

In case of slain Danville teen Nitaya Adams, three years has left no suspects

By JEREMY MOSER
Star-Tribune Staff Writer

Early in the morning of Aug. 6, 2017, shots were fired into a crowd in the 700 block of Paxton Street in Danville. 16-year-old Nitaya Adams, a rising senior at George Washington High School, had been shot.

She had been attending a party that her friends called a "kickback," a birthday celebration for one of her many close friends.

"That Saturday, her friend...was having a birthday weekend," said Nitaya's father, Malcom Plummer. "I told her, I love you. Y'all be careful out there tonight."

At some point throughout that night, the gathering had migrated into the neighborhood of Paxton Street, before an altercation between unknown parties escalated into gunfire.

Danville Police officers out on a routine patrol in the area heard the gunshots ring out into the night. They arrived at the scene to find a green Honda sedan, which they would later find was carrying Nitaya and a group of her friends, speeding off.

"One of the [officers] noted that as they came through Paxton, they could smell gunpowder from the weapons being fired," said Lt. Whitley, a special investigations officer with the Danville Police, who has been one of several detectives and officers investigating Nitaya's case.

The Honda arrived at the emergency room of what was then the Danville Regional Medical Center, where Nitaya, unconscious and suffering from a bullet wound to the chest, would be pronounced dead.

Dozens gathered outside of the hospital's emergency entrance that night. Word had traveled across social media with posts alerting that "Bally" was dead, referencing the nickname she had garnered from her many friends, "Ballout," or "Bally" for short.

Nitaya

"She was the best child ever," Plummer said. "She cared for people, she looked out for her friends. It was always about what her friends needed."

On a cool morning, Plummer was sat smoking a cigarette in his home, a house that sits one street south of where his daughter was murdered.

Inside the living room, a table stuck out from a corner that featured a table full of photos and keepsakes that showcase Nitaya as her father remembers her, a teenager.

"I won't sugarcoat anything...she was like every teenage girl," Plummer said. "She would want to be grown some days, some days you know she isn't grown and she would want to go out and hang out with her friends."

The streets being part of her "family," Plummer explained, Nitaya had made friends from both sides of the city's gang conflicts.

"She was neutral, she wasn't in any gangs," Plummer said. "She dealt with everybody, both Northside and Southside."

Nitaya would spend her time with her many friends, often being the "life of the party." It was not uncommon for her to stay out late, but Plummer would call over to the friends she stayed with to ask her to come home.

One of the keepsakes on the table was a framed high school diploma, the one Nitaya would have received from the graduation she looked forward to.

"School was wonderful, she loved school," Plummer added. "As she grew up...she started to mature. Her grades were good."

Nitaya demonstrated a love for cosmetology with her passion for her own hair. As Plummer explained, she wouldn't leave the house without the part in her hair being just right.

"She loved her hair, she loved her part," Plummer said.

Plummer suspects Nitaya wanted to leave the city, live with her sisters in Norfolk and attend Old Dominion University like they had.

"I think Danville had gotten too small for her," Plummer said. "I don't think she would have stayed in Danville too long."

Nitaya rests next to her grandmother in Oak Hill Cemetery.

The Investigation

Three years out from the night of Nitaya's murder, detectives with the Danville Police have followed leads and searched for answers, but no suspects have been developed and no motive has been found. Nevertheless, the investigation has continued non-stop.

"Since the night this young lady lost her life, there has not been a point in time that this has not been...absolutely on the forefront of what we do," Lt. Whitley said.

Deep into Danville's gang wars of 2016 and 2017, rates of homicides in the city had increased to the point of putting Danville on the map, with the city's 16 homicides that year granting Danville the highest per capita homicide rate for a city in Virginia in 2016.

During that time, the Danville Police Department had formed a homicide task force to tackle murder investigations, with Nitaya's case placed at the top of the list.

According to Lt. Whitley, while detectives have found that individuals present at the crime scene or at the hospital have been confirmed as street gang members, they can't say for sure that it was a gang related crime or not.

"We cannot say [it was gang related] for certain, but we also cannot definitively say that it was not," Lt. Whitley said.

When police searched the crime scene, bullet casings from multiple different types of ammunition were found littering the street. Police also interviewed witnesses from the gathering and the area.

However, while the police have identified "persons of interest" in the case, the physical evidence and witness testimony haven't amounted to the probable cause needed to serve a warrant.

"Eyewitness testimony will be a very key role in this case," said Lt. Richard Chivvis, who responded to the hospital when Nitaya was brought in.

This has led to the police encountering a road block in the investigation. As Lt. Whitley described, gang culture often involves an unwritten rule of not cooperating with police, and the majority of witnesses the police have interviewed have not cooperated.

