



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2016

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### **135 The Massacre of Erba: An Uncommon Homicide by a “Normal Peaceable” Couple**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with a famous chronicle case of the Italian press: the massacre of Erba.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how a common situation of quarreling among neighbors between apparently normal people can turn into a terrible mass murder.

The event occurred at approximately 8:00 p.m. on December 11, 2006, in the small town of Erba, close to Milan, Italy. The massacre took place in an apartment in which four people were killed with knives and iron bars: 30-year-old Raffaella Castagna; her 2-year-old son, Youssef Marzouk; her 60-year-old mother, Paola Galli; and the 55-year-old neighbor, Valeria Cherubini, and her dog. Ms. Cherubini's 65-year-old husband, Mario Frigerio, was present and was saved because he was presumed dead by the killers. After the massacre, the apartment was set on fire.

Raffaella Castagna was attacked and struck repeatedly with a bar (the cause of death was a skull fracture), stabbed twelve times, and then her throat was cut. Paola Galli was stabbed and hit by a bar (the cause of death was a skull fracture). In the apartment located upstairs was the lifeless body of a neighbor, Valeria Cherubini (Mario Frigerio's wife), who had rushed downstairs to help because of the smoke coming from the apartment. She was hit with a pointed, cutting weapon, and seriously injured by 34 stab wounds and 8 blows. Upon arrival of the first responders, the woman was still alive and had cried to the neighbors for help who could not reach her because of the smoke. Ms. Cherubini died by suffocation from carbon monoxide due to the fire, as did the family dog. Mario Frigerio was stabbed in the neck, but survived thanks to a congenital malformation of the carotid artery that prevented him from completely bleeding to death. In the apartment on the first floor, the primary site of the massacre, the small Youssef was assassinated with a single shot to the throat that severed the carotid artery and he died from a hemorrhage.

The investigation first focused on Raffaella's husband, Azouz Marzouk, born in Zaghuan, Tunisia, who had a criminal record for drug dealing and was released from prison on a pardon; however, Marzouk was in Tunisia visiting his parents at the time of the incident. He rushed to Italy, where he was interrogated by the police. Investigators confirmed his alibi and began to investigate two neighbors, Olindo Romano and Rosa Bazzi, because of their suspect behavior and because they had previously had legal disputes with the deceased. These suspicions led investigators to seize some of the clothes of the married couple and to seize their house and car. Both had injuries (the husband had a bruised hand and forearm; his wife a bleeding finger wound). Moreover, the investigators found traces of blood in the car, which was then attributed to Valeria Cherubini. They were stopped by the police the next day. The couple were sentenced to life imprisonment in all three of the Italian proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

This work retraced all the psychological analysis on the two killers, analyzing the acts and the recorded psychological interviews, going over their past lives and traumas, trying to understand the inner reason for their act. The couple was described as very closed and isolated, with a low education level, quiet, anonymous, and morbidly attached to each other. Their relationship was the first for each one; they met each other when they were very young and then married, despite the opposition of his family. Rosa was raped when she was a girl and after the marriage, she lost a baby during pregnancy and could not have more children. This event tied the two pathologically. She was described as a mentally healthy woman, strong and predominant, with an obsessive attention to order and cleanliness, perhaps with an imperceptible mental impairment. Olindo was diagnosed with a clear paranoid trait, deeply in love with and willing to do anything for her. It was their symbiotic relationship that created a new and different entity: the real killer couple.<sup>2-5</sup>

The exceptional aspect of this mass murder lies in the apparent normality of this couple.



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### Massacre of Erba, Neighbor Murder, Mass Murder