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Woman Begins Sentence For Stabbing Death

By Sherry Matthews
A 23-year old Fort Bragg woman was incarcerated Monday in a Raleigh Women's prison after being found guilty last week of second degree murder in Hoke County Superior Court.

Victoria Stowers Burnette, on trail for the stabbing death of her step-father, Roger Keith Shannon, was given a seven-year sentence by Superior Court Judge Coy E. Brewer of Fayetteville.

She is expected to serve only three years before being eligible for parole.

The jury of eight women and four men deliberated two hours Thursday and nearly 45 minutes Friday before returning the unanimous guilty verdict.

The verdict came after four days of testimony filled with the sordid details of Shannon's sex life.

After court recessed several

members of the jury defended their decision.

"It was the only verdict we could possibly have reached considering the evidence we heard," one juror said.

"It was a sad situation, but she was guilty," another juror said. "All the evidence proved that it could not have simply been self-defense."

During the emotionally charged verdict reading, Burnette, who had appeared calm during the course of the trial, wept with her head in her hands.

Burnette's family, who had remained through the week-long trial, wept openly as the clerk of court read the jury's verdict.

Sources said they were told that Burnette's family was "surprised" by the jury's verdict.

Following the verdict, Judge Brewer sentenced Burnette to

seven years in prison, eight less than the maximum sentence.

Although Burnette's attorneys, Willis Brown and Bobby Deaver, both of Fayetteville, tried to persuade the judge to give their client a suspended sentence, Brewer refused to comply.

"This is one of the most serious crimes in the state of North Carolina. There is an irreducible level of punishment for anyone convicted of this sort of crime," Brewer said.

"I feel I have no option, but to impose what I believe is the minimum level of punishment for this crime," Brewer said, noting that he was aware of the "many" mitigating factors surrounding the stabbing death.

Burnette's lawyers immediately appealed the seven-year sentence. Judge Brewer acknowledged the

appeal and set Burnette's bond at \$25,000.

Following the verdict, Burnette was taken into custody by Hoke sheriff's deputies and transported back to the Cumberland County Jail where she spent the weekend.

Hoke sheriff's deputies transported Burnette to Raleigh early Monday morning.

Burnette was arrested and charged in connection with the February 8 stabbing death two weeks after Shannon's body was found in a wooded area between Rockfish and Arabia.

Although during initial questioning by Hoke Sheriff Dave Barrington, Burnette denied any knowledge of her step-father's death, she later admitted stabbing him.

During the trial, defense attorneys attempted to prove that Burnette was acting in "self-

defense" when she stabbed her step-father 11 times in the chest, abdomen, back, leg and wrist.

"He got just exactly what he deserved by his actions. Even if she overdid it, it was justified because she was trying to defend herself," Deaver told the jury.

The defense based its self-defense argument on an earlier event when Shannon apparently raped Burnette at their Fort Bragg home.

On the witness stand last Thursday, Burnette admitted that Shannon had sexually assaulted her when she was 14.

"It really disturbed my mind," Burnette told the jury during testimony.

"I kept it to myself because it was so degrading," Burnette said, noting that it was around that time that she became involved with alcohol and drugs.

Burnette, who has admitted that she has homosexual tendencies, blamed her fear of men on Shannon's early assault.

"Roger's raping me was probably the major factor in my seeking companionship with women," Burnette said.

Although Burnette admitted Thursday that she stabbed her step-father "a lot of times," she denied statements made to Barrington in February indicating that she had handcuffed the 180-pound Shannon before stabbing him.

Burnette also said Thursday that the order of events in portions of her statement to Barrington had been "confused."

In her testimony, Burnette told the jury that she killed her step-father in self-defense.

"The man was trying to rape me. I thought he was going to kill me. I thought he was going to kill (See MURDER, page 2A)



Halloween visitor

Although his eyes might bulge out, and he seems to perhaps have too many legs, this cicada does little to bother mankind, says Hoke Extension Agent Willie

Featherstone. "He nibbles on roots," Featherstone said. Roland Fulk took this photograph with a bug's eye view of a county cicada.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The weather has been as would be expected for this time of year. Warm days and cool nights. There was a big frost last Friday morning and according to Robert Gatlin, the thermometer got down to 34 degrees. Now this is just two degrees above freezing and this is the reason for the car windows to be icy.

The forecast for the upcoming weekend looks good and the temperatures are supposed to get to the high 70s by weekend.

So maybe we won't see the "frost on the pumpkins" this week.

I stated last week that the rain had hurt the attendance during the last two days of the N.C. State Fair. Even with the last two days being down the Fair still drew over

600,000. Now this is a success in my book.

The city election is next Tuesday, November 8. The mayor is unopposed for office, but seven are running for the five seats on the council. In this day of big money, it is important who governs our city. The way to be a part in this election is to be sure and vote.

Usually just a few of the registered voters in the city take time to go to the polls and vote. These candidates have put their names on the ballot, so we should show our appreciation by going to the polls and voting.

Having served on the council for many years, I can say with authori-

ty that it is a thankless job. The only time you see or hear from the citizens is when something is wrong.

So mark your calendar NOW and be sure to vote on Tuesday, November 8th.

Also don't forget to mark your calendar for November 11th. This is the date for the Dedication of the new National Guard Armory and the Armistice Day Parade sponsored by the American Legion.

