



LOCAL

US &

THINGS

WEATHER

SPORTS

NEWS

WORLD

TO DO

HEALTH &

DEALS &

FITNESS

SHOPPING

## LOCAL NEWS



### Dad says son appeared normal before Polk murder-suicide

By Josh Poltilove | Tribune Staff  
Published: May 3, 2009

LAKELAND - Troy Bellar and his wife Wendy had had some domestic problems in the past, but the couple seemed to have worked things out, Troy's father said today.

Jim Bellar said he last spoke to his son about 8 p.m. last night. Everything seemed normal. An hour and a half later, Troy Bellar had killed his wife and two of his young children, including an 8-year-old boy and 4-month-old baby boy.

His son, 13-year-old Nathan Bellar, survived after Troy Bellar chased him down the street in south Lakeland, shooting at him with a rifle, the Polk County Sheriff's Office said. Bellar then fatally shot himself.

Jim Bellar said he is not certain what started the chain of events. Asked what the past few hours have been like for him and his relatives he said, "You'd only know if you'd lost your entire family."

He said a memorial fund has been set up for Nathan

Bellar at Mid Florida Federal Credit Union under account number 455633. The teen ran to a neighbor's home Sunday night after the first shots were fired, investigators say.

The neighbor called 911. An operator asked whether the boy's stepmother was still alive.

"She got shot in the head," 13-year-old Nathan Bellar said.

The teen told deputies that about 9:30 p.m. Sunday there were some words exchanged in the home, but there was nothing loud, Polk Sheriff Grady Judd said.

Then As Wendy Rene Bellar prepared to leave for the evening with the children, the shooting began.

Troy Ryan Bellar, 34, used a .308-caliber assault rifle with a scope to shoot Wendy, 31, their 4-month-old son, Zachary, and their 8-year-old son, Ryan, in the front porch area of their home at 2019 Creekbend Drive in south Lakeland, Polk County sheriff's office spokesman Scott Wilder said.

Troy Bellar shot himself in the front yard after he tried to chase down Nathan and shoot him.

"We'll always ask ourselves why, and the family members will always ask themselves why," Judd said. "None of us will ever get that answer.

"It absolutely makes your blood boil to think a man could that to his wife and children, and it's so sad." One 911 caller told the operator that she had heard about 10 gunshots.

Nathan Bellar will be placed with family members, Wilder said.

Troy Bellar had been arrested twice in Polk County. He was charged with aggravated assault in 1994 and with driving under the influence in 1999.

He pleaded no contest to aggravated battery, and adjudication was withheld, court records show. In that incident, Bellar took two bottles of Robitussin from a Lakeland Publix and attempted to leave the store without paying for it, deputies said. He tried running off after being caught, and he struck a person on the head with brass knuckles.

He pleaded no contest to the DUI charge and was

found guilty.

Deputies were called to the Bellars' home March 14 to investigate a domestic incident. Troy Bellar told investigators Wendy "beat on him some" and left with a knife, according to the state attorney's office.

Troy Bellar, who wasn't injured, told deputies his wife appeared to have been suffering from postpartum depression and was trying to gain his attention "through various actions."

Deputies said that when they spoke with Wendy Bellar following that incident, she couldn't explain what happened but said she loved her children and was a good mother. She told deputies she was embarrassed by her actions and didn't know what she wanted to do with the knife.

Wendy Bellar was charged with battery domestic violence after the incident, Wilder said. A pretrial conference had been scheduled for this Thursday.

Nathan Bellar attends Mulberry Middle School. Ryan Bellar attended Southwest Elementary School.

Grief counselors will be on hand today at the elementary school, according to the Polk school district.

"He was a very special, sweet boy; a little first-grader here that everybody loves," Southwest Elementary Principal Ellen Andersen said. "We're just all very, very saddened."

Michael Young, principal at Mulberry Middle, said the school is still assessing the need for a crisis team. He said Nathan Bellar is well-liked and that employees' hearts go out to him.

Brandi Holmes, who lives across the street from the family, said the Bellars seemed like nice, normal people.

"I'm so flabbergasted that this happened," she said.

Wendy Bellar last logged on to her MySpace page Thursday. She listed her mood as "eccentric."

Bellar's listed interests include: "Learning everything. Listening to and playing music. Reading and writing literature (especially poetry, prose). Everything about math and its perfection. Oh, yeah, and I hate sports."

She said her son Ryan's autism "gives him little language." She said she graduated from Pine Ridge High School in Deltona in 1996, attended Polk Community College in Winter Haven from several years and had been attending the University of South Florida, where she was majoring in English.

She wrote on her page that she would like to meet "Sylvia Plath, Natalie Merchant, Tracy Chapman, Mozart, Dali and God."

The Bellars had been married 10 years. Troy Bellar and his former wife, who also was named Wendy, were divorced in February 1998 after nearly four years of marriage. His first wife is Nathan Bellar's mother, court records show.

Deputies don't believe a suicide note was left at the scene.

Several similar high-profile cases in recent months have been tied to families' economic woes.

Deputies said they aren't aware of whether that is the case with the Bellars.

The shooting was this year's first murder-suicide in Polk County. Another recent one happened near Christmas in the county, when a man shot and killed his estranged wife, wife's boyfriend and then himself, and his daughter escaped from the bathroom, sheriff's spokeswoman Carrie Eleazer said.

An analysis by the Violence Policy Center in Washington, D.C., found an average of nine or 10 murder-suicides a week. But familicides - in which both parents and all their children are killed - generally happen only two or three times every six months, said Kristen Rand, legislative director for the center, a nonprofit gun-control advocacy group. She said there has been a clear rash of such killings in recent months.

They can be tied to the nation's economic woes, said Richard Gelles, dean of the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

He describes familicides as "canaries in a mineshaft" - sensational cases that herald an uptick in more common forms of domestic violence.

"You can only speculate over whether the economy is going to affect the broad swath of abuse of children and abuse of women," he said. "But the warning sign

is when these familicide cases begin to cluster. In the past few months, they have begun to pop off across the country."

Familicides have also occurred this year in Los Angeles and Santa Clara, Calif., and in Belle Valley, Ohio. The slayings are usually committed by men, usually because of shame over financial problems, and people close to the families never see it coming, Gelles said.

© 2013 TAMPA MEDIA GROUP, Inc.

[Contact Us](#) | [Member Agreement / Privacy Statement](#) | [Tampa Media Group Credit Terms and Conditions](#)

[Subscribe / Manage Tampa Tribune Account](#) | [Corrections](#)