

AARON DANIEL HUFFMAN DOMESTIC ABUSE CHRONOLOGY

From striking, to stalking, to shooting: Why enforcement of firearms laws is critical

**By Katherine Luke
Research and Investigation Coordinator
July 2003**

On September 20, 2001, Minnetonka resident Aaron Daniel Huffman's year-long campaign of terror and violence toward his ex-girlfriend AJC culminated in one horrific and life-changing attack. During this attack, Huffman shot AJC's new boyfriend TAT in the leg with a shotgun and held AJC hostage for over an hour. TAT's left leg was amputated at mid-calf as a result of this assault. On April 12, 2002, Huffman received a sentence of 10 1/2 years, seven of which must be served in prison with the rest spent on parole. The trauma and permanency of this attack compelled us to compile this chronology to see what lessons could be learned from retracing the events leading up to it.

Huffman has been charged with 13 criminal cases in Hennepin County, the first of which was in 1992, when he was 18 years old. He was convicted of at least one criminal act in 10 of the thirteen cases. In addition, at least seven of the 13 cases involved crimes of domestic violence toward the same victim. These crimes occurred over a one-year period after Huffman and AJC bought and moved into a home together in September 2000.

One of the most alarming facts in the latest case is that Huffman was in possession of a gun. He had been convicted of numerous crimes of domestic violence within one year, threatened to commit suicide on numerous occasions, had an active order for protection against him, and had been specifically and repeatedly ordered by the court not to possess firearms. According to the victim, officials in this case were aware that Huffman owned at least one gun, yet it is not clear that the critical steps necessary to ensure his compliance with the firearms prohibition were taken. These critical steps would not necessarily have curbed his propensity for violence, but, in general, removing firearms from violent offenders decreases the likelihood of serious injury or death to their victims and themselves.

Many points in this case illustrate the criminal justice system working at its best—Minnetonka prosecutors charged violations of conditional release, Minnetonka police collected detailed evidence at each crime scene and made a determined effort to locate Huffman when he was “gone on arrival,” and the victim AJC cooperated with the prosecution. However, many factors also demonstrate the need for a better and more coordinated response on the part of the system. In particular, WATCH is troubled by a number of questions. How were Huffman's previous threats of suicide addressed by the court or his probation officer? Threats of suicide are well-known, critical indicators of possible future lethal violence towards others. Also, were the sentences he received appropriate or sufficient given the number of incidents and level of conduct? In all, Huffman only served approximately 19 days in jail for all the violence he inflicted up until the last incident. Finally, and most importantly, why, after numerous court orders, was Huffman still in possession of a shotgun? What actions, if any, were taken by criminal justice officials to remove known firearms from Huffman's possession? Answering these questions is imperative to prevent similar, potentially lethal, situations in the future.

Case One: 5th Degree Assault-Domestic (Misdemeanor)

9/24/00 Minnetonka Police Report: Huffman was arrested for twice hitting his girlfriend AJC in the face. Huffman and AJC had recently purchased and moved into a new home. During a fight earlier in the day, he had damaged their refrigerator and thrown a coffee table at AJC. After he hit her in the face, AJC locked herself in the bathroom and called the police on a cordless phone. The phone died while she was talking to the police. Later, she was unable to find the phone charger in its usual location. The police arrested Huffman, took pictures of the property damage, and contacted a battered women's advocacy program for victim services.

9/25/00 Conditional Release: Huffman was released on \$1,200 bail under the following conditions: no contact with AJC and no arrests or charges for alcohol related offenses, simple assault, breach of the peace, disorderly conduct, or resisting arrest.

10/9/00 Arraignment Hearing: Huffman appeared in front of Judge Ann Alton on **Case One** and pled not guilty. He was allowed to remain out of custody under the following conditions: no use of alcohol, keep counseling appointments, no contact with AJC except for counseling, stay away from the home, no use of non-prescribed drugs, random breathalyzer, remain law abiding, and random urinalysis (UA). The county "subject in process" database (SIP) lists Laurel Hersey as the prosecutor and John Price as the defense attorney.

