

Struggling to make sense of son's death - Man - South Jersey Times (NJ) - January 26, 2018 - page A1

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Millville

Catherine Gandy said that Millville police were familiar with her son **Edward C. Gandy Jr.**, 46, and his mental health problems from many previous encounters.

That's why she is baffled as to why an officer fatally shot him Monday after he called 911 saying he had a gun. No gun was recovered, authorities said.

"He wouldn't hurt anybody," his mother said. "He never had (a) gun in his life."

In her living room two blocks from the shooting scene Wednesday, Catherine Gandy said her son told her he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

When he wasn't taking medication, his mental health problems led to many run-ins with police, she said. Sometimes she had to call the cops on him, she said, and he even called them himself if he felt out of control or suicidal.

About two weeks ago, she said, Gandy pulled a knife in a nearby Wawa store and threatened to kill himself, she said. Police responded and called his cousin, who calmed him down, she said.

Millville police were the ones who trans

ported him to the hospital, she said, where he stayed in a crisis unit for about a week.

Asked whether she thought her son claimed to have a gun because he was trying to get police to shoot him — something dubbed "suicide by cop" — Catherine Gandy said she doesn't believe he actually wanted to die.

"He was just crying for help," she said, as he had called before.

Authorities have not confirmed any previous dealings with Gandy, as Millville police are not authorized to speak about the shooting and Cumberland County Prosecutor Jennifer Webb-McRae has not commented beyond the initial press release Monday.

Based on the 911 call released Tuesday, police had good reason to believe Gandy had a loaded gun. He told the dispatcher he was "feeling homicidal."

Gandy called police to the corner of High and McNeal streets, near the Rite Aid that Gandy's mother says he frequented.

According to the use of force report released Thursday, Patrolman Colt Gibson was the officer who fired two shots at Gandy. The officer said on the form, which is required by the state Attorney General's Office every time an officer uses any type of force, Gandy "threatened officer with a firearm."

The report also said Gibson went to the hospital but listed him as uninjured.

Authorities have not said how long officers were on the scene before Gandy was shot, or given details about what transpired.

Jack Hoban, a retired Marine who trains police departments such as Camden's in de-escalation, said he teaches officers that there are ways to avoid shooting a subject, even if one suspects the person has a gun or sees it in his or her hand. The first rule is to stay away and behind cover.

But he said there are a lot of unknowns in this case, including whether the officer was so close that if Gandy did something, perhaps a sudden move toward his pocket, it could make the officer feel that the only option was to shoot.

"That's why we've got to give the cop the benefit of the doubt here. Because the cop has heard he is homicidal, not suicidal, homicidal, and that he has a gun, he said it numerous times," said Hoban, president of Resolution Group International in Sea Girt.

"We don't know what happened in Millville, but we do know ... the training model is buy yourself time by taking cover and using space and de-escalate. Get a professional negotiator, de-escalator person in there to try to talk to the person," he said. "It doesn't mean it would work in this situation."

The deadly force incident is rare in recent years in Millville, a city of around 28,000.

Millville police recorded no use-of-force incidents in which officers fired their weapon from the beginning of 2012 to July of 2017, according to the most recent years available obtained through an open public records request.

Webb-McRae said the shooting is under investigation and the officer who fired is on administrative leave.

Public records show Gibson, 33, joined the Millville Police Department in September 2009 and last year earned a salary of \$70,801.

Catherine Gandy said that her son was nicknamed "Eddie Pisghetti" growing up because he was such a skinny kid. He loved to go fishing and play basketball with his siblings.

"Those four kids were so close when they were little," she said. "If someone did something, they'd stick together and no one would tell me who did it."

As an adult he worked several jobs, including at a casino and a factory, she said. He lived alone with

three cats on Dock Street.

His mental health issues surfaced when he was 24, she said.

“When he was properly medicated, he’d give you the shirt off his back,” she said. “He’s happy-go-lucky.”

But if he stopped taking his medication, he was prone to becoming upset and agitated, and sometimes expressed suicidal thoughts.

She said his doctor, after finding a benign brain tumor, told him to stop taking a bipolar medication that had been working well. Catherine Gandy said she doesn’t know when that happened or whether he was prescribed something else, but said his erratic behavior returned.

After the incident with the knife at the Wawa, his mother said, police ordered the family to bring Gandy’s hunting knife collection to the police station just in case. He was home from the hospital a week later, she said.

“I just saw him last Saturday. He wanted to walk my dog,” she said.

Late Monday morning, she, said, her sister called and told her something had happened with Gandy on the corner of High and McNeal streets. On her way out the door, she ran into a friend who said she had just seen Gandy crying.

Catherine Gandy said she learned later that police had again called Gandy’s cousin to calm him down like before, but he didn’t arrive in time.

When she got to the intersection, her son had already been taken to a hospital. “I saw police tape, his wallet, a Rite Aid bag and a little pool of blood,” she said.

She met with police from Millville and Vineland at the hospital and they told her Gandy was dead.

She told them she wanted to kiss him goodbye but wasn’t allowed to see him.

“That’s when it hit me hard,” she said.

NJ Advance Media staff writer Craig McCarthy contributed to this report.

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