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Knock on door, fatal crossfire

Family members detail face-off that left girl dead

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Thus began the deadly gun confrontation that ended with the death of 10-year-old Auralia Cisneros, one of her relatives said Wednesday.

Jessy Paiz, who identified himself as Auralia's cousin, said the story was related to him by Auralia's parents, who were there when their daughter was shot Monday night.

Auralia lived at 4711 W. Tennessee Ave. Just before 10:30 p.m. Monday, she was at the apartment with her younger siblings Molly, who is about 6, and Zane, 4, according to family.

Auralia's father, Leo John Cisneros, who goes by "Mickey," and her mother also were in the apartment, according to family accounts. Auralia's mother is Amanda Salas, according to one family member, who was unsure how to spell Amanda's last name.

Cisneros' brother, Louis, was in the apartment, too, Paiz said.

Auralia was about to kiss her mom goodnight, Paiz, 20, recounted. Then there was a knock on the door. Someone opened it.

"Whassup homey?" the gunman said, but then hesitated, according to Paiz.

The gunman pointed a small gun back and forth, first at Louis, then Mickey. "He did not know whether to shoot him or Mickey," Paiz said. "He did not know who he was there for, or something."

Girl shot in the head

Denver police say a crossfire broke out between apartment occupants and at least the one gunman outside.

Auralia died of a gunshot wound to the head, the Denver Coroner's Office said Wednesday. Sonny Jackson, police spokesman, confirmed that Auralia was shot inside in the apartment.

But there were so many shots, police have said, that they do not know who fired the fatal bullet, at least for now.

Paiz could not say whether Auralia's father fired a gun in the shootout. But he also said Auralia's father recounted how he could not have fired the fatal shot because Auralia was

"away from him."

The gunfight may have involved gangs or drugs, according to police. But family members who gathered outside the apartment Wednesday said they wanted to tell the media that gangs and drugs were not the issue.

"It's not anything like that," said Cisneros' sister, Benita Cisneros.

Relatives added they did not have a motive for what happened. They said Cisneros did not work, and Paiz believed he may have had trouble finding a regular job because of tattoos on his face.

Cisneros also was described as the type of man who would take in any family member who needed a roof over their head.

Sad day at school

Auralia was remembered by family and neighbors as a girl who liked to dance and sing to hip hop and play hide-and-seek. She and her friends were also building a fort.

"She was just the greatest little girl in the world," 25-year-old Benita Cisneros added. "She was a special person."

Auralia's apartment in a small, gray building was closed off with police tape most of the day.

Benilda Samuels, spokeswoman for the Denver Department of Human Services, declined to say whether any other children who lived at the home were placed in the agency's custody.

The department, Samuels said, has had "no prior involvement with this family, and that includes their children."

Samuels declined to say whether human services workers currently were investigating the family, but said "any children who were at the home are safe."

"Human services is working closely with the police to provide any help that we can," she said.

A police car parked outside appeared to be in constant vigil, and investigators came by in the afternoon. A small collection of stuffed animals, flowers, a wreath and candles sat near the crime scene.

'No place for kids'

Auralia's death reverberated at her school, Force Elementary. A school letter sent out Tuesday informed parents, briefly, of the death and offered support and counseling.

Two troubled parents said it was at least the third letter sent home this year outlining problems with the school, such as suspected drugs being found.

"That's kind of like the last straw with me," Jerad Maes said of Auralia's death as he picked up his sons Wednesday afternoon.

Maes said he would send his kids to a different school next year, maybe in Golden.

"Pretty much anything west," he said. His children - Matthew, 8, and Brandon, 6 - recalled a sad day at school.

Brandon told how the class wrote cards to Auralia's sister.

Pauline Lopez, 37, lives next to Auralia, and her 6 year-old twins attend Force and played with Auralia. "This neighborhood is just terrible," Lopez said Wednesday as she recounted hearing the gunshots. "It's no place for kids."

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School of slain girl counsels classmates

By Kirk Mitchell

The Denver Post

<<mailto:kmitchell@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20School%20of%20slain%20girl%20counsels%20classmates>>

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Grief counselors met with students and faculty today at Denver's Force Elementary School, where a 10-year-old attended classes before she was shot to death Monday night in her home.

Principal Ann Myers also sent a letter home to parents Tuesday asking them to talk to their children about grief and loss and to look for signs of stress.

"Some students may have some unresolved feelings and difficulty understanding the loss of their classmate," Myers' letter said. "You may wish to discuss death and grief further with your son or daughter."

The Denver coroner's office identified the girl as Auralia Cisneros. The office reported today that Auralia died of a gunshot to the head and determined that it was a homicide.

Denver Police Chief Gerry Whitman said a shootout broke out about 10:30 p.m. in the doorway of the girl's apartment in the 4700 block of West Tennessee Avenue and that shots were exchanged from inside and outside the unit.

He said the shooting was related to drugs being sold from the apartment. Seven detectives are working on the case, including gang-unit detectives.

