

American horror story

Elderly husband kills wife, then himself, in desperation over skyrocketing healthcare costs

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At 8:23 a.m. on Wednesday morning, 77-year-old Brian S. Jones called the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office near his home north of Seattle, Washington, and told the dispatcher, "I am going to shoot myself." There was a note, he told dispatchers, which would explain everything. "We will be in the front bedroom," he said, before hanging up the phone.

This was the final scene in a horror story that exposes the cruelty and criminality of American capitalism.

Shortly after hanging up, Jones took a pistol and aimed it at his 76-year-old wife's head, firing once and killing her. He then turned the gun on himself and pulled the trigger three times.

When police arrived, they surrounded the home and attempted to contact the residents via loudspeaker. After sending a robot-mounted camera into the home, they found their bodies lying side by side.

Police found the notes, which explained what had happened. Jones' wife, Patricia Whitney-Jones, suffered from serious health problems, and the couple could not afford medical care. Jones, an apparent Navy veteran, wrote directions as to how police could contact their next of kin. Police found the couple's two dogs and turned them over to the Humane Society.

The home was not located in a forgotten, impoverished area but in a semi-rural neighborhood near the Cascade Mountains where homes are valued in the \$400,000 range. The bottom 90 percent of people in "the richest country in the world" are living under financial hardship that varies only in terms of degree.

The couple's next-door neighbor, Sherrie Schulteis, told local news website *My Ferndale News*:

"This was our dear neighbor and all of us on Timmerman Lane are totally shocked as this man drove by everyday with his dog hanging out the car window. We talked often and knew his wife was very ill with Alzheimer's. We all wished he would have said something, because we could have helped him and put him in touch with people could help them. Please anyone in this situation, you can call to start looking for help. He never seemed depressed, nor did he speak of anything he was going through. He also would walk his dog often down our tiny dead end street."

This was apparently not the first time tragedy had struck the residential road located just a few minutes east of Interstate 5. Schulteis further noted:

"But here is the horribleness of this whole thing, less than 6 months ago our across the street neighbor shot himself, a young man with PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder], cops and SWAT all lined our street then too. He was young—in his 50's—and this guy and the whole block knew and saw him riding his bike, or walking his tiny dog also. He lived directly across from our house and we talked with him everyday as we were outside a lot. We had no idea his PTSD would kick in and he started believing everyone was someone else and he was going to kill everyone."

This man, Schulteis explained, was evidently also a military veteran: "The other veteran he lived with called the police and when the man saw the police approaching the house he shot himself. So, in 8 little houses on this road we have had this happen. I do go up and hug strangers after talking with them, I do everything I can, I love our human race, but sometimes

we can't do everything. We check on our neighbors, watch after their houses. I myself I feel so guilty, could I have done more?"

No, Schulteis is not to blame for the horrors corporate America and imperialist war have wrought on her quiet country block. Blame for the unnecessary deaths of Brian Jones and Patricia Whitney-Jones lies squarely at the feet of America's healthcare profiteers, their bought-for politicians and a capitalist system which guarantees the power of corporations to kill people like the Joneses for profit.

According to the National Institute of Health, the average American over the age of 65 pays \$3,000 in out-of-pocket healthcare costs per year, eating up over 40 percent of all social security payments. Studies show this is only expected to worsen. By 2030, 42 percent of Medicare beneficiaries will spend at least 20 percent of their total income on out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

As costs skyrocket, the ruling class complains that elderly people live too long and that their pensions and Medicare payouts cost corporations and governments too much money. One 2019 publication from the International Labor Organization laments:

"Population ageing adds another burden to the sustainability of existing social protection systems. The tax base may erode as the labour force decreases and expenditures for pensions and care services increase. In particular, health-care costs tend to increase when populations grow older since the elderly use more services and require more expensive treatment. For example, in the United States, increasing life expectancy is projected to lead to an increase from 15 to 29 per cent of GDP in health expenditures by 2040. Moreover, provisions for the elderly are expected to increase and be used for longer periods of time, which may overwhelm the pension system in the absence of later retirement ages or increased taxation."

The moves in ruling circles to force elderly people to die sooner was expressed most bluntly by Ezekiel Emanuel, brother to former Obama Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who wrote a 2014 *Atlantic* article titled "Why I Hope to Die at 75."

In the article, Emanuel complains that Americans are obsessed with efforts to "cheat death and prolong life as long as possible." He advocates against what he calls a "manic desperation to endlessly extend life" which unnecessarily costs corporations money. He complains

that advanced healthcare has "slowed the dying process."

Whichever government agency or corporation was responsible for the Joneses health has succeeded in achieving what the for-profit system demands. And that agency or company will mark the couples' death by removing any payments it owed to cover Patricia's Alzheimer's treatment from the expenses section of their balance sheet.

For over a century, Americans have employed the popular phrase "keeping up with the Joneses" to signify the struggle to appear as upwardly mobile as the family next-door. The deaths of Brian Jones and Patricia Whitney-Jones symbolize the harsh reality of capitalism today. For hundreds of millions in the US today, "keeping up with the Joneses" just means staying alive.



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