

Confessed killer's ex-girlfriend is "lucky to be alive"

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accused serial killer Shawn Grate, and on Saturday had just taken a call from the Marion County Sheriff's Office.

BUCYRUS — Christina Hildreth is nervous.

She surrounds herself with her seven dogs and invited an ex-boyfriend and his dog to stay at her Bucyrus home temporarily.

Hildreth has never rested easy since her relationship with

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"They were asking me a lot of questions. Evidently, he told the police that he told me things, but I didn't believe him. He never told me he killed anyone. They were asking me a lot of questions about a red car that he used to drive that ended up being repossessed," Hildreth said.

The final chapter hasn't been written in the story of Shawn Grate, who has either confessed to or is accused of killing four people in north central Ohio in recent years.

But Hildreth is glad that she'll just be a sidebar in Grate's story, and not a featured, tragic main character.

The beginning

Hildreth met Grate in 2005 in Marion.

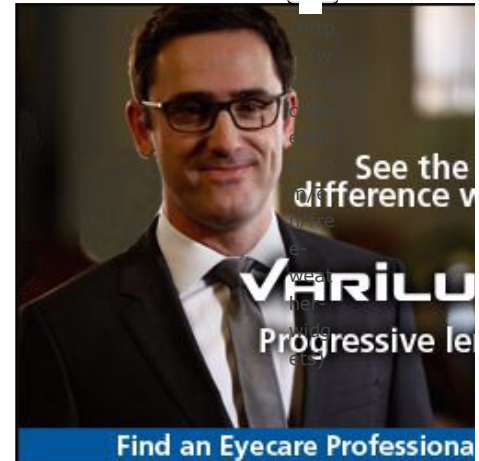
"I met Shawn through my step sister. She worked at a gas station in Marion and that is how she knew him," Hildreth said.

She and Grate moved to Bucyrus and began living together around Christmas time that year.

Hildreth said Grate was very charming.

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Mostly cloudy

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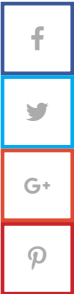


POLL

At the first debate, did Donald Trump address how he would create more jobs to put money into the pockets of American workers?

- Yes
- No
- I have no opinion / I did not watch

Next



“It was the way he would look at you, like you were so special to him,” Hildreth said. “He was fun and we really hit it off.”

A much darker side



Hildreth said that Grate’s charm could be replaced with evil in the blink of an eye.

“He would get angry over things that most people would not be upset over,” she said. “We argued a lot about the fact he would not get a job and he was always doing things to make me late for work, trying to get me fired. He wanted me to quit working, and said his dad would pay our bills. I never did, and he didn’t like it. I think he wanted to isolate me from others.”

Hildreth said Grate hit her and choked her several times, but she was afraid to leave.

“He always apologized and said he wouldn’t do it again,” Hildreth said.

She said Grate gave her a ring which he had said belonged to his mother.

“I found out later he had been in prison for robbery. He said he robbed an elderly woman, so I wonder now if that was a ring he stole from her,” Hildreth said.

Hildreth said she only met Grate’s mother three times during the five years she was in a relationship with him.

“He wasn’t close to her,” she said. “He said that when he was around 11 or 12, he told his mother there was something wrong with him and he needed to talk to somebody. She was very religious and told him to pray about it and go to church and he would be fine.”

A key to his anger?

Grate severely injured his arm in his early teen years.

“He was very much into baseball and was good at it,” Hildreth said. “He had to have surgery on his arm and could never play again after that. I don’t know if that affected him.”

“I also think other things happened to him when he was young, but I am not sure. It is just a feeling I had,” Hildreth said.

She said he was not nice to her three children.

“They lived with my sister at the time, but came to my house on the weekends. He was always wanting them to leave because he wanted me all to himself. My son, now 17, told me he is not surprised about the



charges against Shawn. He always thought there was something really wrong with him,” Hildreth said.

A trip to the Emergency Department



Hildreth said things came to a head between her and Grate in 2010 when they lived at Woodbine Apartments in Bucyrus.

“Since he wouldn’t get a job, he was to do all of the housework, but hadn’t been keeping up on it,” she said. “We argued before I went to work one morning about it and when I got home, he had straightened up the house a little bit but had not done most of it. He wanted money and I refused to give him any and I told him he needed to get out.”

