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## **Staten Island Police Couple Found Dead in Suspected Murder-Suicide**

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

A Staten Island couple, both veteran police officers, died yesterday in what investigators believe was a murder-suicide when a detective apparently shot his wife, a community police officer, four times and then put a bullet through his brain.

Police investigators said there were no signs of struggle inside the two-story house at 18 Benson Street, and even the area around the kitchen where the bodies of the detective, Frederick A. Jesselli Jr., and his wife, Monica, were found seemed orderly. But the investigators were also mystified by the lack of reports of domestic violence and the portrait of a family of two adults and two children who by all accounts seemed happy.

"It's very traumatic for the police officers," said Assistant Chief Eugene Devlin, commander of the Patrol Borough on Staten Island. "They are asking the question that everybody else asks: Why? Why did it have to end so violently?"

It was the second time in a month that a police officer has shot dead his wife and then turned a gun on himself. The previous incident was in Orange County on Sept. 25. In that case, the husband, who also shot the couple's two children to death, had reportedly been able to deflect his wife's complaints that he was abusive.

The police are supposed to monitor closely any hints of domestic violence in their midst because the potential for violence among officers is considered high. The disciplinary action for confirmed incidents of spousal abuse can include taking away an officer's gun and badge, placing the officer on restricted duty and even dismissal.

"I don't think they should be allowed to take their guns home," said Miriam Allen, a neighbor of the Jessellis on Staten Island. "If he hadn't had his gun, maybe he would have hit her, but not killed her."

Now, his kids are without parents. How are they going to live?"

Police investigators would not confirm whether Mr. Jesselli, 47, had used his service revolver when he pumped four bullets from a 9-millimeter gun into his 38-year-old wife. Mrs. Jesselli was found on her side, shot three times in the body and once in the head. Her husband was found on his back.

The investigators said there were no witnesses to the actual shooting, and detectives were still trying to piece together what had erupted in the quiet neighborhood across the road from an older, grassy section of the Fresh Kills landfill.

Neighbors said Mr. Jesselli had a mixed reputation in the Arden Heights neighborhood, on the one hand having repeated run-ins with a gay neighbor or barreling out of his house to brandish his badge at people making noise. But on the other hand, he gained a certain admiration after a decade in the neighborhood for covering his house with elaborate decorations for Halloween and for dressing as Santa Claus.

"I heard what sounded like firecrackers go off," said Daniel Carrougner, 13, who was in his house nearby around 3 P.M. "At first I thought maybe somebody was knocking on our door."

He went outside and, within minutes, saw Erica Jesselli, 12, run out of her house crying and then bang on a neighbor's door. There were conflicting reports whether Erica was elsewhere in the house at the time of the shooting or had come home from St. Patrick's School to find the bodies of her parents. A son, Derek, 16, a student at Monsignor Farrell High School, was later seen being escorted away by detectives.

The police said Mrs. Jesselli joined the force in July 1981 and spent her entire career in the 123d Precinct on Staten Island. She had worked her regular shift yesterday, they said, signing out around 2:30 P.M. Mr. Jesselli, who had been on the force since November 1979, was part of a burglary investigation team at the 122d Precinct on Staten Island that had recently made a number of good arrests. He was not due at work until 4 P.M.

The emergency call about the deaths was logged in at 3:16 P.M., said Sean Crowley, a police spokesman at the scene.

The block where the killings took place is a cul-de-sac of five houses, a place where the scent of garbage from the nearby landfill never quite wafts away. Neighbors tend not to dawdle on the streets, but Mr. Jesselli, a chunky man, was known for treating the area as his own fief.

"Everybody tries to sell their houses and get out of there because it is the first street right across from the dump," said Richard J. Potts, who moved out of the section recently. "Everybody goes crazy over there."

Local residents said Mr. Jesselli had been particularly upset after an openly gay man moved in next door, repeatedly yelling at the neighbor about party noise, parking and even landscaping.

He also built a fence to cut off his own deck from the view of the gay neighbor's Jacuzzi.

"I guess he felt like he owned the block," said Trent Perino, 28, another resident. He said Mr. Jesselli was known to summon squad cars to have cars ticketed or even threaten to arrest neighbors. Mr. Perino said he parked on the street one day and found a handwritten sign on his car from Mr. Jesselli that read: "Please get your car off this block. It is parked illegally. This is not a parking lot."

But other neighbors painted a different portrait of Mr. Jesselli, saying he liked to barbecue in his backyard with his family near their above-ground swimming pool.

"Freddie seemed so level-headed, it must have been temporary insanity," said Nick Spano, another neighbor.

Their house was already decked out with a pumpkin, an inflatable ghost and a picture of a black cat for this year's Halloween decorations, which included a fake tombstone marked R.I.P. on the front lawn.

Neither neighbors nor professional colleagues had seen any overt signs of marital stress. Sgt. Mario Perez, Mrs. Jesselli's supervisor at the 123d Precinct in the Tottenville neighborhood, said she talked constantly about her son's ice hockey exploits or how well her daughter performed as a cheerleader. The couple had recently visited Las Vegas and were planning to retire there in about four years, he said.

A 1994 study found that New York City police officers kill themselves at a rate of about 29 per 100,000, more than double the suicide rate of the general population, which is about 12 per 100,000. In light of this, the city started a program in 1995 to train peer officers, who are supposed to help fellow officers deal with the pressures of work and home.

"Everybody here is in shock," Sergeant Perez said. "We can't comprehend how something as tragic as this could happen. They seemed to be the last two people in the world that something like this could happen to."

Photos: Neighbors of Detective Frederick A. Jesselli Jr. and his wife, Monica, apparently had no hint of domestic violence before their deaths by gunshot. The police believe Detective Jesselli shot his wife and then himself. (Mary DiBiase Blauch for The New York Times)(pg. B3); Detective Frederick A. Jesselli Jr., and his wife, Monica. The police are mystified by the apparent murder-suicide of the couple.