It was payback, widower suspects

City man thinks arrest of brother triggered fatal attack on wife; police expect murder charge

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CREDIT: Supplied
Michael Butler says his wife, Stephanie Rae Butler, right, was afraid of his brother.

EDMONTON - Grieving widower Michael Butler fears his young wife was killed in their southeast Edmonton home Friday as payback for his decision to have his brother arrested just days earlier.

Two days before Stephanie Rae Butler was killed, Michael says his agitated younger brother arrived in Edmonton from Saskatchewan and tried to break into the couple's house, at 4204 38th St. in Kiniski Gardens.

Fed up with his brother after years of erratic and violent behaviour, Michael refused to answer the door and called police. Ken was arrested outside Michael's house Wednesday morning, but was back on the street the next day.

"I called police and what did they do?" Michael said in an interview. "They arrested him, they let him go and they didn't even tell me. How is that protecting the public? It's so sick. It's not fair.

"They didn't do anything. They just made the problem worse. They pissed him off more and that's probably why he got so mad at me -- because I got him arrested. It would have been better if I had gone out that day to talk to him,

because that is what I usually do. This is one of the first times I called the police on him

and, boy, was that a mistake."

By Friday night, Ken was back in police custody after a 61-year-old Co-op cab driver was critically beaten just up the street from the Butlers' house. Inside the house, police believe 25-year-old Stephanie was dead, though her father wouldn't find her body until the following day.

On Sunday, an upset Michael Butler told the media the justice system has failed his family. Butler said his family has been trying for years to help keep his brother off drugs such as methamphetamine, but the legal system does little to help.

They talked to police, they talked to Ken's social worker, they went to AADAC, but nothing worked.

In frustration, the Butler family bought Ken a house in Regina and

finally had some peace. Michael said his mother obtained a restraining order against Ken.

Then last week, Ken called Michael to say he was coming back to Alberta and he wanted to stay with Michael and Stephanie. "I told him not to come," Michael said.

On Wednesday, Ken phoned Michael for a ride from the Edmonton bus depot. Butler refused.

A short time later, Butler said his brother arrived by cab and started pounding on the door and demanding to come inside. After half an hour of his brother's enraged yelling, Butler called police.

On Stephanie's urging, Michael said he called police again Wednesday night to find out what they were doing with his brother. He was told to expect a call back that never came.

"She was really concerned about him," Michael said. "She was scared of him because he was so crazy."

Police have confirmed they responded to a "trouble with person" report at Butler's address on Wednesday at 11 a.m. Officers arrested a 24-year-old suspect. Police determined he had outstanding warrants and held him in their cells.

He was released on his own recognizance with $300 cash bail and a condition that prohibited him from going to the Butlers' house.

Michael said he got another call Thursday from Ken, who said he was running into old

friends on Whyte Avenue. Michael hung up.

On Friday around 8 p.m., Michael left for Red Deer to play in a recreational men's basketball tournament the next morning.

"I shouldn't have left," he said, but added that his brother had never been aggressive toward his wife.

About 10 p.m. that evening, paramedics called police to report a cab driver had been badly beaten on 38th Street near 42nd Avenue.

A man who lives nearby, who didn't want to be named, said Sunday that he and some friends found the injured cabbie lying on the street a few metres behind his taxi, which was still running.

"He wasn't responding, just gurgling blood," said the man in his 20s. "We turned him on his side."

Police cruisers immediately blocked off the area to search for a suspect.

At 10:35 p.m., a man got in the back seat of a police car parked about a block away and indicated he was the suspect police were looking for.

The man's statement was verified by a police dog that tracked the suspect's scent from the cab to the Butlers' house and then to the police car where the man was sitting.

Police arrested the 24-year-old man for aggravated assault.

The cabbie remained in critical but stable condition Sunday at the University hospital.

Police did not check the Butlers' house Saturday night. Investigators now believe the suspect broke into the house through a basement window and killed Stephanie during the 35 minutes after he beat the cab driver and before he turned himself in to police.

Police spokesman Karen Carlson did not know if there will be a review to determine why they did not check the Butlers' house -- an address their aggravated assault suspect was forbidden to visit and where he had been arrested days earlier.

"I think every officer who was at that scene or connected with that incident somehow is probably asking themselves what they could have done differently," Carlson said. "Given the violence and the vicious nature of that attack, I don't think anybody could have changed the outcome."

After repeated text messages and phone calls went unanswered, a worried Michael Butler started calling his wife's friends and family early Saturday afternoon from Red Deer.

Shortly after 5 p.m. Saturday, Stephanie's father went to the couple's house and found his daughter's bloodied body.

He called Michael and told him to come home immediately.

Police arrived at the house at 5:20 p.m. and called in homicide detectives to investigate the assault and death.

Police said Sunday they have arrested a homicide suspect who is a relative of the victim's, and he will face charges of murder, breaking and entering and breaching a recognizance.

A court date will be set after the suspect is formally charged.

Police would not reveal Sunday how Stephanie Butler died. An autopsy will confirm the cause of death, Carlson said.

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