

'NO STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON REVENGE'

SLAYING OF REPUTED MOBSTER REMAINS UNSOLVED, WRITES STEPHEN METELSKY



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Column

Rapid gunfire permeated the still, warm air in loud succession as shoppers and frantic bystanders scurried for cover.

When the smoke cleared, a man was observed laying on his back on the pavement outside the Pro Patio Furniture store at 484 Plains Rd. E. in Burlington.

The spent shell casings had barely hit the ground when the suspect vehicle — described as a newer model grey, four-door sedan, with a sunroof and damage to the driver's side door — sped away from the crime scene westbound on Plains Road East.

This was not a random shooting. The dead man on the ground was reputed Hamilton mobster Pasquale "Pat" Musitano. Halton Police "believe he was targeted" on that warm summer day on July 10, 2020, close to 1 p.m.

No one has been charged in the murder and no suspects have been identified.

"There was certainly some planning that went into it," said detective sergeant Trevor Bradley, who manages Halton's homi-

cide unit.

The premeditation and planning to murder Musitano began well before the fateful events in that Burlington parking lot.

Pat's murder eerily mimicked the high-profile underworld murder of Hamilton mafia boss Johnny "Pops" Papalia, who was ordered killed on May 31, 1997, at the behest of the then-powerful Musitano brothers, Pat, and his younger brother Angelo. Papalia was also shot on a warm, sunny day in the early afternoon in a public setting.

"The mafia uses symbolism and messages when someone is killed," said Antonio Nicaso, a professor at Queens University, organized crime expert and author of over 40 books on the subject. "It is an important part of mafia culture."

Kenneth Murdock had been hired to kill Papalia and his underboss in Niagara Falls — Carmen Barillaro — who was gunned down in the front foyer of



his home on July 23, 1997.

The hitman later flipped and struck a deal that sent the Musitano brothers to jail in 2000 after they pled guilty to conspiracy to commit murder in the Barillaro homicide, as part of a plea deal.

The precursors to Musitano's 2020 death in Burlington appear to have begun the day Papalia was killed over two decades earlier in Hamilton. This is the consensus shared by police intelligence and mafia experts.

"Yes, 100 per cent," said John Mans, the former detective sergeant, who managed Halton's intelligence unit up until 2017. "In all my experience with organized crime, these guys never forget."

Events in the underworld took a significant and violent turn after reputed Montreal mob boss Vito Rizzuto's untimely death in December of 2013. This created a major shift and void in Canada's underworld, with a ripple like



A police cruiser sits in the Plains Road East plaza where a double shooting left reputed mob boss Pat Musitano dead.

Graham Paine/Metroland

effect that played out into southern Ontario.

From that point on, there was a foreshadowing of violent events that led up to the Burlington shooting — in a slow, methodical escalation of violence levied against the two brothers.

In September 2015, Pat's SUV was set ablaze at his Hamilton home on St. Clair Boulevard.

On May 2, 2017, Angelo was shot to death at his Waterdown residence as he sat in his car.

In June 2017, weeks after his brother's murder, Pat's house was shot at.

Then on April 25, 2019, Pat survived the first attempt on his life, when he was shot several times in

the Mississauga parking lot of his attorney. Up until his death in Halton, it was believed Pat was on the run. However, the reputed mob boss couldn't outrun his past.

"There is no statute of limitations on revenge," added Nicaso.

On the day of the July 2020 shooting, the Hamilton Spectator confirmed John Clary and Pino Avignone were also present when Pat Musitano was murdered. Clary was shot and transported to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

"There is obviously a shroud of secrecy around the actual victims themselves," said Bradley.

"You're not necessarily going to get the full cooperation out of that (organized crime) world."

But who pulled the trigger? Part two: The anatomy of a hit.

Have a tip or information about this homicide?

Call the Halton Police Homicide Tip Line at 905-825-4776.

Tipsters can also provide information anonymously at Crime Stoppers: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

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