

## **Mom recalls son's loving last words to her - Man - Beacon News, The (Aurora, IL) - April 12, 2018 - page 1**

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Ten years ago, 26-year-old **Santiago Calderon Jr.** stood on Gates Street with his back to Aurora police officer Ramon Lopez.

Calderon, who lived steps away on Ashland Avenue, raised a gun in his right hand and fired several shots toward Phillips Park, according to a police report Lopez filed after the April 4, 2008, confrontation. Lopez ordered Calderon to drop his gun, and Calderon appeared to ditch it in a parked car. Then Lopez told him to get on the ground.

"Shoot me," Calderon said, according to the 2008 report.

Calderon started to walk away, so Lopez ran and tackled him from behind. When another officer arrived, Calderon was facedown on the sidewalk yelling or crying while handcuffed. He was arrested and charged with aggravated unlawful use of a weapon and reckless discharge of a firearm.

A decade later, at age 36, Calderon died March 22 in a downtown Aurora shootout involving two Aurora police officers. Kane County Coroner Rob Russell said Calderon's preliminary cause of death was "multiple" gunshot wounds. Authorities have not yet disclosed how many or clarified whether one or both of the officers, both investigators, fired their guns. The Kane County Major Crimes Task Force is investigating. Aurora police have not yet released video of the incident.

"He's not a saint," said Calderon's mother, Elba Solis. "I don't know what happened that day. Do I want to know? Yeah. Do I want to find out? Yeah. But ... All I know is that I got a call saying to come down to the police station, and they told me my son was dead ... All I know is I got (his) four kids and I've got to try to take care of them."

Solis described Calderon as happy-go-lucky and impulsive, close to his four siblings, with many friends and few enemies. Maybe it was his time, she said. She said she's just trying to pick up the pieces.

"If they felt they were doing their job, well, more power to them," Solis said. "They left four kids fatherless. It's just that way. Nothing, nothing that I can say or nothing, nothing that anybody can do can bring my son back."

Solis said she knows her son will always be watching down on his kids, because of how much he loved them. He was a good father who would spoil them one second and discipline the next, she said.

In her Yorkville apartment during a recent interview, Solis, 59, teared up reflecting on the son

whose last words to her were that he loved her, whose favorite saying was "Count your blessings, not your problems." He never married and was effectively a single father, Solis said. Now she said she's doing her best to get his four children, ages 12 to 17, through the rest of the school year. Her two-bedroom apartment is too small for them all to keep living there, so she also has to think about moving.

Solis said Calderon had been between jobs and was trying to go to school for truck driving. That was his last wish, Solis said.

Calderon had a record of arrests on charges related to domestic violence, soliciting a sex act, growing marijuana and trespassing at the Hollywood Casino. His convictions included reckless discharge of a firearm, aggravated unlawful use of a weapon, resisting police and producing marijuana.

Calderon had more than a dozen encounters with Aurora police, according to reports provided to the Beacon-News. In a few cases, he also was a victim of crime, reporting his car burglarized or vandalized. Police listed him as a witness to a 2001 attempted murder in which a man was jumped, punched, kicked and stabbed.

Solis said that at some point during her son's adult life, some people started to wonder about his mental health. In one police report, a passenger in Calderon's car told an officer that Calderon had bipolar disorder but did not take medication. But Solis said that to her knowledge, he was never diagnosed.

Days before his death, Aurora police questioned Calderon following a shooting on the city's west side. On March 18, police were searching for a silver or white SUV they suspected was involved in the shooting. Investigators focused on a driveway with two SUVs, a silver model and a white Ford Escape.

When the Ford left the driveway and headed north on South Lake Street, police followed and clocked it going about 7 mph over the speed limit.

They pulled it over on the 100 block of South Lincolnway Street, according to reports. Calderon was driving. His two passengers said they were going to a party in North Aurora, while Calderon told police they were headed to an East Side Aurora barbecue, according to reports. Their stories didn't match up.

A pat-down search followed, and police reported feeling a large, metallic object in Calderon's jacket pocket. An officer handcuffed Calderon, then unzipped his jacket, according to reports. Officers found a 9 mm semi-automatic handgun with no rounds in the chamber but seven live rounds in the magazine, police reported. Calderon told police he had more ammunition. Police found the box under the driver's seat.