"We can't force information out of people. What we rely on is people understanding that there's a family out here that has lost an important part of their life," Lt. Whitley said. "There is no doubt in my mind that there is someone out there...that can be a hero to this family and give them the answers they deserve to have. A 16-year-old kid didn't deserve to die in the street."

Relief

"Relief," Plummer said when asked what solving this case would bring to him.

Without an understanding of motive, police can't say for sure if Nitaya was the intended target, but Plummer believes Nitaya's death was accidental.

"I don't think the bullet was meant for her," Plummer said. "I think she got caught in the crossfire trying to find her friend. I'm not blaming anybody. I think it was an accident. She didn't have any enemies."

The true nature of Nitaya's death remains unknown to her family.

"I can handle anything, but I want my kids to know," Plummer said. "I want her mother to know."

Thought to be robbery turned murder, woman's death still unsolved 40 years later

By **JEREMY MOSER**

Star-Tribune Staff Writer

Some of the information in this article is sourced from an article which was run in the Star-Tribune in 1981.

Late at night in Hurt on Friday, June 5, 1981, on what would later be named Level Run Road, 79-year-old Effie Moon was in her home where she lived alone.

Her sister, Helen Hall, who lived a few miles away in Altavista, called her around 5:45 p.m. that night to check up on her. Her sister living alone since the death of their mother in 1966 worried her, so Hall called several times a day.

Effie answered in good spirits, and talked of how she had been to the beauty shop that afternoon in preparation for her niece's graduation the next day.

Another neighbor, a Mr. Simmons, reported talking to Effie on the phone that night around 7:30 p.m. as well.

A sweet, churchgoing person, Effie was a regular attendant of Edge Hill Baptist Church. Where she lived on Route 668 in part of the Grit community, she was half a mile from her nearest neighbor.

When Hall again called around 10 p.m., however, she received no answer after several tries.

Hall then enlisted the help of Oliver Hancock, a family member in Hurt, to go check on her.

Hancock found Effie slumped over in her armchair inside her combination living room and bedroom, fully dressed and apparently dead of a bludgeoned skull.

At the time, Hall was quoted as saying, "She was such a sweet, Christian person; she wouldn't harm a soul."

Investigation

"We don't have any current leads," Sheriff Mike Taylor told the *Star-Tribune*. "That's what we're asking for."

Taylor is the third sheriff to preside over the investigation into Effie's death. Over 40 years later, the leads have dried up.

"She'd lived there all her life. She was not married, and...was well known in that community, and [had] no known enemies, just [lived] a quiet lifestyle," Taylor said, and went on to comment about how these aspects make the crime all the more curious. "It makes it all the more interesting why someone would want to do that do her."

When Effie was found dead, it was first reported to the nearby Altavista Police Department. Then-police chief Tucker reported the death to the Pittsylvania County Sheriff's Department, which sent Investigator Ronnie Simpson and Captain D. A. Collins to the scene.

While initially reported as a bludgeoning with a blunt object, an autopsy report found that Effie had been shot multiple times.

"From all indications, it was a small caliber handgun," Taylor said.

Additionally, family reported that some items were missing from the house, leading to a theory that this was a robbery turned homicide, although Taylor reports there were no signs of a struggle.

What is known is that at some point between 7:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. that Friday night, someone came into Effie's home and shot her dead.

According to information from an unreleased police report provided by Taylor, witness testimony turned up some people of interest, and investigators followed those leads but to no avail.

"There were several leads that were followed, but it seems the names that were given, they had alibis," Taylor said.

Taylor reported that lead Investigator Simpson had at one point traveled to another state in 1984 to interview someone who may have had information, but it didn't lead to a break in the case.

After following several leads throughout the years, the case went cold with no suspects ever developed.

Limited by Technology

Crime scene analysts have far more tools at their disposal in 2020 than did a sheriff's department in a rural Pittsylvania County in 1981.

"Today's technology just surpasses what was [available] back in 1981 by leaps and bounds," Taylor said. "You didn't have DNA, that was something that was in the future. Being able to identify striations on a bullet fragment has really progressed with technologies in the lab."

During the initial investigation, a crime scene truck was brought to the scene of Effie's murder from the Danville Police Department, and tracking dogs were employed to search for trails both inside and outside of the home, but no trail was found.

"There are an abundance of things that can be re-looked at in cases like this, especially if we get a good, credible lead," Taylor said. "Someone out there knows."

Taylor is asking the public for assistance in bringing justice to Effie and her family. Anyone with information about the case can call the Sheriff's office, or can leave an anonymous tip using the online Crime Stoppers form.

