



**KATIE**

## Katie Socci's story: 'She truly did love him'



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The night his daughter was murdered, John Socci couldn't sleep.

The Auburn man stayed up well past his usual bedtime on June 14, 2011, pacing around his living room and perusing the Internet in an attempt to lull his brain into unconsciousness.

Insomnia was not a problem John ever dealt with. So as he watched the clock stretch its hands well past midnight, the father of three

tried to pinpoint what was keeping him awake.

But one call silenced all thoughts of sleep.

At 1:30 a.m., the Soccis' phone rang, shrilly interrupting the quiet night. John quickly picked up the phone and heard a voice he didn't expect. Linda, his daughter Katie's next-door neighbor, told John something was very wrong on Swift Street.

"We knew as soon as we got the phone call," John said. "We knew."

Katie's dogs – who always spent the nights inside – were outside barking. Sydney, her toddler daughter, was alone inside the home. And although her child, keys and wallet were safe inside, Katie could not be found.

John and his wife, Tina, rushed to their daughter's home, where they watched helplessly as police combed the Auburn residence in search of clues.

Desperate to find her daughter, Tina called the one person she thought might have answers: David McNamara, Katie's ex-boyfriend and the father of the couple's child.

David was notorious for never answering or responding to missed phone calls, they said. But the night Katie went missing, he immediately returned Tina's call and asked, "Is Katie OK?"

The question, however, was a ruse. David knew Katie was far from OK. He was the one who would later admit to strangling the young woman to death hours earlier and dumping her body in a shallow grave. Today, he is scheduled to be sentenced for his murder conviction.

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Before Katie Socci and David McNamara became a couple, they spent years as friends.

The nurses met while working at Highland Hospital in Rochester and stayed in touch when Katie moved to California. When she flew back to New York to meet her newborn nephew seven years ago, David picked her up from the airport.

"From then, they were just together," Jen Socci, Katie's sister, said.

When they first met David, Tina and John agreed that the clean-cut, mannerly man was different from anyone their daughter had previously dated.

"Katie was an outgoing person ... a people person," John said. "Whereas he was more reserved."

David's quiet nature didn't bother Katie. Instead, the bubbly woman seemed completely enamored.

"She was just very affectionate toward him," Tina said. "We had never seen her with anybody like that."

As the relationship progressed, John said he couldn't shake the feeling that his daughter's beau was "different."

David never wanted to get to know Katie's friends, and didn't like it when she spent time with them. Whenever Katie suggested the couple spend an evening socializing, David resisted.

He avoided spending time with Katie's loved ones. And whenever he did manage to make an appearance at a family dinner or party, he always found an excuse to exit quickly.

David's indifference for spending time with anyone other than Katie stretched beyond her loved ones and friends. Aside from his parents, brothers and few acquaintances, John said David didn't mention many friends.

He just wanted life to include him and Katie.

David's obvious craving to create an insulated world for him and Katie irked John. He couldn't shake the feeling that David was not right for his daughter.

"I just thought: 'They're too different,'" John recalled. "I just knew Katie wasn't going to be happy with him."

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Along with refusing to embrace the parts of life Katie relished, David seemed content to let Katie work as the only consistent breadwinner. Despite having a good education and a history working in the medical profession, David didn't seem able to keep a job.

“That was the first thing that struck me. He never seemed to work consistently,” John said. “He would have a nursing job for six months, and then he’d be out of work. And he was perfectly fine with that, getting his unemployment.”

Eventually, the family discovered the reason behind David’s chronic joblessness: he was addicted to prescription painkillers.

Because the addict kept his history quiet, the family didn’t find out why he couldn’t keep a nursing job until after Katie’s death. During the pretrial investigation, District Attorney Jon Budelmann unearthed that a Rochester hospital fired David for stealing painkillers from his patients.

John said the hospital discovered that David was using a syringe needle to break through packaging and extract medication from pain patches. After taking the drugs, David put the patches back in stock for patient use.

After he left the hospital, David’s drug problem continued to fester. And as his addiction worsened, so did his controlling, subtly abusive nature, the Soccis said.

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When Sydney was first born, David acted like a different person. Tina said he spent every moment with his premature daughter, glued to her bedside.

“When she was very young, he was good,” she said. “He was taking a lot of care of Sydney.”

For a while, the couple’s relationship also seemed to improve. Tina said Katie picked out a wedding dress, and prepared to walk down the aisle with David. But once it became clear that David wasn’t serious about getting clean or taking care of Sydney, Katie decided she needed space.

“She truly did love him,” Tina said. “It took her so long to leave.”

