

The not-so-Smart death of a salesman

By: R. Marc Kantrowitz May 28, 2020



Pamela and Gregory Smart

The first of a two-part column

The crime scene screamed burglary. Both the upstairs and downstairs of the condo were ransacked, with articles haphazardly strewn about. What differentiated this burglary from others, though, was the presence of a dead body blocking the carpeted dining room from the tiled foyer.

The victim was Gregory Smart, a successful 24-year-old insurance salesman on his way up the ladder at MetLife, who had been married six days short of a year. Shot once in the head, blood slowly oozed onto the carpet.

His wife, Pamela, discovered the body shortly after 10 p.m., when she arrived home from a school board meeting. Screaming and fleeing the apartment, she sought the help of her frazzled neighbors, who responded by hurriedly calling the Derry, New Hampshire, police.

If it were a robbery, why would one commit it at night in a densely populated area with people undoubtedly at home? And why a gun, since most small-time robbers ordinarily didn't carry, much less use, one? And why were the victim's three-diamond ring and wallet left behind?

Maybe something more sinister was afloat. Perhaps drugs. After all, there had been many loud parties in the rented condo since the newlyweds moved in. Or maybe gambling, as the victim was known to frequent Atlantic City. Had he crossed the wrong person?

The police had limited leads and a 22-year-old widow, who it was hoped might shed light, or even a glimmer of it, on a potential suspect and motive. But there was something slightly odd about "Pame," other than how she spelled her nickname. When questioned at the scene, she seemed strangely composed, more anxious than sad. Asked to pick out the final resting clothing of her dead husband, she nonchalantly selected a few pieces, not pausing, as many do, to linger over an emotionally difficult selection. And why did she step on the towel covering her dead husband's blood stains on the carpet as opposed to stepping over or around it? Some of the officers noted that but then discounted it, recognizing perhaps that they not infrequently found suspicion where others did not, or summing up her demeanor to people grieving in their own uniquely, varied ways.

Although they had met earlier, Gregg Smart and Pame Wojas hit it off at Gregg's 1986 New Year's Eve party. In typical fashion for the popular, happy-go-lucky host, it was a blowout time, mobbed, with loud music, dancing, booze, drugs and sex for those who wanted it. In some ways their mutual attraction was a bit of an anomaly. Gregg liked to party and was close to his family anchored in New Hampshire. Pame, on the other hand, whose family relocated to the Granite State while she was young, thinking it a better area in which to raise their three smart, hard-working and overachieving children, was more driven, ambitious and focused. Often holding down several jobs despite a heavy college course load, she attended Florida State University, majoring in communications.

Both, though, were attractive and out-going, able to motivate and get people to do their bidding. Sharing a love for heavy metal music, especially Van Halen, they wanted to stand out and be different, leaders rather than followers. Perhaps in

one small way, their chosen method of spelling their names out of the ordinary reflected that.

When Pame returned to Florida for school, the two kept in touch. With the passage of time, their relationship blossomed. More than smitten, Gregg eventually moved to Florida to be with her. They were soon living together and engaged. Pame graduated in three years, and to mark the occasion, Gregg gave her a Shih-Tzu, aptly named Haylen.

Pame found herself at a crossroads. On the one hand, she wanted to follow her dream of being a news reporter, which required travel to the far and often quieter parts of the country for the young seeking employment in the highly competitive field. Conversely, she also desired to marry one who loved everything New Hampshire had to offer. She followed her heart. Despite their young ages, they wed on May 7, 1989, two short years after they met.

Not surprisingly, Pame quickly found a relatively well-paying job as director of the new media center for the local schools, where she wrote press releases, reported on school projects, and taught how to use media equipment. Her office was across the street from Winnacunnet High School. Gregg, meanwhile, slowly started to mature, working at his father's place of employment, MetLife. The gregarious young man quickly found success, co-named the Rookie Salesman of the Year. He did not, however, totally walk away from his partying ways.

At the wake, Pame and her father-in-law had a dispute as to whether the coffin should be open or closed. Pame left the room when it was opened and returned when it was closed. She seemed surprised and happy to see three students with whom she had grown close — Billy Flynn, Vance JR Lattime Jr. and Cecelia Pierce — at the wake. When Flynn kneeled in front of Gregg's casket, one wonders what he thought. After all, he was the one who murdered him.

(To be continued.)

The above column was based on "Teach Me to Kill" by Stephen Sawicki and various internet sources. R. Marc Kantrowitz, a retired Appeals Court judge, can be contacted at Rmarckantrowitz@comcast.net.