



FATALLY SHOT & SET ON FIRE

WHO KILLED THE FIRE CHIEF'S WIFE?

More than a year after Nanette Krentel's body was found in the charred remains of her home, police are still looking for a killer who knew how to cover up a murder with flames **By CHRISTINE PELISEK**



SHOCK & SORROW
"She was a happy person," says sister Kim Watson of Nanette (above, with Steve and his son Justin in 2000).



COURTESY (FROM TOP RIGHT) DAN WATSON (2); COURTESY STEPHEN KRENTEL/LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

At first it seemed like a cruel joke. Fire Chief Steve Krentel was on duty on the afternoon of July 14, 2017, when he got a frantic call telling him his house was on fire. Krentel rushed to the remote Lacombe, La., home he shared with his wife of 22 years, Nanette, but it was too late: Firefighters discovered the house destroyed and Nanette's charred remains in the master bedroom, her beloved Chihuahua Harley lying dead next to her. "I was in total, complete shock," says Steve.

And the family's shock only grew. A week later, just as the funeral service for the 49-year-old former preschool teacher was ending, family members were stunned by a news alert from authorities revealing the results from the coroner's report: Nanette had no soot in her lungs; she had died from a gunshot wound to the head. "I knew from the moment I'd heard she'd died in a fire," says Nanette's father, Dan Watson, "it was murder."

But after almost a year and a half—and despite hundreds of tips, surveillance video and an ongoing open investigation—questions about who killed Nanette and why remain frustratingly unanswered. The premiere episode of season 3 of *People Magazine Investigates* dives further into the theories, suspects and evidence in the case. "I am still in a complete state of shock," says Steve, 50. "I know nothing more today than the day I found out she was shot." Police have ruled out suicide, but they have so far been unable to determine much else about Nanette's death—even whether or not the fire-damaged handgun found near her body was the murder weapon.

On the morning of the murder, Steve says, Nanette put out his clothes, made him a peanut butter sandwich and, along with Harley, walked him to his truck around 7:45 a.m. Surveillance footage from a local fast-food restaurant seems to show Nanette's car and a woman who looks like her picking up food later that morning, and her cellphone activity synchs up with that trip. "It wasn't any different than any other day," says Steve.

But Nanette's family and friends say things between the couple weren't as perfect as they appeared. Steve was having an affair with a co-worker, and Nanette was considering ending her marriage, according to her family. "She was going to throw him out," insists Watson. Steve—who has passed a polygraph test and who police say is currently not a suspect in the murder, as he was 17 miles away at the fire station at the time of the fire—insists his wife knew about the affair, and



INSIDE THEIR LIVES

"She was the love of my life," says Steve (top, with Nanette in 2007). "I was enchanted the moment I met her." After two years as fire chief, Steve (at the station) retired in September. "This is a perfect story for social media trolls," he says, "because it has sex, murder, the fire chief whose house burned down. It's frustrating."

'WHO WOULD HAVE A REASON TO KILL HER? SHE WAS SO WONDERFUL. IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE'
—FRIEND LORI RANDO

the couple had worked through it. "I am not telling you she liked it, but she was aware of it," Steve says. "It was selfish and ignorant on my part."

Those close to Nanette say she was terrified of her husband's brother Brian, 48, an ex-convict who had recently been released from prison. But police ruled him out after security video placed him at his mother's house on the day of the murder. Authorities also investigated 24-year-old Justin Krentel, Steve's son from a previous marriage, who Nanette had claimed owned multiple guns. "We did investigate his whereabouts, and he was out of state," says St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Randy Smith.

Meanwhile friends and family are still haunted by the brutal death of a woman they remember as warm, funny and bright. "I need somebody to be accountable for this and start paying their time," says Nanette's friend Lori Rando. "It wasn't just shooting her, it was shooting her and burning her to a crisp. It is just unfathomable to me that a person can do this." ●

For more on this story, see *Somebody's Watching*, the first episode in the new season of *People Magazine Investigates*, premiering Monday, Nov. 5, at 10 p.m. ET on Investigation Discovery.

