Police say 19-year-old

# Donald Rudolph

murdered three people, including his own mother and sister. As Steve Holt reports, everybody saw it coming—except the state agency that was in charge of his care.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

**On the morning of December 10, 2011, Donald Rudolph woke up alone in a cold cell at the Norfolk County jail. It was his 19th birthday, and the one-month anniversary of his time behind bars.**

For Rudolph, one month in the same place was actually a long time. He'd spent the past two years bouncing around foster homes, his parents' houses, and the street. In jail, at least, he was getting three square meals a day.

Rudolph's chaotic life reached the peak of its frenzy on the evening of November 10, 2011, when police responded to a call about suspicious activity inside his mother's Weymouth home. Through the first-floor windows, officers arriving on the scene at 10 Upland Road could see a young male inside the house, though he quickly disappeared from view. A few minutes later, they found him trying to escape through a small basement window. When they pulled him out, he seemed disoriented, and his clothes and hands were covered in blood. Rudolph was no stranger to the cops, and a few of them would have recognized his bony face. In the incident report, they wrote that he mumbled, "I fucked up" a couple of times. "You will see when you go inside the house."

Inside, it was a bloodbath. Police found the body of Frederick Medina, 52, the boyfriend of Rudolph's mother, lying in the living room under a scattering of stuffed animals, his throat cut. A Beanie Baby had been stuffed into his mouth. In a garage just off the house were two female bodies—those of Rudolph's mother, Paula, 50, and his 24-year-old sister, Caylin—both beaten to death with a hammer. Caylin had also been stabbed. On the kitchen table sat the apparent tools of death, a bloody hammer and knife, wrapped in a place mat.

News coverage of the murders focused, appropriately, on the brutality of the killings. People wondered how this kid, a recent high school graduate who could be found smiling broadly in photos with his sister on Facebook, could have done what police were saying he did.

Those who knew Rudolph, though, had seen signs of trouble for years. In fact, things had gotten so bad that he'd been placed in foster care. But exactly 11 months before the events at his mother's house, Rudolph had turned 18 and become a legal adult. He'd "aged out" of the system, and in short order was homeless, jobless, and involved with drugs. In the months leading up to the alleged murders, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. During that period, he was also arrested four times for an array of alleged crimes.

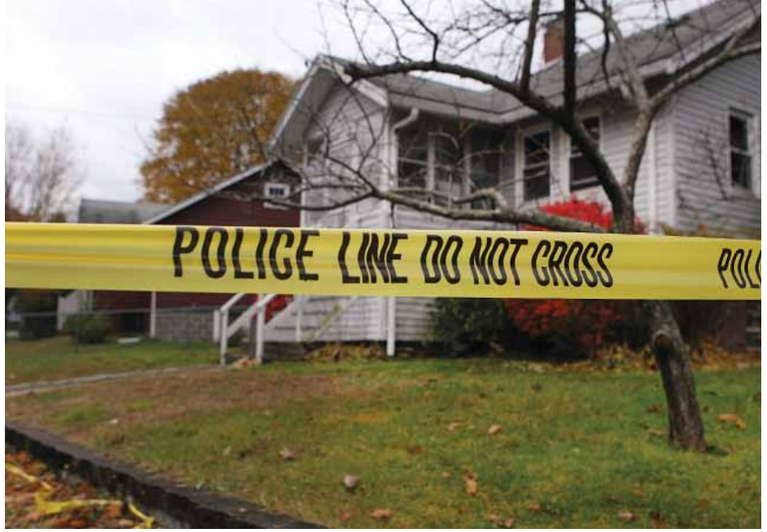
Brittany Rudolph, Donald's 22-year-old sister (she wasn't home the evening of the murders because she was away at college), says state officials missed clear signs that her brother needed additional resources. Furthermore, she says, Donald's time in the foster care system was marked by abuse and neglect.