10/23/00 Conditional Release Violation: AJC called Huffman's probation officer (PO) to report that he had allegedly been "sniffing cocaine." During this conversation, the PO learned that Huffman had also been living with AJC in the home. When confronted with this information, Huffman admitted to being at the home "one or two times." The PO received another phone call from AJC later that day, who said that Huffman had called her at work and threatened her for reporting him. Huffman was arrested for violating his conditional release for having contact with AJC; the drug test he took was considered 'negative' even though it showed traces of cocaine. Bail was set at \$4,200, which he met.

10/24/00 Conditional Release Violation: AJC called the police to report that Huffman was present at the home in violation of his conditional release. When officers arrived at the home, Huffman told them that he had been arrested the day before and released approximately one hour earlier. He said he was under the impression that he was allowed to be at the home. The police could not confirm the status of an apparent warrant, so he was not arrested.

10/26/00 Temporary Order for Protection: AJC filed a petition for a civil order for protection (OFP) against Huffman based on the incident that resulted in charges in **Case One**. Judge David Duffy issued a temporary OFP and a hearing was set for 11/2/00.

Case Two: Criminal Contempt of Court (Misdemeanor)

10/31/00 Complaint: Huffman was charged with criminal contempt of court in **Case Two** for the incident of 10/24/00.

10/31/00 Arraignment Hearing: Huffman appeared in front of Judge Daniel Mabley on **Cases One and Two**. Huffman was arraigned on **Case Two**, which was set to be handled in conjunction with **Case One**. For **Case One**, Judge Mabley ordered bail revised to \$0, refunded the bond, and reinstated all the prior conditions of release. SIP lists Laurel Hersey as the prosecutor.

11/2/00 OFP Hearing Outcome: AJC and Huffman appeared in front of Referee Marybeth Dorn for an OFP hearing. AJC was granted the OFP that included an order that Huffman be excluded from the home and stay away from her place of employment.

11/20/00 Case One and Case Two Outcomes: Huffman appeared in front of Judge John Sommerville for **Case One**. The count of 5th degree assault-domestic (misdemeanor) was amended to disorderly conduct (misdemeanor). Huffman pled guilty to the amended charge and was sentenced to serve 90 days at the Adult Correctional Facility (ACF) with credit for three days jail time and 87 days stayed for one year under the following conditions of probation: no firearms in possession, attend anger management classes, no weapons violations, follow the recommendations of probation, and no charges of breach of the peace, disorderly conduct, or any same or similar charges. He was also sentenced to pay a fine of \$1,000, with \$700 stayed for one year. **Case Two** was dismissed.

12/00 OFP Hearing Outcome: The 11/2/00 OFP was dismissed on action of AJC.

Case Three: 5th Degree Assault- Domestic (Misdemeanor)

6/10/01 Police Report: Huffman and AJC, living together at the home again, were discussing the events of a wedding reception the previous evening. At the reception, Huffman had followed AJC into a stall in the women's restroom and torn off her dress, claiming he was angry and jealous after she went for a walk with another man. While talking about this incident, Huffman became angry and punched the closet door, damaging it and causing his hand to bleed. Huffman also knocked a lamp and picture frames off the dresser. Later in the afternoon, while AJC was in the shower, Huffman found a man's phone number in AJC's purse. When she got out, he stopped her from getting dressed and leaving. Later while attempting to escape, AJC grabbed her purse and started running to the garage. Huffman chased her and managed to take her purse. When she reached her car, she got in, locked the doors, and called 911 on her cell phone. Huffman yelled at her to hang up the phone and he appeared to look around for something-AJC believed he wanted to break the car window. He used her keys to get in the passenger's side of the car and pulled the cell phone charger out of the car. Huffman then left the area on foot and was gone when the police arrived. Police took pictures of the damaged dress, purse, closet door, and bloodied napkins, then issued an arrest order to pick up Huffman. They located and arrested him; bail was set at \$1,200, which he met.

