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## **Memorial Held for Slain Anti-Abortion Protester**

By **DAMIEN CAVE**

OWOSSO, Mich. — They knew Jim Pouillon well, the 300 friends, relatives and skeptics who on Wednesday filled the stadium of the high school where he had protested for years. They knew his belly laugh, his past alcoholism, his Christianity, and — like the man charged in his murder last Friday — they knew the signs he held almost every day showing pictures of aborted fetuses.

“You may not have agreed with his tactics or methods,” said Mr. Pouillon’s pastor, David Knox, during a 20-minute sermon at a public memorial. “But you could not miss his passion.”

“Amen,” the crowd shouted. “Amen.”

The day was filled with such godly affirmations. In life, Mr. Pouillon had a jumble of experiences: Vietnam, fatherhood, divorce, church, protests, illness. But in death, he was described in simpler terms: as a martyr to the cause of fighting abortion.

His killing is believed to be the first of someone protesting abortion, and at the memorial and a vigil later outside a Planned Parenthood office, he was praised as a symbol of dedicated action.

Supporters from national organizations, many of whom met Mr. Pouillon at his first protest, outside an abortion clinic in Atlanta in 1988, flew in to pay their respects. Neighbors who stood with him outside the high school where he was killed or at City Hall, recounted his booming voice and the energy it took for him to hold heavy signs with an oxygen tank in tow.

“Jim was effective in what he did,” said Dan Brewer, who spent days with Mr. Pouillon on the streets of this small town a half-hour from Flint, Mich. “He left a lasting impression on this city.”

On Wednesday, it was hard to go anywhere here without being reminded of Mr. Pouillon.

At Mulligan's, an Irish bar in town, in stores, and on street corners, his death gripped the community.

This was the goal for people like Ronald Brock, 71, who began honoring his friend around 7 a.m. after driving from Washington. Across the street from the high school, near a makeshift shrine with candles, balloons and baby pictures, Mr. Brock held a sign like the one Mr. Pouillon had when he died.

Mr. Brock then drove slowly through town in his impossible-to-ignore "truth truck": a 1987 Toyota motor home with 329,000-miles on the odometer and political billboards all around. A large picture of a fetus could be seen from the back, "Obama Care, Obama Lies" on the left side, and in front, in large letters, it said: "James Pouillon, well done good and faithful servant."

Two other trucks with a similar collage of pictures and strong anti-abortion statements also looped through town all day.

Mary Jo Pouillon, one of Mr. Pouillon's five children, said her father would have appreciated the outpouring of support. "They're talking about the babies today," she said. "That's what he'd say."

But here and nationwide, the killing was also a reminder of how dangerous the abortion debate can be. Mr. Pouillon's death came less than four months after a prominent abortion provider in Kansas, Dr. George R. Tiller, was gunned down in his church.

Some feared there would be more killing. Around 2 p.m., when about 30 protesters arrived near the Planned Parenthood office and in front of a blood drive for the American Red Cross, several blood donors said they were worried that another gunman might single out the group.

Frank Samson, 56, said he was still in shock. "We never have problems here," he said, after pulling up to the football stadium on a yellow Harley-Davidson. He said he saw the shooting, having just dropped off his son at school when the shots were fired, and had been seeing a therapist to help him deal with it.

"I saw Jim fall down," he said. "I knew what happened."

Mr. Samson was not a close friend, but Mr. Pouillon's protests — with signs showing a baby on one side, under the label "life," and a mangled fetus on the other, under the word

“abortion” — were a regular part of life in this town, like vinyl siding on homes and “Go Trojans” signs supporting the high school football team.

The police said the man charged in the killing, Harlan J. Drake, a local truck driver, had been bothered by Mr. Pouillon’s graphic opposition, displayed as children came to school. Mr. Drake is also charged in the murder of a local businessman who was killed the same day over a separate grudge, according to the authorities, who said that a third victim might have been killed if the police had not intervened.

Other local residents were also irritated by Mr. Pouillon’s protests. A local car dealer sued more than a decade ago to restrict Mr. Pouillon’s protests, but lost in the State Court of Appeals.

But even those who did not always see eye to eye with Mr. Pouillon agreed on one simple fact, which Wednesday’s efforts sought to emphasize — he did not deserve to die.

And for those who supported him, their hope was that his death might inspire others.

“Jim Pouillon ran his race,” said Cal Zastrow, chairman of Michigan Citizens for Life. “It’s our turn to run for the Lord and sacrifice for the babies.”

*An earlier version of this article gave an incorrect attribution for the quote, “You may not have agreed with his tactics or methods, but you could not miss his passion.” It was spoken by David Knox, not Elmer Cox.*