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Winston-Salem Chronicle

Officers Back On Job As McKellar Investigation Goes On

▲ DA still studying SBI report on cause of death

By SHERIDAN HILL
Chronicle Assistant Editor

The five Winston-Salem police officers who arrested a black woman who died in police custody are slowly being returned to their regular duties as the district attorney's investigation continues.

All five were assigned to desk duties after Sheila Ann McKellar stopped breathing in a holding cell in the Hall of Justice last summer. When McKellar was arrested July 18, officers handcuffed her hands behind

her back, cuffed her ankles, and gagged her with gauze. A police report said she was resisting arrest and trying to bite the officers.

Sgt. L. O. Saunders, the only supervisor involved, resumed his normal duties within the last two weeks. Saunders is a black male. Ofc. T. J. Trentini, a white female, has also been returned to patrol duties.

The other officers involved were D.A. Jackson, a black male; K. A. Alridge, a white female; and S. B. Yoder, a white female.

Police Chief George Sweat declined to comment on the personnel action, but Capt. G.G. Cornatzer said the officers were needed back on the street.

Police said they checked on McKellar periodically

during the 26 hours she was in the holding cell. She was taken to Baptist Hospital where she revived but never regained consciousness. She was pronounced dead July 20 at 1:20 a.m.

A medical examiner said her death was caused by positional asphyxiation (the way she was handled) and that cocaine contributed to her death.

Cornatzer said the police department would not make final personnel decisions regarding the arresting officers until District Attorney Tom Keith has made a decision on whether to press criminal charges.

"As far as these officers are concerned, nobody's been found in violation of any rules, regulations, or laws," Cornatzer said. "The D.A.'s looking at it, the

Justice Department's looking at it, and we can't do anything yet. I don't see anything changing for months."

On Jan. 25, District Attorney Tom Keith received an investigative report on McKellar's death from the State Bureau of Investigation. He said he hopes to read the four-inch book in the next two weeks.

In determining the cause of McKellar's death, he said he will look closely at her medical records.

"Is it coincidental that she died of positional asphyxiation, or was that inevitable from the cocaine or some other cause?" he asked. "The amount of crack in her system is critical to that."

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ON THE AVANT GARDE

BY TANG NIVRI

Who's Mourning Whom

"Bringing the Negro into the mainstream of American life should be a State interest of the highest order. To fail to do so is to ensure that America will forever remain a divided society..." Thurgood Marshall, 1908-1993.

Why is it that when a man such as Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall dies, the only people who seem to have anything much to say about it are all black folks?

Why are average white folks so reluctant to acknowledge the contributions made by blacks in helping to rid this nation of the scourge of evils that otherwise would surely destroy us all? Why does it take them so long?

When black folks who have done this nation proud, stand to be recognized, now or in the hereafter, white folks act like it is a black thang, and they wouldn't understand." They ignore it.

Wasn't it a good idea that the notion of "separate but equal" be challenged -- regardless of who tried the case? Regardless of the race of the plaintiff?

Isn't it in the best interest of the long term future of America (despite our present problems) that our public schools are not separate on the basis of race, that little white boys and little white girls be able to play and learn with other little black boys and black girls as once dreamed by a black man?

As Americans, are not we all proud of this nation's willingness to declare in 1954 that educational apartheid was no longer acceptable? What are we ashamed of?

Shouldn't we have all stopped to acknowledge the life and death of a man like Justice Marshall who took it upon himself to rectify injustice when a great many white folks were just as content as cows to live quiet lives based on racial hypocrisy and brutality, all the while threatening the survival of our American nation?

White folks should have taken great pride in the fact that Marshall, unlike other advocates of social change, (Malcolm X) chose the United States Constitution -- the greatest such living document since the Magna Carta -- as the vehicle to right legal wrongs -- that he chose to use the system of the United States Judiciary to help us as Americans see the error of our ways. He, with the help us others, helped us to see where we were wrong!