6/25/01 First Arraignment Hearing: Huffman checked in at the courthouse for **Case Three**, but left before his case was called. Judge Delila Pierce issued a bench warrant for his arrest.

6/26/01 Second Arraignment Hearing: The prosecutor added a count of disorderly conduct to **Case Three**. Huffman appeared before Judge Pierce and pled not guilty to both charges. He was allowed to remain out of custody under the following conditions: no use of alcohol, random testing, no contact with AJC, and no use of non-prescribed drugs. SIP lists Laurel Hersey as the prosecutor and Rick Petry as the defense attorney.

7/17/01 Police Report: A co-worker of AJC reported to police that he had spotted Huffman in his vehicle near AJC's place of employment. The co-worker informed AJC that Huffman was outside and escorted her to her car. As AJC was getting into her car, Huffman pulled his vehicle into her view, stopped in traffic, and yelled and made obscene gestures at her, threatening, "I'm

going to get you” and calling her a “whore” and a “slut.” He stopped when one of AJC’s co-workers began taking pictures of his actions.

7/23/01 Temporary OFP: AJC filed a petition for an OFP against Huffman based on the charges in **Cases Three, Four, and Five** and other violent and abusive incidents, including several threats Huffman made about ending his own life. Judge Kathryn Quaintance issued a temporary OFP ordering Huffman to have no contact with AJC and excluding him from AJC’s home and AJC’s place of employment. A hearing was scheduled for 7/30/01.

7/24/01 Preliminary Hearing: Huffman failed to appear at a preliminary hearing for **Case Three**. Judge George McGunnigle issued a bench warrant for his arrest.

Case Four: Stalking/Harassment (*Gross Misdemeanor*); Obscene or Harassing Telephone Call (*Gross Misdemeanor*); Harassment-Electronic Mail (*Gross Misdemeanor*); Violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order (*Misdemeanor*) (Three Counts)

7/25/01 Complaint: A complaint was filed for the charges in **Case Four**. These charges were based on incidents AJC reported to the police that took place between 7/9/01 and 7/20/01, including incidents from **Cases Three and Five** (see below); a 7/16/01 incident in which Huffman continuously placed calls to AJC at her mother’s house (where she was now living) over the course of an hour and a half repeatedly threatening to get his gun and kill himself, her, and any police if she called them; and incidents from 7/17/01 to 7/20/01 in which he sent threatening emails and voicemails to AJC. A warrant was issued for Huffman’s arrest and bail was set at \$6,000 with a condition of no contact with AJC.

Case Five: Violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order (*Misdemeanor*)

7/26/01 Complaint: A complaint was filed for the charge in **Case Five** based on the 7/17/01 police report and a warrant was issued for Huffman’s arrest. Bail was set at \$6,000.

7/27/01 Civil Property Case Filing: AJC filed a civil petition asking the court to order that the home be put on the market.

7/30/01 OFP Hearing: The OFP hearing was rescheduled for 8/13/01 because Huffman had not been served with the temporary OFP and the order for a hearing.

8/1/01 Police Report: AJC reported to police that she went to the house (from which Huffman was excluded due to the OFP) with a locksmith and had all the locks changed on 7/30/01. She found that many of her personal items had been placed in the garage along with sentimental greeting cards from Huffman for her and a friend of hers. On 7/31/01, she returned to the home to find that the locks had been destroyed, that Huffman had left an angry four-page letter for her, and that he had destroyed and removed the home’s electrical fuse box.

Arrest: Huffman was arrested on **Case Five**, met bail, and was released.

Case Six: Harassment - letters and messages (*Gross Misdemeanor*); Violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order (*Misdemeanor*)

8/3/01 Complaint: A complaint was filed for the charges in **Case Six** and a warrant was issued for Huffman’s arrest with bail set at \$5,900.

8/10/01 Arrest: Huffman was arrested on **Case Six** and met bail.

