books of condolence for U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow in the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse. Tribune photo by Chuck Berman. PHOTO: Investigators continue to work Friday near Judge Joan Lefkow's Edgewater home, where the bodies of her husband and mother were found in the basement. The murder probe is focusing on people linked to past cases the judge has heard. Tribune photo by Bonnie Trafelet.

PHOTO: Robert D. Grant (left), special agent in charge of the FBI in Chicago, announces a \$50,000 reward for information leading to an arrest in the case. City and other U.S. law-enforcement officials joined him. Tribune photo by Zbigniew Bzdak.

PHOTO: Judge Joan Lefkow insists she will return to the U.S. bench.

Edition: Chicago Early Edition

Section: News

Page: 1

Index Terms: CHICAGO ; COURT ; OFFICIAL ; FEDERAL ; MURDER ; MULTIPLE ; REACTION ; RELIGION ; SUBURB ; QUOTE ; FAMILY

Record Number: CTR0503060447

Copyright (c) 2005, Chicago Tribune Company. All rights reserved.