

Families shocked by shotgun slayings

Murder
Authorities still have not ruled out a suicide pact

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BONNY DOON — The three Colorado residents found dead Tuesday night at Bonny Doon Beach were so close their families called them the "Three Musketeers."

What led them to a bluff overlooking the beach and why one apparently killed the others before shooting himself, however, remained a mystery Thursday.

"There's nothing there, nothing to hold on to," said David White, whose daughter Brenda was one of the victims.

Her body was discovered along with that of her best friend, Melinda Leippe, and Leippe's boyfriend, David Bachman.

Sheriff's investigators believe the 26-year-old Bachman shot the two 19-year-olds before turning a 12-gauge shotgun on himself. Authorities are calling the deaths a double homicide-suicide but have not ruled out a suicide pact.

"There's not even anybody alive for me to hate," said David White, a South Lake Tahoe resident. "I'm slipping in and out of shock."

The three friends were most recently from Littleton, Colo., but all had ties to the South Lake Tahoe area, where they attended high school.

David White said his family lived in the Watsonville area for about five

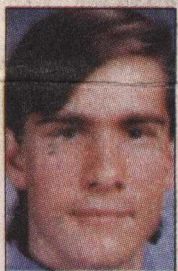
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WHITE



LEIPPE



BACHMAN

Bodies

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years, leaving in 1997. He said his daughter attended Moss Landing Middle School and still had many friends in the area.

"She missed the ocean," David White said.

He said the trio did everything together and were so close that family members called them the "Three Musketeers."

White's mother, Keely White, visited her daughter in Lake Tahoe the day before the bodies were found in Santa Cruz County.

White told her mother she and her friends were going to hang out at the ocean for a day, then head back to Tahoe, according to David White.

The three were planning to continue on to Kansas to visit Leippe's mother and stepfather, who had moved there recently. Family members say the three supported themselves by working odd jobs.

"They were just three normal kids who needed to take a trip," David White said. "And 20 hours later they were dead by one of their own hands."

David White said he does not believe his daughter or Leippe died as part of a suicide pact.

His daughter was in the process of selling some of her furniture in Littleton so she could move back to Lake

Tahoe and spend more time with her parents, he said.

Sheriff's Lt. Terry Parker said the deaths remain under investigation.

The three bodies were found slumped in a circle around a sleeping bag. There were no signs of a struggle, and each girl had been shot in the back of the head.

Parker said the gun belonged to Bachman.

Investigators initially reported no drugs had been found, but sheriff's detective Steve Plaskett said a small amount of marijuana was discovered with their belongings.

The popular but secluded beach is about 7 miles north of Santa Cruz.

Coroners performed autopsies on the two women Thursday. They were set to perform the third Friday. Formal results aren't expected for a few weeks.

Christina Sanford knew Leippe. Her brother is married to Leippe's mother.

"It's left a huge hole in our hearts and so many questions unanswered," said Sanford, of Mountain View. "Melinda was phenomenally intelligent. We have absolutely no evidence that either of them (White or Leippe) would have committed suicide."

Leippe reportedly called her mother Monday.

She told her she and her friends had been visiting Leippe's ailing father in the Reno area and were going to Lake Tahoe, then to the coast, then to Kansas, according to Sanford.

"It was a spur of the moment trip,"

Sanford said. "The last thing she told her mother was that she would be in Kansas by the end of the week. We never expected this to happen and we have no explanation for it."

All three attended South Tahoe High School, although Bachman graduated before the younger girls started their freshman year, the school's principal, Karen Ellis, told the Associated Press. She described Bachman as an excellent student and "a wonderful young man."

She said Leippe was an honor student, and that neither she nor Bachman had been disciplined while at the school.

White also attended the school, but left after her junior year.

Sanford said the two women met through Leippe's cousin and became inseparable.

"They were extremely close," Sanford said.

White even moved in for a time with Leippe's family in 1999.

Records show Bachman also attended Lake Tahoe Community College. Officials there would not say whether he had graduated.

Sanford said Leippe and Bachman, by then a couple, moved to Littleton two years ago to be closer to Bachman's parents.

Littleton police said Leippe and Bachman lived together in a one-bedroom apartment in a large apartment complex called West Lake Greens.

The manager said Leippe and Bach-

man moved out months ago.

A former neighbor, Donielle Dutton, told the Associated Press the couple was quiet and Bachman liked fantasy and role-playing type games.

Leippe apparently worked at a grocery store there.

White moved to Littleton about a year ago and lived with the couple, but had recently moved into her own apartment, her father said.

None of the three had a criminal record, according to authorities.

Authorities say they have the least information on Bachman.

Reached by phone at their Colorado home, Bachman's parents declined to comment.

Sanford said Bachman's parents called Leippe's mother on Monday to offer condolences.

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