8/13/01 OFP Hearing Outcome: An OFP hearing was held in front of Referee Marybeth Dorn. AJC appeared with an advocate. Huffman appeared with his attorney, Rick Petry. Huffman denied the allegations in the OFP petition, but agreed to the issuance of the OFP. The OFP ordered Huffman to have no contact with AJC and to restrain from committing any acts of domestic abuse against her. It excluded him from AJC's place of employment, the home, and any future home of AJC for one year. It also notified him that he must comply with the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 concerning shipping, transporting, possessing, or receiving firearms and ammunition.

8/27/01 Arraignment Hearing: Huffman was arraigned on **Cases Four, Five, and Six** in front of Judge Bruce Peterson. He pled not guilty to all charges and demanded a jury trial. SIP lists Laurel Hersey as the prosecutor and Rick Petry as the defense attorney for all three cases.

9/4/01 Cases Three, Four, Five and Six Outcomes: In front of Judge Isabel Gomez, Huffman pled guilty to the 5th degree assault-domestic (misdemeanor) charge from **Case Three**, the harassment-electronic mail (gross misdemeanor) from **Case Four**, and the violation of a domestic abuse no contact order (misdemeanor) from **Case Five**. The disorderly conduct charge from **Case Three** was dismissed, five of the six counts in **Case Five** were dismissed, and all counts from **Case Six** were dismissed.

Sentencing: For **Case Three**, Huffman was sentenced to pay a fine of \$50 and serve 90 days at the ACF with 90 days stayed under the following conditions: no use of alcohol, attend anger management, no contact with victim AJC, no criminal charges, complete a rule 25 evaluation, no use of non-prescribed drugs, random breathalyzer, random UAs, remain law abiding, and follow recommendations of probation. For **Case Four**, Huffman was sentenced to pay a fine of \$50 plus \$240 restitution and serve 365 days at the ACF stayed for two years under the conditions listed above. For **Case Five**, Huffman was sentenced to pay a fine of \$50 and serve 90 days at the ACF with 90 days stayed under the conditions listed above.

Revocation: Huffman's probationary sentence from **Case One** was revoked. He was ordered to serve 90 days at the ACF with credit for 16 days and 42 days stayed for one year under the following conditions: attend anger management, no assault charges, no breach of peace, no firearms in possession, no disorderly conduct, no weapons violations, no same or similar charges, and follow the recommendations of probation. He was also ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine with \$700 stayed for one year under the conditions listed above.

9/11/01 Police Report: AJC called the police to report that several pieces of furniture stored in the garage of the home had been damaged. She said she believed Huffman caused the damage because a picture of the two of them holding hands had been left on top of the furniture. The police took pictures of the dresser and headboard, both of which had holes in them which appeared to have been caused by a blunt object. Industrial staples had also been punched through the headboard.

Case Seven - 1st Degree Assault (*Felony*); 2nd Degree Assault (*Felony*); Kidnapping (*Felony*)

9/20/01 Police Report: AJC and her new boyfriend TAT met at the home to move AJC's belongings. (AJC had been at the home earlier that day and found a note from Huffman as well

as court paperwork inside the house, which she reported to police.) Unbeknownst to AJC and TAT, Huffman was in the basement of the residence in violation of the OFP and the conditions of his probation. AJC was standing behind TAT as he was going down the stairs in the walkout basement when Huffman yelled, “Hey, motherfucker” and pointed a shotgun at them. TAT began to run back up the stairs and Huffman shot him in the left leg. TAT jumped through a window and ran across the backyard and into a neighbor’s yard to get away; AJC ran toward the garage. Huffman caught up to her, grabbed her by the neck and arm, and dragged her back into the house and down the basement stairs. Huffman then turned off all the lights, dragged her to the cedar closet, and grabbed more ammunition and a 12-inch knife.

Several neighbors came outside to assist TAT before the paramedics arrived. TAT had a very serious wound to his lower left leg and several significant cuts to his arms. Due to the rain and the mud/wet grass, the ambulance became stuck and was unable to transport TAT to the hospital for nearly 30 minutes. The ambulance took TAT to the Hennepin County Medical Center where he immediately underwent emergency surgery that resulted in the amputation of his left leg at mid-calf.