Hildreth said Grate pushed her over the sofa then gave her a black eye. In the struggle, she said Grate broke her hand.

“My hand was swelling up rapidly. I begged him to let me go to the hospital, and he finally gave in and drove me. He told me I better tell them I fell,” Hildreth said.

She said at the hospital, Grate stayed right by her side while she registered for the emergency department at Bucyrus Community Hospital.

“He then went into the triage room with me where the nurse asked if I felt safe at home. Of course I had to say yes, he was sitting right there,” Hildreth said. “That needs to change for all victims of domestic violence. Don’t ask us in front of a man that could potentially be our abuser.”

The two were then placed in an examination room.

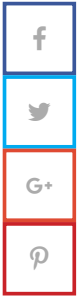
“He wasn’t asked to leave until they brought in the mobile X-ray unit. But instead of having him wait in the hall, they sent him to the waiting room. I immediately told the nurse and doctor that he had injured me. The doctor said he knew because of the black eye and the fact that I had a broken hand from ‘falling,’ yet I had a knot on the back of my head,” Hildreth said.

As the police cars pulled up to the emergency department entrance, Grate saw them and took off.

Stalking

“The police went with me and my mom to my apartment so I could get some things,” She remembered. “I had an eerie feeling so I left, but came back about an hour later because I forgot something.”

When she walked into the apartment, she saw a hammer on the kitchen counter that had not been there before.



“And the toilet seat was up. I knew he was there and as I turned to run to the door, he was right in my face and started to beat me. A neighbor called the police, but when they knocked on the door, he had the hammer at my head so I told them everything was fine and they left. I have never been so scared,” Hildreth said. 

Hildreth said Grate told her he had watched every move she made during her first trip to the apartment.

“He cut the inside of the love seat out and was hiding inside of it,” she said. “You would have never known he was in there.”

Desperate to get away

After another beating, Hildreth told Grate she would help him escape the police.

“I told him I would give him the only money I had, \$20, and would drive him to Marion to his dad’s house. He didn’t go for it at first, but then I threw in the three Vicodin I had left over from the hospital and he went for it,” she said.

The two made a plan that he would sneak out of the apartment, run through a wooded area and meet her at Diamond Wipes, a factory, near the Crawford County Health Department.

“I didn’t go because I knew he would end up killing me. I went straight to the police,” she said.

After an exhaustive search of the area by police, Grate remained on the run.

Can’t take no for an answer

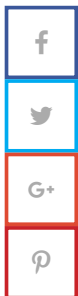
“I knew he would go back to the apartment, so the police met me on a Saturday at the bowling alley parking lot near my apartment so they could be right behind me when I went into the apartment. They got him and arrested him,” Hildreth said.

Hildreth said Grate was only sentenced to 30 days in jail originally.


“He kept trying to call my work collect and was telling people he was in jail with what he was going to do to me when he was released, in detail. I was so scared. I went on a letter writing campaign to the municipal court judge at that time, Sean Leuthold, and he ended up keeping him in jail for the maximum time he could, six months.”

The end of the relationship

Hildreth moved before Grate was released and was told by deputies that his mother picked him up and took him to Ashland to live with her.



She said Grate encountered a friend of hers two years after their breakup, in 2012, and tried to get her address and phone number.

“He offered my friend a ride, but she was uncomfortable around him. She told him she would not give him my information, but  his number to give to me so he would leave her alone. I threw it right in the trash,” Hildreth said.

More tragic news to come?

Hildreth thinks there are more victims and on Monday, information was released that Grate admitted to the murder of a woman in Marion in 2004, stating that woman was his first victim.

Bucyrus Police Chief Dave Koepke said there are no missing person cases in Bucyrus during the time period that Grate lived in the city.

“No other law enforcement agency has been in contact with us about Grate as far as I am aware of,” Koepke said.

Grate’s record in Crawford County includes the domestic violence conviction in June of 2010 along with charges for falsification, identity theft, obstruction, driving under suspension, fictitious registration and possession of marijuana, all from 2007.

For women currently in an abusive relationship, Hildreth has some advice.

“Get away as fast as you can and take the necessary precautions to protect yourself and your children,” she said. “I have no doubt I would have been one of his victims if I had not gotten away when I did.

“I am lucky to be alive!”

