

Benson. When asked what he thought of them, the bald, girth-laden man with tats wrapping his skull gave the detectives a bizarre response. "I just thought they were nice people," he said. "They were happy people."

With Smith being unhelpful, it was time for Higgins to come back in the interview room. Before leaving, Joyce looked at Smith and said, "The fact is we got two guys shot in the head and burned. Nobody deserves that, right?"

"Nobody," Smith murmured.

Once Higgins returned, he instantly had a question. "So how come you didn't tell me the guy died?" he asked, referring to Galsote.

"I don't like talking about it," Smith responded.

Higgins decided to play a card. He revealed that he knew that 10 days before the north Sacramento shootings, Smith had gotten Galsote's girlfriend to buy ammunition that matched shells found at the Norman crime scene. Smith clammed up. He grumbled that he didn't remember what kind of rounds were bought, and he didn't know who touched them or where they'd gone after that.

Higgins started applying the pressure. "I don't think you were the shooter there, but I've got to explain this," he demanded, raising his voice. "If you loaded somebody else's gun, lent somebody a gun, we don't care about any of that bullshit. But I've got a murder to solve!"

REMNANTS OF A SAVAGE SUMMER

One afternoon in May 2018, Mattison and Higgins sat in an empty hallway of Auburn's 124-year-old courthouse, waiting to tell a jury how the tsunami of slayings and shootings three years earlier were all connected.

Their cases broke open in the fall of 2015, when Mattison and Joyce started getting results on their DNA evidence, along with ballistic analysis and data from cell phone warrants. Plus, Higgins had found more witnesses.

Perhaps the biggest revelation was that the same .380 caliber pistol used at the Stacy Norman murder scene also fired bullets into the heads of Benson and Galsote. The gun topped a broad pyramid of evidence.

On June 3, 2015, after convincing Galsote's girlfriend to buy ammunition for his .380 caliber, Smith went back to the Beaumont Street apartments, where he was living with Quintero's disabled brother. Over the next few days, as tensions rose with the Paisas, Quintero and Gutierrez were seen flashing guns. On June 13, at 2:37 a.m., a fight broke out at a unit of the Rio Linda apartment next to Norman's flat. Not long after, a friend of Quintero's appeared from the darkness at the Beaumont Street apartments, saying he'd been jumped

by the Paisas and demanding someone give him a gun.

Quintero walked out with a pistol and asked the friend, "Are you ready?" The two then disappeared into the night. Gutierrez soon met up with Quintero and they headed off to face the Paisas. Gutierrez had borrowed Smith's recently reloaded .380 caliber. At 4:45 a.m., Quintero and Gutierrez sprayed the Rio Linda apartments with a hail of bullets. Norman lay dying as they drove away.

Ten minutes later, someone in a blue Honda tried to retaliate against Quintero's crew, opening fire on the Beaumont Street apartments. Belinda Gamez was shot near her front door, but survived.

Another gun attack that happened later that afternoon at the Beaumont Street apartments had nothing to do with these



Placer County Sheriff's homicide detective Bryan Mattison watches evidence from his case presented to jurors in May 2018.

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