While holding AJC hostage, Huffman called his mother on a cell phone and told her it would be the last time she would talk to him. He then called the police. In the course of that conversation, he said that he hadn’t meant to hurt anyone and that he had the shotgun because he was suicidal. He also stated that the gun wasn’t supposed to go off and that he had thought the safety was on. Huffman then called his father and had a similar conversation. A hostage negotiator from the police then called Huffman back on his cell phone. Huffman had the gun this entire time and AJC was afraid for her life. After over an hour, Huffman decided to surrender.

9/21/01 Complaint: A complaint was filed for **Case Seven**. Bail was set at \$200,000 with no conditions or at \$125,000 with intensive conditional release including no contact with the victims or residence, no drug or alcohol use, random testing, and no possession of weapons.

9/21/01 Quitclaim Deed Signing: Huffman signed a quitclaim deed giving his father his interest in the home he and AJC jointly owned.

9/24/01 First Appearance: Huffman appeared in front of Judge Pamela Alexander. The defense attorney reserved bail arguments and bail was ordered to remain at \$125,000 with intensive conditions. SIP lists David Genrich as the prosecuting attorney and Rick Petry as the defense attorney.

9/27/01 Amended Complaint: The criminal complaint in **Case Seven** was amended to include a count of 2nd degree attempted murder-intentional (felony).

10/15/01 Second Appearance: Huffman appeared in front of Judge Myron Greenberg for **Case Seven** where he was served with the amended complaint and bail was revised to \$400,000. SIP lists Samuel McCloud as the public defender and John Price as the co-chair on the case.

10/19/01 Civil Property Case Hearing: Judge Deborah Hedlund ordered the home to be placed on the market under the terms requested by AJC with the proceeds from the sale being deposited into an interest-bearing account through district court.

11/8/01 Arraignment Hearing: Huffman was arraigned in front of Judge Swanson on **Case Seven**. He pled not guilty to all four counts, demanded a jury trial, and waived his right to a

speedy trial. Victim AJC made a formal request to Judge Swanson for a speedy trial. Judge Swanson denied AJC's request.

12/28/01 Civil Property Case Outcome: Judge Hedlund ordered that AJC should receive the sum she contributed to the down payment of the mortgage on the house, repair and maintenance fees, compensation for damaged property, and compensation for legal fees. Judge Hedlund also found the transfer of interest from Huffman (defendant) to Huffman (father) to be fraudulent.

3/18/02 Trial: Jury selection for **Case Seven** began with Judge Warren Sagstuen after three continuances between January and March 2002.

3/19/02 Case Seven Outcome: Huffman appeared before Judge Sagstuen where the criminal complaint was amended to add a felony count of violation of an order for protection and to change the count of kidnapping to kidnapping-false imprisonment. Huffman pled guilty to one felony count of 1st degree assault and one felony count of kidnapping-false imprisonment. The remaining felony charges were set for dismissal at sentencing. Huffman was ordered to be held without bail.

4/12/02 Sentencing: Huffman appeared before Judge Sagstuen for sentencing on **Case Seven**. For the 1st degree assault (felony), Huffman was sentenced to 98 months in custody of the commissioner of corrections, of which 2/3 must be served in prison. He was also ordered to pay \$3,259 out of prison earnings for restitution. For the kidnapping-false imprisonment (felony), Huffman was sentenced to 28 months in the custody of the commissioner of corrections, of which 2/3 must be spent in prison. These sentences were ordered to be served consecutively, meaning that he will be in the custody of the commissioner of corrections for 126 months or 10 1/2 years, although he could be eligible for supervised release from prison in 84 months or seven years (minus his 205 days of jail credit). TAT read a victim impact statement at the sentencing hearing expressing his frustration at the length of the sentence and the decision not to revoke Huffman's more than 13 months of probationary sentences from **Cases Three, Four, and Five**. At the time of printing, advocates were working with city attorneys to get revocations for **Cases Three, Four, and Five**.