



## Murder jolts three into changing lives

By **Karen Jeffrey**

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He freely admits that a few years ago he stabbed someone who annoyed him. Drug dealing? It began at age 16 when he discovered selling marijuana brought him an easy \$100 a week. A few years later, he moved on to selling cocaine and heroin, routinely bringing in \$1,500 to \$2,000 a week.

Women? "I told 'em whatever they wanted to hear, and when I was done, I was done, no matter how much they cried."

As far as he was concerned, Julio Germaine Concepcion was "a player" who never gave much thought to the future.

All that changed in the early morning hours of Jan. 26, 2002, when Spencer MacLeod, one of his childhood friends, was killed during a South Yarmouth home invasion

That night forever changed the way Concepcion views his life and the lives of those around him.

Now, Concepcion can be found at 6 every morning praying at Victory Chapel in Hyannis. He has a full-time job for the first time in his life, pays his bills on time, and shares a house with two other members of his church. They take turns cleaning and cooking for one another.

A handsome young man with close-cropped hair and an easy smile, Concepcion laughs at how he would have reacted five years ago if someone predicted his current lifestyle.

Turned life around "Getting up in the morning, never mind being at church, never mind praying. Anyone who told me that I would be doing those things, I'd have thought they were crazy or high," he says.

In 2002, the year MacLeod was killed, there were 16,204 murders in the United States, according to the FBI.

Although these accounted for less than — percent of all violent crimes in this country, most people would agree that murder is a particularly brutal crime that has a ripple effect, hurting many of those close to the victim.

This was the case with MacLeod, a young man who, by all accounts, was loving, compassionate and patient with old friends who, unlike him, had not realized that drinking, fighting, doing drugs and taking advantage of women, are temporal pleasures.

Who was this young man whose life touched so many people?

He was a carpenter, a musician and a member of Victory Chapel. He wrote rap songs to express his religious beliefs, traveled with church members to South Africa on a mission of faith. He kept journals of his journey deeper and deeper into faith, journals that his mother, Robin Farnsworth, and two younger brothers, Miles and Jake, have often turned to during the past two years to help ease the pain.

But MacLeod had not always been such a paragon of virtue. His mother and others who loved him admit that the road to this productive life was preceded by a much bumpier path paved with bouts of alcohol abuse and fighting.

In the years before his death, MacLeod achieved a kind of peace that his friends envied. They watched as he shed a need for violence, alcohol and drugs, and instead found joy in religious faith. Although not ready to do the same, they remained friends, finding a private sense of comfort in the fact that MacLeod still welcomed them in his company.

"Spence was the last person in the world you'd think this would happen to," says Concepcion, recalling the morning he learned of his friend's murder.

It was a devastating moment because Concepcion was one of half-a-dozen young men whose fight earlier in the evening precipitated the home invasion.

"I feel responsible in part for Spence's death," says Concepcion. "That's a heavy burden to carry.

He kept his friends "The thing you have to understand about Spence is, he became a Christian but he didn't walk away from his friends. He prayed for me. He used to invite me to his church and tell me all the time that it wasn't too late," says Concepcion.

Sitting at the dining room table in a home he shares with friends Dave Murph Brandon Gomes, Concepcion shakes his head.

How can he describe the stomach-lurching moment when he heard of MacLeod's death?

"When he died, it was a shock to my system. That doesn't mean I changed right away. It took me a little while to come around, but I realized the burden was too heavy to carry on my own," he says quietly.

On nearby shelves are board games - Trivia Pursuit, Clue and Monopoly. Outside, cheers and jovial jeers erupt during a friendly game of driveway basketball.

A few minutes later, Murph Gomes come in, towels around their necks and grins upon their faces

Like Concepcion, they are friendly, open and welcoming of guests in their home. A few short years ago, neither of them would have been so pleasant or warm to a stranger - unless that stranger offered alcohol or drugs.

"We all knew each other growing up and saw each other around," says Murphy.

"I can tell you that Spence's death changed things for me. If he hadn't died and I hadn't changed my life, I would have been the next to go. It wasn't supposed to be Spence. It was supposed to be one of us," he says.

"The thing about Spence is, he had this gentle spirit, this sense of peace that shone from the inside," says Gomes. "I wasn't quite so involved in drugs and drinking like Julio and Murph, but my life wasn't going so well either.

"I saw Spence and wanted that same kind of peace," Gomes says.

The conversion is not easy to describe for them, although all three, can speak long and eloquently about their love of God and thirst for the Bible.

All three described becoming Christian as a "lifting of the burdens."

"When you quit that stuff, when you accept Christ into your life, all of a sudden you feel this burden lift from you, and you never recognized you'd been carrying it," Murphy says.

All members of Victory Chapel - the church MacLeod led them to through the example of his own life - Concepcion, Murph Gomes are hoping to become pastors.

"Spencer showed each of us about changing lives - that's the true product of Christianity, a changed life," says Gomes.

"Spencer's death brought us to the door, but Christ led us through," says Concepcion.

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