

Third-Grader Gets Her 15 Minutes Of Fame

By KAREN M. HANNON
Community News Reporter

Nine-year-old Shereka Vaughn, who calls herself the next Whitney Houston, is savoring her first taste of stardom.

This vibrant, energetic third-grader, the daughter of Kevin and Sharon Vaughn, was one of 21 Cash Elementary School students who sang "Freedom" at President Bill Clinton's inauguration dinner last week.

Shereka said she and her classmates left home on their way to Washington, D.C. on Sunday morning, Jan. 17. They sang Monday night during the inauguration dinner and came back home the next night.

But she's still on cloud nine. "We went to Washington, to see the President," Shereka, said. "And we saw the (Washington) monument, the Capitol building, and Jefferson and the Lincoln Memorial, and the White House."

But Shereka said singing for the

President was a big surprise for her class. They were originally chosen to ride a float in the inaugural parade.

"Our music teacher (Sondra Philipphart) chose the song that we sang in a Columbus Day program at our school," Shereka said. "We made a tape of it and sent it to the Presidential Inaugural Committee, and they invited us to ride a float. But at the last minute, they wrote our school and told us they had to take the float we were supposed to ride on out of the parade because the parade was too long."

She said she and her classmates, along with their teacher, Carol Carmichael, were disappointed.

"But then on New Year's Day, they wrote us back and invited us to sing our song at the dinner," Shereka said. "I felt great."

But Shereka says the most

exciting part of the entire trip was not singing at the President's inauguration dinner — someone else in the national spotlight caught her attention.

"I met M.C. Hammer," Shereka says with a big smile. "He was at the inaugural ball, and he heard us singing. He said he just decided to come over and talk to us, and he gave me an autograph. I was more excited about meeting M.C. Hammer."

Shereka's mother, Sharon Vaughn, says Shereka wanted to tell Hammer something, but she didn't get a chance to.

"She said she wanted to tell him she was going to be the next Whitney Houston, but she didn't get to tell him," Vaughn said.

Shereka said before the dinner she and her classmates practiced the song "too many times." After their performance, she said she had sung the song enough.

"But then, when we came back,

we had to sing the song again for the secretary," Shereka said. "And we had to sing it for Channel 12, Channel 8, and Channel 2."

And Shereka says she wasn't nervous about singing during the President's dinner. Her mother says Shereka started singing in church when she was just four years old.

"She was the youngest one in the choir at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church," Vaughn says. "That's her grandmother's church."

Shereka is the granddaughter of Jesse and Shirley Eaton and Norris and Martha Gullick.

When asked if she would remember this event for the rest of her life, Shereka said, "Yeah, 'cause I never got to be interviewed before by any channel."

And when asked if she would tell her children about singing at President Clinton's inaugural dinner, she said, "Only if I get to sing like Whitney Houston. But if I don't — nah!"



Shereka Vaughn, in the dress she wore while singing at President Bill Clinton's inaugural dinner, shows off a sweatshirt she wore while her third-grade class toured Washington, D.C. Each of the students received a sweatshirt donated by the Hanes Group.

Defense Makes Motions In Stoner Murder Case

By SHERIDAN HILL
Chronicle Assistant Editor

Defense attorneys presented motions this week in preparation for the upcoming murder trial in the death of Carlos Colon Stoner. Rickey Eugene Knight, 28, of 1138 Bank St. is the first of four men who will be tried for first-degree murder in connection with the death and mutilation of Stoner, who was found dead May 27 on a footpath near Washington Park.

Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

Motions filed by Knight's attorneys include a motion to strike the death penalty, and to keep prosecutors from using some statements Knight made in his confession to

detectives.

Superior Court Judge Melzer A. Morgan Jr. is presiding over the hearings, which are expected to continue today and Friday.

In October, Knight was evaluated at Dorothea Dix Hospital in Raleigh and found fit to stand trial. In statements he made at the hospital, Knight said he and three other men were going to "whip his [Stoner's] ass because he was talking junk and being disrespectful...We took him over there to beat him up."

According to the forensic report, Stoner was stabbed more than 20 times. His chest was opened up and his lungs exposed after the initial assault. His penis and part of his scrotum had been excised and placed in his mouth.

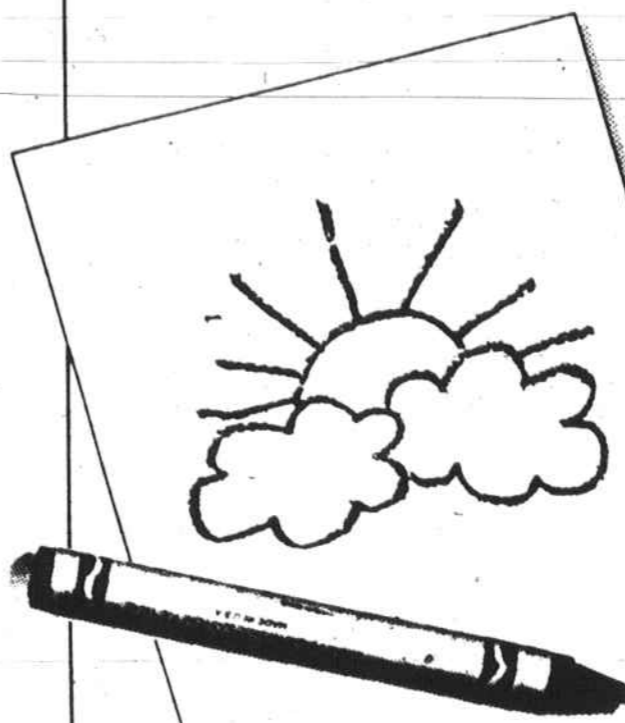


Rickey Eugene Knight

Knight denied stabbing Stoner and maintained that Stoner's body was intact when he left the scene.

The other men charged in the crime are Dwayne Gregory Doby, 21; Mark Anthony Smith, 21; and James Andrew Gilbert, 23.

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