Police are looking for two suspects. One is described as a Latino man in his early 20s, about 5-foot-5 and 145 pounds. The man had a mustache or goatee, Detective John White said, and was wearing a dark plaid outer shirt or black hoodie with a white inner shirt. He was wearing a brown or black hat.

Whitman did not describe the second suspect but pleaded for the public's help in the form of tips to investigators.

Denver Public Schools spokesman Alex Sanchez said a team of crisis counselors went to the school Tuesday and spoke with teachers and students in groups and one-on-one.

He said the counselors would stay as long as they are needed and that they may be at the school the entire week.

Signs that a child might need additional help include a change in

sleeping or eating habits, behavioral changes, withdrawal, physical symptoms or tearfulness.

Friends, family mourn Auralia

"Nonsense," relative says of reports tying girl's shooting to drug deal, gangs

By Kirk Mitchell and Kieran Nicholson

The Denver Post

<<mailto:kmitchell@denverpost.com?subject=The%20Denver%20Post:%20Friends,%20family%20mourn%20Auralia>>

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Relatives of a 10-year-old girl who was fatally shot in her southwest Denver apartment spoke out Wednesday, saying the victim's family is being wrongly accused of drug and gang ties.

"We need to clear up all this nonsense that it's gang-related or a drug deal gone wrong," said Jonathan Davis, 23.

Auralia Cisneros was killed Monday night when gunfire erupted in the doorway of her home.

Police are still looking for two suspects. The morning after the shooting, police said marijuana was involved and gang detectives were working the case along with homicide detectives.

Davis, who is a cousin of Auralia's mother, Amanda Salas, said there was marijuana in the house, but no one in the home was dealing or selling drugs.

Auralia's father, Leo "Mickey" Cisneros, kept a gun in the home because someone had been trying to break into the apartment for the past two months, Davis said.

"They were scared," he said. "That's the only reason why he had a weapon."

Davis spoke on behalf of the couple, who were not available for

comment. His remarks could not be independently confirmed.

Davis said Auralia, a fifth-grader, was finishing up some homework and getting ready for bed Monday night when someone knocked on the apartment door.

"They opened the door and there is a guy standing there with a gun," Davis said. "They never saw him before in their life."

Davis said the stranger opened fire and Leo Cisneros returned fire.

"Imagine if Mickey didn't have a weapon, how much worse this could be," Davis said. "The guy started firing shots. Mickey fired back at the suspect in self-defense."

Auralia was shot in the head, the Denver coroner's office said Wednesday.

Denver Police Chief Gerry Whitman said Wednesday there were six or seven people, including children, at the apartment at the time of the shooting.

Kids in agency's care

Denver social workers have taken custody of three children, Auralia's younger siblings.

"The children are now in our custody and they are safe," said Benilda Samuels, spokeswoman for Denver Human Services. "We are working with the family to make sure they have all the services they need."

The agency did not receive any complaints about the treatment of the children before the shooting, Samuels said Wednesday.

"We had no involvement until this happened," she said.

Whitman said detectives are investigating all angles, including the role Auralia's family may have played. No arrests have been made.

"We're working a lot of leads," Whitman said.

Homicide detectives searched the apartment Tuesday and Wednesday for clues, he said. He declined to say whether drugs or any other evidence was found.

Whitman said detectives would like to speak with anyone who has been to the apartment recently.

"I'm convinced there are people who were involved or not involved who know what happened," he said. "Hopefully we can solve this soon."

Counseling at school

Auralia's slaying affected a lot of people.

Grief counselors met Tuesday and Wednesday with students and faculty of Force Elementary School, where Auralia was a student.

Principal Ann Myers also sent a letter home to the parents of children Tuesday asking them to talk to their kids about grief and loss and look for signs of stress, including withdrawal and tearfulness.

"Some students may have some unresolved feelings and difficulty understanding the loss of their classmate,"

Myers' letter says. "You may wish to discuss death and grief further with your son or daughter."

On Wednesday, Laura Vessey drove her children to Auralia's home so her daughters could drop off a "goodbye note."

Nine-year-old Savannah Deleon, Vessey's daughter, rode a school bus with Auralia.

"I'm depressed because my best friend died," Savannah said.

The note contained "pictures" Savannah drew along with her younger sister, 6-year-old Juliana. The sisters also left a toy in front of the apartment building where other mourners had left stuffed animals and candles in the snow.

"Just a family man"

Danny Mattorano lives next door to the Cisneros apartment with his two children, a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old.

Mattorano's 10-year-old daughter, Delany, and Auralia were very close

friends, he said.

Mattorano said he's been in and out of the Cisneros apartment over the past three years and he has not seen drugs or witnessed anything that would indicate marijuana was being sold there.

"He was all about his music," Mattorano said of Cisneros.

Cisneros is a rapper and hip-hop producer who makes his own CD recordings under the label Hustle Harder/Hustle Home, Mattorano said.

"He is just a family man," Mattorano said. "He was all about his kids. Everybody is shook up about it."

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