"We would ask anyone with any information out there to please call the Sheriff's Office and we will follow up on the lead," Taylor said. "Behind every one of these murders, there is a lot of pain, a lot of misery, heartache. You don't want to forget those victims and their families. Hopefully somebody will know something they can tell us, and we can bring the killer to justice."

Home invasion turned homicide still under investigation three years later

By JEREMY MOSER
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In a home on Shelton Street in Danville, a husband and wife were up late. At around 2 a.m., on May 13, 2017, the police were called to their home.

The husband, Haywood Carter, known in the community as "Biscuit," had lost a leg and an eye due to health complications. His wife, Darlise Miller Carter, cared for him.

That night, a group of men, all wearing dark clothes and masks, entered their home and began rummaging through their belongings.

By the time police arrived, there had been an altercation. Haywood and his wife had been shot, and the assailants had fled the scene.

Haywood was taken to the hospital, where he was later pronounced dead. The 68-year-old Army veteran had succumbed to his multiple gunshot wounds.

His wife, Darlise, survived a shot to the neck, and was able to give a vague description of their attackers.

There were multiple people, armed, who had broken into the home wearing clothes that masked who they were. In the dead of night, they had shot Haywood Carter to death. He was 68, couldn't see very well and couldn't walk. Nevertheless, police say he was respected in the community.

"He was one of those guys that everybody knew," said Lt. Whitley, head of special investigations with the Danville Police Department, and one of the officers responsible for continuing the investigation into Haywood's murder. "He just seemed to be a respected member of the community."

Three years later, as many other murders from 2017, a year that put Danville on the map for its higher than average murder rate in that time period, have been cleared, Haywood's killers have still yet to be brought to justice.

The First Piece of Evidence

According to Whitley, in cases of violent crimes, the first piece of evidence is the victim.

"Victimology, that is detective work 101, that's sort of your starting point," Whitley told the Star-Tribune. "That's what you have from the beginning. That's your first piece of evidence."

Investigating violent crimes like homicide starts with determining what made the victim a target and piecing together what happened beforehand.

Search warrants filed in Danville Circuit Court reveal that police searched Haywood's cell phone after the murder in case it could reveal more details.

Detectives declined to reveal what was found on the phone.

However, Whitley said that they do have reason to believe Haywood's home was targeted.

"There's knowledge that this was not a random act," Whitley said. "The people who did this did it for a specific reason."

The ensuing investigation led detectives to believe that Haywood had been targeted by some who believed he kept a large sum of cash on his person.

According to Whitley, much of the information that police have gathered has been through anonymous tips – the sort of information that must be verified before it can lead to an arrest.

"We received information from the neighborhood, but the majority of it we could not verify," Whitley said.

These anonymous tips have pointed police towards a few known individuals in the community that could have possibly been responsible. Rather than suspects, the police have treated these individuals as "persons of interest."

"We have people that we're interested in, but we certainly don't have suspects yet," Whitley said. "We have a direction, but nothing more than that. There were no eye-witnesses that we are aware of that were able to give us names or descriptions."

Through the years, police have had run-ins with these individuals but have not had much luck in finding more evidence.

Physical evidence gathered from the scene could be used to develop a DNA profile, Whitley said, but without a match being found in the police database, it doesn't make for much help.

How the assailants fled the scene is unknown to police, but Whitley is confident that there is someone out there who has more knowledge about what happened that night in the Carter's home.

"It starts with somebody coming and talking to us," Whitley said. "There are people out there who know what happened. It is very few [cases] where somebody didn't confide in somebody."

The reality that police have faced in their investigation, Whitley said, is that many people don't willingly give police information, and without more information that can be verified, police can't find probable cause to serve a warrant.

Probable Cause

While police have heard names that have been connected to Haywood's death, the police are limited in what moves they can make with that information.

To get a magistrate or judge to sign a warrant for a search or arrest, police must have probable cause to suspect they have the right people.

"Even the worst among us have the exact same rights," Whitley said. "That's the rules, and that's the way it's supposed to be."

Whitley reiterated the importance of witness testimony in this case in bringing their knowledge of the case to the point where they have probable cause.

"[It's important] that people who have information, no matter how important it might be, that they contact us," Whitley said. "This has the label of a cold case, but it's not cold. It will continue until we get the answers that we need to bring justice for [Haywood's] family."

A Broken Heart: Danville hit and run death still a mystery nine years later

By JEREMY MOSER
Star-Tribune Staff Writer

Kirk Drive is very much within the outskirts of northern Danville. It branches off of Seminole Drive and continues through an uninhabited part of the city until it crosses some train tracks, beyond which it becomes Twin Arch Drive and part of Pittsylvania County.

