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Kids Saw Police Chief Shoot Wife, Kill Self

April 28

Witnesses who saw Tacoma Police Chief David Brame shoot his estranged wife in a parking lot just south of Seattle all remember the same thing: the couple's children.

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The couple's 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son were nearby when their father shot their mother, and then turned the gun on himself.

"The girl was over the top of her mother after she had been shot and was pulled off by a witness," said Ed Troyer of the Pierce County Sheriff's Department.

Drewe Warnock witnessed the shootings.

"Anybody that was out here heard the children screaming," said Warnock. "They were terrified."

A Model Police Chief

Investigators say Brame, 44, shot his wife in the head, then killed himself inside her car at a shopping center parking lot after what police believe was a pre-arranged meeting Saturday. He and his wife, 35-year-old Crystal Brame, had been going through a divorce. The day before the shootings, allegations that he had abused his wife were made public.

The chief put their kids, Haley and David, Jr., in his car, before getting in his wife's vehicle. After a heated conversation, witnesses reported hearing two shots. Medics found Crystal Brame lying on the pavement next to the open driver's door.

She was in critical condition at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle Sunday, according to her attorney.

David Brame was a second-generation cop who has been described as a model police chief. Six months into the job as chief, he was in the national

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spotlight when the East Coast sniper killings were linked to Tacoma.

His wife was with him when he was promoted just over a year ago, but in divorce filings made public just last week, she described a man who was violent and controlling.

Crystal Brame claimed that her husband pointed his gun at her and tried to choke her, saying he could snap her neck if he wanted to, court papers said. He in turn said that his wife had a "ferocious temper," and was emotionally unstable.

A Newsworthy Story?

Ruth Teichroeb, an investigative reporter for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, broke the story about the abuse charges against the police chief. It ran the day before the shooting happened.

The paper has since taken heat from the Tacoma police union, the city manager and a city council member, each of whom say that the charges made in the suit should not have been published.

But Teichroeb pointed out that a top law enforcement official was being accused of committing a crime.

"Because he is a high-ranking official in Tacoma, we needed to let the citizens know what the allegations were" Teichroeb said on ABCNEWS' Good Morning America.

"I think that as a journalist, all I can do is do my job and given the circumstances, given that he was charged with upholding the public trust with upholding the law in a city the size of Tacoma, I think all we could do is report what we knew and hope that it would be investigated."

Before the shootings, Brame had sought professional counseling to help deal with the stress of his impending divorce, a city official said Sunday.

City Manager Ray Corpuz said Brame also went to an FBI seminar in January on emotional survival training for law enforcement officers.

"What makes this situation particularly difficult to understand is that Chief Brame recognized and was concerned about how emotional stress can affect police officers," Corpuz said.

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