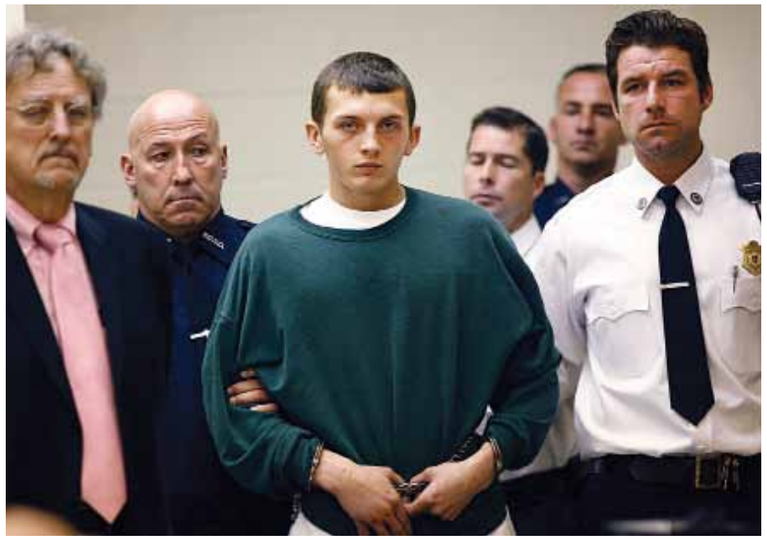
"The way they handled it—the system," she says, "they basically created a criminal."

Rudolph was very much aware that he had problems, Brittany says, recalling the time he sat at the family computer, Googling different types of mental illnesses. "I have this," Rudolph told her matter-of-factly, pointing at the screen. "And I definitely have *this*."

It turned out that Rudolph was right. Last summer, a state psychiatrist diagnosed him with schizophrenia, depression, ADHD, and bipolar disorder. Brittany says her brother seemed tormented by his shortcomings. "He was aware that he wasn't all there," she says. In fact, when Rudolph was arrested last September, just two months before the murders, Weymouth police wrote in their report, "Donald stated that he is schizophrenic and paranoid, and that we [the police] make him nervous."

Rudolph and his siblings lived first in Quincy, but after Paula and his father, Donald Sr., split up about 15 years ago, Paula took the kids and moved to Weymouth. Donald Sr. was rarely around the house, and Paula battled addiction issues, Brittany says. And when her children got older, two of them did, too. Rudolph was busted for selling pot and, last October, Caylin was arrested and charged with stealing a friend's clonazepam, a tranquilizer. Brittany says she was able to avoid some of the madness of the house by spending many nights with friends. But with no dad at home and a troubled mom (who also suffered from multiple sclerosis), her brother became unmanageable. One of his foster parents told the *Herald* that when Paula said no to Rudolph's frequent requests for cigarettes, he would wreck the house with a baseball bat, and that, one time, he threw his mother down the stairs.



Above, the house where Donald Rudolph allegedly killed his sister, mother, and mother's boyfriend. Below, Rudolph at his arraignment alongside attorney John Darrell, left.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AP IMAGES (HANDCUFFS); GETTY IMAGES (HOUSE)

In 2005, Rudolph began attending the South Shore Educational Collaborative, a Hingham school for children with emotional and behavioral problems. Officials there say they never saw a violent side, that Rudolph was clearly troubled, but also a hard worker who reached out to less-popular kids. "Some students got to the point that they actually looked up to him," says executive director Henry Perrin. "He did have that softer side, because I think he felt safe in this environment with the people."

But even as he made progress at school—he'd eventually graduate—his problems at home escalated until, in 2006, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) intervened. A spokesman declined to disclose just what services were provided to the Rudolphs, but the department typically comes in when it suspects children are being abused or neglected. In any case, DCF's involvement ended after just six months. Two years later, though, the department returned and, after investigating for a full year, determined that Paula was unable to care for her son. Rudolph, at 17, was placed in foster care.