When the couple first split up, Tina said Katie still tried to help David fix his life. When her family told her he was old enough to take care of himself, Katie protested, explaining that she couldn’t leave him alone and suffering.

“She was so generous and giving that she just wanted him settled,” Tina said.

David didn’t seem interested in settling into a life that didn’t involve Katie. And when he realized she was starting to rebuild her world, he revolted.

“It was nothing dangerous,” John said, explaining that as far as they know David never physically abused Katie. “He never threatened her, or anything like that.”

At first, Tina said David called and texted Katie repeatedly, harassing her to the point of anger. When she finally reacted and told him to leave her alone, David would parade around Katie’s angry messages triumphantly, pleased with his work.

“He could persuade you to think it was Katie’s fault,” Tina said. “But it would be her texts that you would see. You wouldn’t know that he’d been calling her a billion times harassing her.”

Four months before Katie’s death, the tenor of David’s actions started to change. Instead of goading Katie, he started to act obsessively and stalk the mother of his child.

When Katie went out with friends or took a date to a wedding, he would show up unannounced or camp out in a nearby parking lot. He attempted to make a copy of her house keys and – on one occasion – stole her cell phone so he could sift through her conversations.

Around the same time, John said David also got on a bodybuilding craze and started taking steroids. And although he was on probation at the time for stealing a doctor’s prescription pad and selling Suboxone, the convicted felon always found a way to pass his drug tests.

Each time Katie called crying, John tried to convince her to come stay with him and Tina.

“She just kept assuring us: ‘No. He would never hurt anyone,’” John said. “She believed that. She honestly believed.”

But when Katie’s neighbor told her she spotted David rifling through her trash, that confidence evaporated. A week before her death, Katie started to get scared.

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As soon as Tina found out Katie was missing, she knew David had something to do with her disturbing absence.

“I knew he was responsible,” she said. “I thought he’d just hurt her.”

However, Tina believed her daughter was still alive. She clung to her hope, convincing herself that if police could just find Katie, her daughter could come home.

But less than 24 hours after Katie disappeared, emergency responders located the young mother in a shallow grave a few miles away from her home – breathless, and beyond help.

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Katie was an unforgettable person.

So instead of futilely trying to attempt to live life without Katie, the Soccis spend their time remembering her kindness and passing on the laughter she infused into her family’s life. Although the pain of losing Katie will never abate, the family said the letters they continue to receive detailing Katie’s compassionate acts as nurse.

They also tell Sydney, now 3, about the mother she so unfairly lost, the woman who loved being her mother.

As the family waits for David to be sentenced after he admitted murdering Katie, they take solace knowing Sydney has no idea who her biological father is. When asked who her daddy is, Sydney smiles and points to John.

Jen is currently attending school to become a nurse. She said she currently has some of the same professors as Katie did. Even though it's been a decade since Katie made her way through Cayuga Community College, she is still remembered vividly.

"She didn't have an enemy," Jen said of her sister. "She was friends with everyone."

One particular memory helps keep the family afloat.

A few weeks before she died, Tina said her daughter started to fully live again. Katie's bright smile lit up her face more frequently, and her infectious laughter escaped without restraint.

"The last month of her life, she was herself," Tina said, smiling with tears in her eyes. "Even in the end."

And that, she said, is something David McNamara can never take away.

## Everyone's Battle

This is the third installment in four-day multimedia series assessing the impact of domestic violence on our community and what's being done to reduce its prevalence. Head to [auburnpub.com/everyones\\_battle](http://auburnpub.com/everyones_battle) to see video interviews related to today's stories, as well as stories and videos published Sunday and Monday.

## Join the conversation

Share your thoughts on this issue in the story comments section for any of the articles in this series. In addition, [auburnpub.com](http://auburnpub.com) will feature a live blog discussion at noon Wednesday with local professionals on the front lines of the fight against domestic violence, including Cayuga County Sheriff David Gould, District Attorney Jon Budelmann and professionals from Seneca/Cayuga Community Action Agency.

## If you go

**What:** Take Back the Night, a community rally to support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual assault, dating violence and domestic violence

**When and Where:** Kicks off with a march in downtown Auburn starting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 24, from Memorial City Hall, 24 South St., Auburn. The march will be followed at 6:30 p.m. by a rally on the steps of City Hall.

Take Back the Night (No More Secrets) T-shirts are available for purchase for \$10-\$12 through Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency. See designs and download the order form at <http://www.cscac.com/TBTNtshirts.pdf>.

**More information:** Contact Vicky Myers at (315) 255-1703