

By Angelo B. Henderson

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Gena Wright's parents say she died for the worst of all reasons: She fell in love with, and trusted, the wrong man.

That man was Lamaah Carter, a sociable, seemingly generous Detroit Edison utilities clerk who also seemed to be living awfully well on his \$25,000-a-year salary. He always had a lot of cash, which he often lavished on Gena, 23, with whom he had been living for more than a year. He wore nice clothes, favoring Calvin Klein and Pelle Pelle ensembles. He drove a shiny black BMW.

He also had a story: that he'd inherited a lot of money from an uncle. So when the couple ended up dead, in what police at first thought was a violent, botched hostage-kidnapping scheme, they seemed like the hapless victims of a shocking crime.

Gena was.

But Lamaah, police would soon enough determine, was not exactly an innocent victim. He was, in fact, the man who had set up the armed robbery of his own office, where a lone gunman had gotten away with \$48,000 in receipts that Lamaah himself had just helped to count.

A year later, police now theorize, a dispute over that cash led at least two assailants to appear one night at the door of the two-bedroom house in the middle-class subdivision of Southfield that the couple shared. There was no sign of forcible entry. The time isn't clear.

What is clear is that at 11:50 p.m., a distressed Gena Wright was seen getting out of a silver Taurus—Lamaah's second car—and running up to an ATM near their home. The bank's video

camera captured the scene as she frantically tried to withdraw \$500 but could only manage \$200.

Seven minutes later, a second video camera caught Gena getting out of a different car, a dark-colored Eagle Talon, at the NBD Bank just a few blocks away. As she punched in her bank-card code, she fearfully looked back at the car. She withdrew \$500 in three transactions.

It was 12:13 a.m.—the last time she was seen alive. Gena's body was found in an alley by a Detroit maintenance worker the next morning. She'd been shot three times at close range. A woman living nearby would later tell police she heard shots just after 2 a.m. as she sat watching TV; she didn't think to phone the cops.

Larry Wright, Gena's father, identified his daughter's body, then filled police in on her living arrangements with Lamaah. Even the cops, as they opened the door of the suburban Southfield house with Gena's key, were shocked by the carnage. Lamaah was lying on the floor between the living room and dining room—a steak knife protruding from his neck. Blood spatters were everywhere, including the ceiling. Recent acquisitions—a fancy stereo system and expensive clothes—were found in boxes in the garage, many with the price tags still affixed.

Police soon got a tip from a relative of Lamaah. His story, backed up by yet other relatives, was that Lamaah had set up the Detroit Edison robbery with a nephew named Claude Daniel. The tipsters, according to statements to police and obtained by this newspaper, also implicated Jermaine Daniel, Claude's younger brother, as driver of the getaway car.

Claude was soon arrested for armed robbery and felony possession of a firearm; Jermaine, who drove a burgundy Eagle Talon similar to the one Gena Wright was seen getting out of the night of her murder, was nowhere to be found.

Claude was questioned about the robbery and the murders. In a statement to police, he said of the robbery, "basically, Lamaah set it up." He later added, "I know for sure that Gena was not aware of it." Claude, though, denied having anything to do with the killings or the robbery, and in a 1996 trial in Detroit's Third Judicial District Court was found not guilty of the robbery charge.

What happened to the money remains a mystery.

Police do know what happened to Jermaine Daniel: He was found dead in a Detroit hotel of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. Next to the body was a pistol and a signed note that said, "I'm sorry for everything, please forgive me." A ballistics test later revealed the gun was the same used in the murder of Gena Wright.