According to the bleak picture Brittany paints, foster care may have only made things worse. In his first foster home, she alleges that Rudolph's windows were barred and he was locked in his room from the outside. (Citing confidentiality, DCF offered no official response to this claim. For the same reason, Lutheran Social Services, which facilitated Rudolph's placements, also declined to comment, except to maintain that Rudolph received quality care.) Rudolph began having run-ins with the law, and Perrin says he was sent away to Department of Youth Services facilities "more than once" during his senior year for committing crimes.

Then, in 2010, Rudolph caught a break. He was placed in the care of former New England Patriots cornerback Ronnie Lippett, with whom Rudolph was "at his best," according to Brittany. Since his playing career ended in 1991, Lippett has taken a number of foster children into his home, handling some of the state's toughest cases. So Lippett and his wife knew to hide their kitchen knives from Rudolph. Lippett later told the *Herald* that Rudolph was "heavily medicated" while living in his home.

People who know Rudolph say Lippett seemed to find a way to reach the kid, acting as a kind of father figure. Studies have shown that youths in foster care who have even one strong connection to an adult who is not their parent have better long-term outcomes than those who don't. "Ron was so good to Donald," remembers Ryan Connelly, the father of Caylin's twin girls and a longtime neighbor of the Rudolphs.

But then everything fell apart. Lippett told the press that one morning in CONTINUED ON PAGE 124

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July, as he attempted to wake Rudolph up for school, the teen hit him, breaking his jaw. Rudolph was arrested, but Lippett didn't press charges, instead filing a restraining order against him. Thus ended the only supportive adult relationship the troubled teen had ever really had.

And then something even worse happened to Rudolph: He turned 18.

Young people in Massachusetts who turn 18 while in foster care have a choice. They can strike out on their own, return to a family situation that's often just as chaotic as it was when they were younger, or request to continue to receive DCF assistance. In 2011, 794 youths turned 18 while in foster care, and 615 of them, 77 percent, elected to continue receiving assistance (though just 457 remain in placement today).

Until they turn 23, the department offers these individuals services such as continued foster placement, independent living programs, a modest daily stipend ($25), and access to resources such as counseling, tutoring, and educational support. State officials say that in the past five years, Massachusetts has increased its spending on them to more than $60 million (the department's total budget is nearly $790 million). Then again, though aged-out youths make up 16 percent of the people in DCF's care, that $60 million represents just 8 percent of the department's budget. DCF commissioner Angelo McClain points to a number of programs that were added in that five-year period, including a network of foster care alumni, a Foster Child Bill of Rights, more internship and summer employment programs, and housing and life-skills training.

But here's the problem: The state's efforts to help youths in its care transition successfully to adulthood are largely ineffective.

The Boston Foundation conducted a study of the problem in 2008, and its findings were bleak: 37 percent of former foster kids older than 18 had experienced homelessness; 54 percent were unemployed, and half of those with jobs worked fewer than 20 hours a week; 30 percent had been threatened or injured with a weapon; 25 percent had been arrested in the prior 12 months; and 11 percent reported being raped. Unsurprisingly, 59 percent of the teens surveyed in the study reported feeling "sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row," an indicator of depression. That was four years ago, and the state has added new programs since then, but with numbers this daunting, they can only have done so much to help.

Of course, these problems are hardly unique to Massachusetts. A number of studies have shown that somewhere between 12 and 20 percent of all prisoners nationally are former foster children. But experts say that Massachusetts child services, for all its efforts, suffers from two main problems: a lack of focus and a lack of money. For starters, DCF is severely understaffed—the typical caseworker deals with close to 16 families at a time and, though the state has a program designed to help those caseworkers reach aged-out kids, that program employs fewer than 20 counselors. Given those ratios, only a lucky few get the assistance of a personal mentor.