Given how often we talk about the need for a return to traditional Christian family values and with the decline in today's morals etc., white folks everywhere should have had something to say about this man's dedication to make America stronger -- not weaker. This is a perfect example of public service that we would all hope our children and our children's children find both appealing and rewarding.

Everybody in America knew what Jesse Jackson would say when Justice Marshall died. We all knew what Ben Hooks, past president of

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Fun In The Sun

Shara Mitchell (top) and Christin Barrett spent some time outdoors in the sunny weather at Winston Lake YMCA day care earlier this week.

Police Officer's Caring Life Ends Tragically

▲ "A terrific, very outgoing man," said Sonja Jennings

MARK R. MOSS
Chronicle Staff Writer

From all accounts, Winston-Salem Police Officer Michael R. Jennings, whose life came to a tragic end on Jan. 29, led a life in which he cared about people.

"He was a terrific, very outgoing man," said Sonja Jennings, the officer's widow. "He loved his job, especially when he worked

with juveniles." Nia, his year-old daughter, was the love of his life, Sonja Jennings said. "But he also had a passion for basketball and sometimes I think he loved basketball as much as Nia," she said, managing to laugh in spite of her recent misfortune.

He loved the community, and he showed that by being so active in it," said Benjamin Piggott, the director of the William C. Sims Center in Happy Hill Gardens.

Piggott said that Jennings was one of the founders of the Keep Off the Street Basketball League which encourages youths to play organized basketball as a way of keeping them occupied. "He loved kids, and that was his thing," said Piggott, who was deeply touched by the officer's death.

Captain Franklin Holman, of the Winston-Salem Police Department's special operations division, said that Jennings, 30, and Officer Timothy Rayvon Wilson, 27, were traveling south at 6:41 p.m. last Friday on Winston Lake Road when Jennings lost control of his patrol car at the crest of a hill where the

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Glover Performs Hughes At WSSU

▲ A Review: The Reader Becomes the Actor

By MARK R. MOSS
Chronicle Staff Writer

HARLEM
What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore --
And then run?

from "Lenox Avenue Mural" by Langston Hughes

It was the applause of recognition that burst from the crowd when the actor Danny Glover read those lines at Winston-Salem State University last Thursday night.

Such applause came frequently -- and not always because a poem's lines were recognizable -- throughout the evening as Glover recited, no "performed", the poetry of Langston Hughes, the African-American poet whose writings captured the essence of black America during the first half this century.

Glover, who was also in town to kickoff R. J.

Reynolds Tobacco Company's campaign to reduce youth smoking, is better known for the "Lethal Weapon" trilogy, the movies in which he plays an aging cop who is assigned a loose cannon, Mel Gibson, as a partner.

During a brief interview the afternoon before the show at WSSU's Kenneth R. Williams Auditorium, Glover spoke proudly of the "Lethal Weapon" movies, which have been tremendously successful at the box office. However, he is equally as proud of "To Sleep With Anger," a small budget film with an all black cast that didn't catch on like his other movies.

Felix Justice, a stage actor and close friend of Glover's, opened the night's featured performances with a recitation of a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech, delivered by civil rights leader the night before he was assassinated. The speech, as eloquent and intellectual as any of King's writings, went into depth on the great leader's views on violence and his thoughts on "love" and its many connotations. It was also the speech in which King announced his opposition to the Vietnam War.

It was not Justice's delivery that was disappointing as much as it was his lack of bringing to the performance any thespian challenges. One got the feeling that anybody could have stood on that stage and recited a King speech.

As for Glover? Well, Glover the reader metamorphosed into Glover the actor, who used his arms and his voice, to bring the nuances of Hughes' poetry to life the more poems he read. There were times when it seemed



Danny Glover

as if he were trying to fly off the stage, as when he read "Sylvester Dies in Bed," a comical look at death through the eyes of a dying man.

He treated "I, Too" (I, too, sing America, / I am the darker brother, / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes, / But I laugh, / And eat

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