

FINAL REPORT ON DEATH OF DAVID COLLINS IN LANCASTER, N.H.
ON APRIL 17, 2012

Released by: Michael A. Delaney, Attorney General

Subject: Investigation into Homicide of David Collins and Deaths of Gene and Elena Sly
in Lancaster, New Hampshire on April 17, 2012

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The Office of the Attorney General and the New Hampshire State Police conducted an investigation into a shooting incident, which occurred in Lancaster, New Hampshire on April 17, 2012. The incident resulted in the deaths of three people. The purpose of this report is to summarize the Attorney General's findings and conclusions with regard to the incident.

The incident began at approximately 3:00 a.m. on April 17, 2012, when the Lancaster Police were dispatched to a home located at 43 Wesson Road in Lancaster, pursuant to a 911 call indicating that a resident of that home had been shot. The first responding officer, Officer Richard Ball, discovered David Collins, age 44, lying in the front entry to his house, bleeding from at least one gunshot wound. He was being assisted by his fiancée and his son, both of whom also lived in the home.

The victim's son, Nicholas Collins, informed the officer that he had responded to someone knocking on the door at approximately 3:00 a.m., and, upon answering, found that it was their neighbor, Gene Sly, who lived with his wife, Elena, at 53 Wesson Road, a residence whose property bordered the victim's and was situated approximately 600 feet from the victim's house, on the same side of Wesson Road. Nicholas stated that Gene Sly asked to see his father, and Nicholas woke him up and then returned to his bedroom. Shortly after doing so, Nicholas heard a gunshot and returned to the front hallway, where he saw his father lying on the floor and Gene Sly running across the lawn toward his residence.

After giving this information, Nicholas Collins proceeded to load three bullets into a handgun and began to leave his own home, headed in the direction of Gene Sly's home. Officer Ball tried unsuccessfully to stop Nicholas and then ran after him towards the Sly residence. As he did so, he noted that something was burning in the driveway of the Sly home. Nicholas Collins fired three shots from his handgun, in the general direction of the Sly's driveway, but from approximately 30 feet away. He then ran back to his own home, and Officer Ball followed.

Once there, Officer Ball was able to get the gun away from Nicholas Collins. When ambulance personnel entered the residence, they found that David Collins was deceased.

Because the whereabouts of the presumed shooter, Gene Sly, was unknown, officers from Lancaster, Northumberland and the New Hampshire State Police surrounded the Sly residence while unsuccessful attempts to contact the Slys proceeded. Because of the potential danger of the situation, the Fire Department was unable to approach the Sly residence to extinguish the blaze in the driveway.

Eventually, police were able to ascertain, by means of a remote device, that no one was within the Sly residence. The burning object in the driveway was determined to be a pick-up truck with camper attached. The camper was almost completely destroyed by the fire. The New Hampshire Fire Marshal's office examined the remains of the truck and camper and discovered two bodies, one apparently in the cab of the truck, and the other apparently in the over-the-cab area of the camper. A .38 revolver was also found in the fire debris, as well as several .38 and .22 bullet casings and bullets.

The Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Thomas Andrew, performed an autopsy on the body of David Collins, and also examined the two bodies found in the burned truck/camper. Dr. Andrew found that David Collins had been shot twice, in the right abdomen and right temple. The cause of his death was gunshot wounds that perforated his brain, liver, pancreas, and aorta. His death was ruled to be a homicide.

One of the bodies from the truck/camper was identified as Gene Sly, age 64, through dental records and the presence of a hip prosthesis. The other body from the truck/camper was identified as a female, but could not be positively identified. Due to the surrounding circumstances, however, it is presumed to be the body of Elena Sly, age 64.

Two .38 cartridge casings were found near the front entry of David Collins' home. However, due to the condition of the .38 revolver recovered from the burned truck/camper, the forensic laboratory was unable to determine whether they were fired from that gun. In addition, the laboratory determined that none of the casings or bullets found in the fire debris were suitable for comparison with a firearm. The bullets found in the fire debris did not appear to have been fired from a gun.

The Fire Marshal conducted an investigation to attempt to determine the cause and origin of the fire that destroyed the truck/camper. However, due to the almost complete destruction of both truck and camper, they were unable to determine either the area of origin or cause of the fire. The Fire Marshal's report concludes that the most likely hypothesis is that the fire was intentionally set.

A background investigation concerning the Slys and David Collins indicated that there had been boundary disputes between them concerning their adjoining properties. In addition, the search of the Sly's home appeared to indicate that the occupants intended to leave, either temporarily or permanently. However, no evidence was found that clearly indicated why David Collins was killed or what Gene Sly's intentions were after he killed Collins.

In summary, all of the evidence collected and examined since the incident supports the original hypothesis that Gene Sly intentionally took the life of David Collins, after which he either killed his wife, Elena, or both he and his wife committed suicide.