

## Couple in murder-suicide had history of violence, family says

Wife filed for order of protection in 2006 that was dropped when she didn't show up for court hearing



Court records show that Christine Johnson Tyler filed for an order of protection, later dropped, against her husband Gardell Tyler in 2006. (Family photo)

By Kristen Schorsch Tribune reporter

*August 19, 2009*

Leslie Brown Simmons had been a victim of domestic violence, even going to prison after being convicted of arranging the murder of her husband, who allegedly had beaten her with a pipe and threatened to kill her.

Now, she leads workshops on how to escape abusive relationships and recently had counseled her sister, Christine Johnson Tyler, like she would any other victim: Change the locks. Don't be surprised if your husband beats you one day and buys you jewelry the next. If you want to be separated, don't let him back in the house.

"She listened but she didn't take my advice," said Brown Simmons, 55, of Maywood.

Johnson Tyler, 52, was killed early Tuesday in her home in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. Her estranged husband, Gardell Tyler, 57, shot her multiple times, then shot and killed himself a few hours later at his workplace, police said.

The couple had been together for more than 30 years but were married for just about a decade, family members said.

For the last week Tyler told those close to him he was angry and wanted to kill his estranged wife and himself, a police source said.

Family members said Johnson Tyler had just finished cooking when Tyler stopped by.

Johnson Tyler usually worked until 10:30 p.m. for Securitas, a company that provides security for the [CTA](#), among others. She cooked when she got home for her three children and two grandchildren who lived with her, so they had something to eat the next evening, said her brother, Larry Sistrunk. She had two other children and six more grandchildren who lived elsewhere.

Though she and Tyler separated at the beginning of the year, she let him stop by to see the children and grandchildren, Sistrunk said.

As Johnson Tyler and her estranged husband were talking in a bedroom early Tuesday, her adult children hanging out on the front porch heard them arguing and then gunshots.

Their son Isaiah Tyler bolted into the house and kicked in the bedroom door, his uncle said.

"That's when he seen his mother on the ground and he was trying to stop [his father] from shooting again," Sistrunk said.

Tyler managed to escape, running out the back door and fleeing in his pickup truck. Police who responded about 1 a.m. to a call of shots fired in the 5200 block of West Ferdinand Street found Johnson Tyler shot in the back.

Just before 5 a.m., police went to an apartment building in the 1800 block of South Pulaski Road to try to take Tyler into custody. He had gone to hide out where he worked in maintenance. Family members showed up and tried to calm him down but, police said, he took his own life about two hours later.

Tyler's family members could not be reached for comment or declined comment.

Brown Simmons said she encouraged her sister in the last few months to file an order of protection against her husband but she didn't. She had sought one in 2006 after Tyler allegedly choked her and punched her in the face and head, Cook County Circuit Court records show.

In the petition, Johnson Tyler said she and her husband had a history of abuse and she feared more violence, the court records show. Her husband was charged with domestic battery but the charges were dropped and the order of protection dismissed when Johnson Tyler didn't show up in court almost a month into the case.

"I told her it's really sad," Brown Simmons said of her sister's situation. "Someone's going to get hurt."

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