Calderon said there was no way his gun could have been used in the shooting earlier in the day, according to police reports. And police ultimately did not believe Calderon or anyone in his car was involved in the shooting earlier that day, the reports said.

But, as a convicted felon without a firearm owner's identification card, he wasn't supposed to have a gun. He was charged with felonies including aggravated unlawful use of a loaded weapon and appeared in Aurora Branch Court where Associate Judge Sandra Parga set his bail at \$75,000. Calderon bonded out, then skipped a status hearing March 21 in St. Charles. Kane County Associate Judge David Kliment ordered a warrant issued for his arrest.

The next day - March 22 - police said two investigators in an unmarked car followed an SUV driven by Calderon from a "known gang house" on South Lake Street to the first block of East Galena Boulevard, where they stopped it.

Calderon, who had a 24-year-old Aurora man in the car with him, shot at officers, then drove away eastbound, striking another car at Galena and Route 25, Aurora Police Chief Kristen Ziman said.

After the crash, Calderon ran, exchanging gunfire with the investigators, police said. Calderon was fatally shot in the parking lot on South LaSalle Street between Galena and Downer Place, police said.

Other officers started to arrive. One reported seeing Calderon on the ground near a concrete pillar under the railroad bridge. Calderon did not respond to police and was motionless, according to reports.

When one sergeant got there, he reported seeing Calderon still facedown, restrained with two sets of handcuffs.

"It appeared he was bleeding from his head," the sergeant wrote. "The medics asked for an officer to un-handcuff the offender."

Police removed the handcuffs, and medics turned Calderon over so he was facing up, according to reports. He was pronounced dead at the scene, police said.

Officers reported finding a pistol on the sidewalk a few feet away.

Ziman said the investigators involved, Matthew Huber and Colin Griffin, were both put on paid administrative leave while the case is under investigation. Police have not disclosed why they stopped the car.

Medics treated Griffin for a graze wound and Huber for shoulder injuries. Both were taken to an Aurora hospital, treated and released, according to reports.

The next afternoon, two men, including one who said he was Calderon's brother, pulled up to the parking lot in a silver sedan. They parked on LaSalle street, got out and tried to retrace some of Calderon's last steps.

"I don't understand," one of the men said as he walked through the parking lot, under the overpass.

Two weeks later, friends and family filled Healy Chapel on Downer Place for a visitation. Calderon

wore a pinstriped Cubs jersey, because, Solis said, that's what his kids wanted.

Two toy owls perched near his head, and a Cubs hat rested near his left side. One day, well into Calderon's adulthood, "he just came up with this fascination of owls and it never stopped," Solis said. He thought they were good luck, she said. A family photograph and a cross were also tucked inside the casket.

The family is thankful for everyone who has chipped in financially or supported them with hugs, prayers and kind words, Solis said.

Solis said when Calderon would visit, sometimes he'd leave her money, \$10 or \$20. He often brought her groceries or tacos.

He believed in God, in his own way, and was philosophical, Solis said. He liked to have answers, and he liked to be right. He'd challenge anyone on anything, she said.

But she remembers him as a good kid who played basketball, football and baseball and didn't get into fights. At family gatherings, Calderon was always the clown, Solis said.

Earlier this year, when Solis was in the hospital, Calderon showed up with a balloon and teddy bear, his mother said.

"He goes, 'Mom, I got the receipt in the car, I'm coming back for this stuff tomorrow, I just didn't want to come in empty-handed,' " Solis said. "And the nurse is like, 'You didn't just say that?' "

Solis knew he was only kidding. She knew her son better than that, she said.

Yet he didn't want to worry her and didn't tell her much when he got arrested, she said. There were things he liked to keep to himself.

"When he shared, he shared, and when he didn't, he didn't," Solis said.

The night he died, he was just visiting someone, she said.

"It was the second time they followed him out of there in an unmarked car," Solis said. "An unmarked car, anybody would be scared."

Though acknowledging he'd been to jail, Solis said she believes her son was "not a gangbanger" but was lumped in because of people he hung around with.

"Like they say, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink, so that's the way he was," Solis said. "He had friends all over. I didn't know how many friends he had until he died."

[hleone@tribpub.com](mailto:hleone@tribpub.com)

Twitter @hannahmleone