Commander Sam Snead told me last week that plans for the parade were about complete and it should be well worth people's time to attend.

During these troubled times (See AROUND, page 2A)

Citizen Committee Chosen To Eye School Buildings

By Sherry Matthews
Following a lengthy executive session, members of the Hoke County Commission and the Board of Education agreed to appoint 21 members to a task force being set up to study the condition of the schools.

The 21 county residents under consideration are expected to be appointed officially to the new "Blue Ribbon" study committee during a second joint meeting of the two boards slated for next Monday morning.

As part of the task force, the committee, which was chosen from taxpayers in the county, will have the job of inspecting all the school facilities, developing a "prioritized" list of facility needs, and estimating costs, and eventually presenting those findings to both boards.

Both school board members and county commissioners also agreed that the task force should have completed its job by May 1, 1984.

The date for completing the project was designed to meet both boards' budget deadlines.

The local school board, by law, must present its final fund requests to the county commission by May 15, giving the board only 14 days to incorporate the study committee's recommendation into the budget process.

Those expected to be appointed to the joint task force include Bobby Gibson, former school board chairman; John McAllister, former assistant school superintendent; Ralph Barnhart, former Hoke County Commissioner; Earl Fowler, Chamber of Commerce Director; Bill Archer, Burlington Raeford Plant manager; Steve Parker, Southern National Bank Manager and Chamber of Commerce President; Onnie Dudley, Assistant Register of Deeds; Julian Butler, Production Credit Manager; Edith Newton, Jesse Wheeler, Billy McCall, Lawrence McLaughlin, Brenda Jacobs, Henry Dial, William Kelly, Edgar Edens, David Warren, Kay Hendrix, Dr. Ramnik Zota, Robert Doby and Eddie McNeill.

County Commissioners selected seven of the 21 members, school board members chose seven, and

the two boards jointly selected the remainder.

The appointments of the "blue ribbon" committee came after both boards agreed that the condition of the Hoke schools needed to be addressed soon.

In an earlier interview, School Superintendent Dr. Robert Nelson said the schools were in "bad need of attention" and the job was not one that "could be done overnight."

"This committee is going to have a big job on its hands," Nelson said earlier.

The committee is expected to find that some of the Hoke schools need a lot of work and are overcrowded, Nelson added.

One school that will apparently get a great deal of attention is the 48-year old J.W. Turlington School.

A facility plan, completed in 1974, recommended that no major funds be spent to extend the life of the aging school. At that time some 411 students were attending the school.

Nine years later, Turlington still stands and is housing some 809 students.

Hunt Verdict Overturned

By Sherry Matthews
Hoke County Commissioner James A. Hunt, who has been charged with writing some \$15,000 in worthless checks, is apparently meeting court-ordered payment deadlines and "getting back on the right track."

"I don't lack much having everybody paid off," Hunt said Thursday after being given suspended sentences in Hoke County Superior for bad check charges.

"My troubles are just about over, and it sure feels good," Hunt added.

Less than 24 hours later, Hunt was admitted to Moore Memorial Hospital suffering from appendicitis.

Although Hunt was apparently released Sunday, he could not be reached for comment at press time.

Hunt was scheduled to appear in Robeson County District Court Friday on a \$140 bad check charge.

Robeson clerks refused to comment on whether Hunt made his scheduled appearance.

The commissioner, however, did appear in Hoke Superior Court Thursday to appeal an earlier District Court ruling that ordered him jailed for 90 days.

District Court Judge Joseph Dupree initiated the 90-day active sentence in July after Hunt refused to resign from the Hoke County Commission. Hunt immediately appealed the order.

"I thought it was a joke at first, but I soon found out that he wasn't just kidding," Hunt said.

Superior Court Judge Coy E. Brewer of Fayetteville gave Hunt two six-month suspended sentences for writing \$1,755 in bad checks.

The judge suspended those sentences with 30 months probation attached to both counts.

Following the Thursday ruling, Hunt claimed his nearly year-long legal struggle was drawing to a close.

"I'm just about there," Hunt said.

The commissioner also claimed that he had paid off over \$24,000 (See HUNT, page 2A)

Unemployment Drops

By Sherry Matthews
Hoke County's unemployment rate dropped significantly during the month of September, decreasing by 1.1%, according to figures released this week by the North Carolina Employment Security Commission.

During September, 860 people were among the ranks of the unemployed, 90 less than August's 950. Hoke's jobless rate decreased from 11.3% to 10.2% during the month.

While the unemployment rate dropped, the number of Hoke residents in the labor force climbed, making the jobless rate appear more significant.

In September, 8,450 county residents were among the job labor force, 70 more people than were among that list in August.

Hoke's Employment Security Commission Manager Donnie Mann credits the sharp unemployment decline to more people "simply getting out and finding jobs."

"It is really difficult to tell where the jobs are coming from, but most deal with the manufacturing jobs available in this area," Mann said.

"Employment is up in this area. We are coming off unemployment and people are beginning to maintain more jobs," Mann added.

Although Mann seemed pleased with the decrease in joblessness, he did not rule out the possibility that the rate could increase again soon.

"It is really hard to determine from month to month, but we (See JOBLESS, page 3A)



Inside Today

This youth appears to be hanging on for his turn to tour the haunted house held during the annual TMH Carnival Saturday. We take a look at the carnival and the activities which took place at Upchurch School on page one of Section B in today's News-Journal.