In its report, the Boston Foundation observed that when it comes to new legislation aimed at helping adolescents and young adults, "the difficulty seems to be in implementing these policies into consistent practice." Again, that study is four years old, but those who have seen the department up close believe it continues to be true. Martha Henry, who directed the state-run Center for Adoption Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School before it was defunded last year, saw DCF from the inside, training its employees. "I think they wanted to be progressive," Henry says, "but I'm not sure it always trickled down to the field." She says the department also suffers from "initiative overload," meaning swarms of new policies are never completely absorbed and practiced by field-level social workers. In some cases, she says, upper management would be preaching one policy, and the fieldworkers would be practicing its exact opposite. Henry, for instance, recalls repeatedly finding that caseworkers were reluctant to allow adolescents to sleep over at a friend's house out of a belief that the friend's parents would need background checks. Not only was this untrue, Henry says, it also went against a principle being championed at the highest level of DCF: that adolescents in foster care should experience "normal" activities with their peers.

But back to the aging-out problem. The truth is, it's difficult to determine the success rates of even the most promising policies for dealing with the issue. A big part of the challenge is that you're dealing with a highly mobile population. Only a few studies have followed transition-age youth, and they have been conducted by independent foundations and think tanks (the Boston Foundation, for instance). The state, on the other hand, stops tracking young adults once they leave its care. McClain says the department has begun keeping tabs on small groups of former foster kids in accordance with a new National Youth in Transition Database, but a full set of data won't be available until 2016. Until then, he'll have to continue to fly blind on his policymaking and hope for the best.

When Donald Rudolph turned 18, he found himself with few options. He began drifting between beds at his father's and mother's houses, and signed up to continue receiving assistance from DCF.

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Then, in April 2011, while at his father's in Quincy, Rudolph inexplicably took a pellet gun, perched himself in the building's backyard overlooking Washington Street, lined up his target, and began firing. He hit two women passing by on the sidewalk across the street. Later, police found the pellet rifle leaning against Donald Sr.'s back porch. The teenager was arrested and charged with two counts of assault and battery, a felony that carries a sentence of up to two and a half years. Rudolph was arraigned in May and released on his own recognizance to await trial.

That month, DCF also dropped Rudolph from its care. In a mind-boggling turn of logic, DCF spokeswoman Cayenne Isaksen says the department did so because Rudolph had been incarcerated during his time at school (the decision had nothing to do with the pellet gun incident). She adds that he was notified that he could request to continue receiving services from the department. He did not choose to do so. And with that, Massachusetts willfully cut ties with a man it knew was mentally ill and a threat to others.

Back out on his own and with little oversight, Rudolph was adrift and increasingly volatile. He wandered the streets aimlessly, according to one of his mother's neighbors. The *Globe* reported that there was talk in the neighborhood that he'd killed several cats. In August, police arrested Rudolph after following him to a meeting with someone to whom he was selling marijuana. A month later, on September 7, he was arrested again, this time, according to police reports, for allegedly attempting to break into a Quincy home to recover drug money he said he was owed.

On September 14, as a result of that incident, Rudolph pleaded guilty to possession of burglary tools, as well as shooting the women with the pellet gun, and distribution of marijuana. Rather than being locked up, however, Rudolph received a two-year suspended sentence from District Court Judge Diane Moriarty, who put the 18-year-old back out on the streets with an order to receive mental health treatment. But a month later, his mother reportedly told the police that Rudolph was off his medications. And with no one to make sure he got the judge-ordered treatment, there was no guarantee he would.

In the weeks preceding the triple murders, Rudolph faced increasing heat from authorities for his suspected involvement in a September burglary at the Upland Road home of Beverly McDermott, his mother's neighbor. A number of items had been taken from the house, including jewelry, foreign coins, and 23 pills of Klonopin, which is used to treat seizures and panic attacks. Rudolph was staying with his father at the time, so Paula asked Donald Sr. whether he'd seen any of the stolen items. He had. Donald Sr. allowed police to search Rudolph's room in early October, and, according to their reports, they found a backpack full of items taken from McDermott's home. Rudolph was arrested for the fourth time since becoming an adult, charged with "receiving, buying, or aiding in the concealment of stolen goods," and ordered to appear in court on November 29. Until then, though, he was set free once again.

