

## 2 adults, 3 kids found dead in Oak Harbor home

Written by

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OAK HARBOR -- In what turned out to be the last time Neil Atwater saw his grandson Alan, there was something about him that seemed a little off.

Neil's wife Joan described her grandson, 31, as a workaholic and the kind of person who was always there for his family, be it working the family farm, helping them through times of illness or helping her learn how to use a computer.

"He didn't act like Alan," Joan remembered Neil telling her Friday.

That night, police believe, Alan Atwater, 31, shot his wife Dawn, 30, and their children Ashley, who just celebrated her fourth birthday about two weeks earlier; Isaac Atwater, 2, and Brady Atwater 1 1/2. Alan Atwater called the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office at 12:11 a.m. Saturday morning.

"There's been a terrible accident at my house," Atwater matter-of-factly told a dispatcher. "My wife and three children are dead. Gunshot wound, and I'm getting ready to kill myself right now."

Alan Atwater said that he shot them, and then hung up as the dispatcher started asking what happened.

Ottawa County Sheriff Bob Bratton said deputies arrived within minutes to the two-story farmhouse, but seeing and hearing no movement within the house. Bratton said the Sheriff's Special Response Team set up a perimeter for their own safety, noting that even with what Atwater said in the call, they couldn't be sure if it was a hostage situation -- or a set-up for an ambush.

Joan Atwater was listening to the police scanner and heard deputies dispatched to the house. She tried to call 20 or 30 times, by her estimation, but got no answer.

Sheriff's deputies also tried to reach Alan by phone, as well as through loudspeakers on site. They, too, got no answer.

At 2:52 a.m., the Sheriff's Special Response Team broke into the house and found the bodies in an upstairs bedroom. Brady was in bed; the rest were on the



Alan Atwater killed three of his children, along with his wife and himself inside a farmhouse Saturday, April 16, 2011, in Oak Harbor, Ohio. / AP  
Photo/Ottawa County Sheriff's Office

floor. No note has been found, Bratton said.

"Obviously, this is a tragedy," said Sheriff's Capt. Olen Martin. "The community is shocked."

Including Atwater's grandmother.

"I cannot believe this happened," Joan Atwater said. "I never expected something like this.

"We don't know what went on," she said. "He said they had marital problems, but we all have marital problems."

Bratton said Alan Atwater had no criminal history beyond traffic violations, and they were never called to any kind of domestic incident at the home.

Alan Atwater worked in the maintenance department at Davis Besse Nuclear Power Station. Bratton said Dawn Atwater didn't work outside the home.

Joan Atwater said her grandson also helped with the family farm run by her husband, whom Alan Atwater addressed not as "grandpa," but as "chief."

She said Dawn Atwater was a quiet person, but the children were starting to get chatty as they got older. Isaac always came up to her and tried to talk to her, she said.

"Ashley was getting older and a little more talkative," Joan Atwater said.

Atwater also had a 12-year-old daughter

from a previous relationship, Bratton said.

Atwater and the girl's mother had joint custody, and she was in Lucas County this weekend, Bratton said.

The case remains under investigation by the sheriff's office and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation. Bratton said autopsies will be performed, possibly Sunday or Monday.

This is the second multiple murder in Ottawa County in six months. B.J. Liske was arrested and charged with the Halloween murders of his father, stepmother and stepbrother in their Benton Township home.

"For some reason, this is how people are finding a resolution to their problems," Bratton said. "I wish I had an answer, but I don't."

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Alan Atwater, who killed himself, his wife and three children early Saturday morning. / AP Photos