Bouncing around to multiple foster homes—as Rudolph did—has a damaging effect. That 2008 Boston Foundation survey of 812 youths who turned 18 while in DCF care found that 39 percent reported having had 10 or more placements over the course of their lives. Adults who used to be in foster care say that constantly moving when they were younger caused a deep-seated feeling of instability that has followed them their entire lives (although Rudolph passed through only two foster homes, between his mother's and father's places, and wherever else he could find to sleep, he clearly led a transient lifestyle).

The sad truth is that part of the problem with aging out—part of the reason so many 18-year-old foster kids are so poorly adjusted—is that too many children are treated badly even while they are in the state's care. Massachusetts has one of the nation's highest rates of children being abused or neglected while in foster care, according to government data. DCF itself reported in 2009 that .84 percent of foster children suffered abuse or neglect. While that might sound low, it doesn't meet federal standards and actually places Massachusetts as the seventh-worst state in the country.

State officials attribute our higher rate to aggressive reporting. In other words, problems that some states might just ignore, Massachusetts deals with actively. "That's why on paper it looks like we've got 22 times more abuse and neglect than Pennsylvania," says the DCF's McClain.

But one national advocacy group doesn't buy it. After researching troubling cases in the state over a number of years, the New York–based group Children's Rights is suing Massachusetts for violating the constitutional rights of children in its care. The class-action suit, expected to be heard in U.S. District Court in Springfield early next year, was filed on behalf of six children the organization says have been "badly harmed" by abuse, neglect, and numerous placements while in the state's foster care system. *Connor B. v. Patrick* also accuses the state of not adequately preparing adolescents in foster care for living independently as adults, essentially targeting the aging-out issue. The state has already failed in several attempts to have the case dismissed or delayed.

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## buzzworthy

### ANN TAYLOR RE-LAUNCH

On Thursday April 5th, *Boston* magazine hosted a launch party, to celebrate the new Ann Taylor concept store in Boston, with charity partner Children's Hospital. Guests enjoyed an Ann Taylor fashion show, modeled by a few of Boston's most stylish and successful women, while sipping on delicious Vail vodka cocktails, light hors d'oeuvres, and enjoying mini makeovers from Naz Kupelian Salon, while DJ Saucy Lady provided the night's music.

The event was hosted in the 33rd floor penthouse of The Clarendon, the Back Bay's most renowned new condominium. Guests enjoyed jaw-dropping 360-degree views of Boston and beyond, plus all the luxury and elegance of this 3,600 square-foot penthouse. For more information on select remaining residences, visit theclarendonbackbay.com.

Photography by Melissa Ostrow

ANN TAYLOR

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"The commonwealth's taxpayers are paying for a system that, rather than protecting children, is further contributing to damage that children have gotten already in a home environment," says Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director at Children's Rights, which has served as general counsel in lawsuits against child welfare agencies in at least a dozen other states. "It's not a good system and has not been a good system for a long time. The state's known about it but is not taking any action."

McClain, of course, challenges those accusations. He says Children's Rights has been "in the business" of suing child welfare systems for more than 20 years. "[I]t's not difficult to go in and find some situations that didn't go too well and paint them as representative of the entire system," McClain says, adding that Massachusetts is in "good company," being sued alongside states like Connecticut, Oklahoma, Texas, and Michigan.

A little more than two weeks before he was due back in court on the stolen-goods charge, Rudolph allegedly killed his sister, his mother, and his mother's boyfriend. His lawyer—who pleaded not guilty on Rudolph's behalf—says the teen has no memory of the tragic events of November 10, saying as recently as January that he believes his mother is still alive. When Rudolph's sister Brittany attempted to visit him in jail, he refused to see her.

Brittany says she tries not to let thoughts of the murders distract her from pursuing her dream of becoming an art therapist after she graduates from college. But when she does think about the events leading up to the deaths, she sees a disturbing trail of missed signs and botched care by immediate family, police, and courts, as well as the schools and agencies tasked with helping.

Brittany says that in her final years, her mother would often make an ominous prediction: "Donald's going to kill me someday."

"She would say it to the police and the caseworkers," Brittany recalls, "and whenever she would say it to me, I would say, 'Don't be ridiculous. He's your son.' And look what happened. No one listened." B