In the years since Aug. 5, 2011, the thick woods that surrounded both sides of the road have been cleared for timber. An abandoned hunting stand along where the cutting stopped can be seen from the road, as can a sign advertising the many undeveloped acres for sale.

What can also be seen is a utility pole that serves as one of the last memories for a man that died there.

Nine years ago, on Kirk Drive, Thomas Wayne Wilson was hit by a car and killed. His surviving family, including one of his two daughters, Holly Wilson, placed a memorial on the side of the road where police found his body.

All that remains of that memorial now is a single broken heart.

A Possible Hit and Run

The night of Aug. 5, 2011, Wilson, 51 at the time, was walking along Kirk Drive when he was hit by a car.

Police received a call at 3:17 a.m. when a passerby discovered Wilson lying in the road.

Whitley described the scene of the crime on Kirk Drive that night as one of the more disturbing scenes he's seen in his career.

Skid marks were not found on the road. This and other evidence at the scene suggested that someone had been driving towards the city on Kirk Drive, hit Wilson and didn't stop.

"There was significant reason to believe that [Wilson] was drug, most likely, underneath the car," Whitley said.

While it may have been an accident, Whitley says the police have treated the case as a homicide.

"[It could have been] a hit and run. Somebody fled the scene, did not report it and left him there, and he died," Whitley said. "[It could have been] an intentional act, and...it is being worked as an intentional act."

The Investigation

To this day it is not known who was driving the car that killed Wilson, but police have traced the events of that night to the point where Whitley says they have a person of interest.

"This case has been run all the way back to the beginning, and we have run through it and multiple interviews" Whitley said. "We feel like we have a strong person of interest in this case."

Prior to Wilson's walk along Kirk Drive, surveillance footage and witness testimony places Wilson at a Fas Mart on West Main Street around midnight with a group of people.

Reportedly, Wilson had traveled with the some of the same people to a house on Twin Arch Drive, which Kirk Drive becomes just beyond the train tracks.

Wilson had last been seen at that house on Twin Arch Drive, from where he reportedly left on foot.

According to Whitley, police interviews have found that Wilson had been asked to leave that house following a domestic altercation at the house that Wilson is not thought to have been involved in.

"According to witnesses, he was told to leave the house," Whitley said. "He left on foot, and that was the last he was seen alive."

The investigation began, Whitley said, with him spending the early morning hours during the first week sitting on the side of Kirk Drive watching for vehicles with front end damage.

When police learned of the Twin Arch Drive house through cell phone records, the investigation developed a direction that eventually led them to search a particular vehicle, which did not recover any evidence, even after a second search.

"We continue to focus on some particular parties that associated with that vehicle. There were some inconsistent statement's made, a polygraph was administered, there were interviews of people within [the person of interest's] inner circle," Whitley said. "We feel strongly that this person was in the vehicle in the vehicle when it happened, if not the only person in the vehicle when it happened."

While some unsubstantiated tips have verified some inconsistencies with previous testimony, Whitley said that the tips couldn't be confirmed, leaving the police without enough evidence for an arrest.

Anyone with information about Wilson's case is asked to contact the Danville Police.

"The family needs these answers," Whitley said. "We need to bring this thing to conclusion."

Double homicide remains one of 2016's unsolved cases

By JEREMY MOSER
Star-Tribune Staff Writer

The bustle of Hughes Street in Danville continued on May 3, 2016 even as shots rang out through the late evening. When police arrived at 320 Hughes St., the bottom-right apartment inside a quadplex right before an intersection, they found John Henry Stewart, Jr. and Alan Wayne McFall, Jr. dead of apparent gunshot wounds.

According to court records, officers noticed pools of blood on the floor and bloody shoe prints near the door.

Police also recovered bullet casings, bullet fragments and a pair of rolling dice.

Two victims, one shooter

According to Danville police Lt. Richard Chivvis, who responded to the scene at the time of the shooting, evidence at the scene suggests a single shooter and a tragic case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Stewart, Jr., a 35-year-old that his parents described as a "happy-go-lucky guy," had lived in that apartment.

"He was a good-hearted person. He would give you his last," said Lily Stewart, John's mother who lives with his father, John Stewart, Sr., just a few houses up the road from where their son was murdered.

According to Chivvis, police have gathered through their investigation that the shooter was likely known to Stewart, and had likely been at his apartment during that day.

"John had had folks in and out of his apartment all throughout the day...there was nothing unusual about that," Chivvis said. "For whatever reason, [John] was likely the intended target."

The 47-year-old McFall, Jr., however, is not believed to have been the target of the attack, and instead had entered the apartment after hearing a commotion inside.

"From all appearances, what we understand...is that Alan was next door, heard a commotion next door, and was an unfortunate casualty," Chivvis said. "I think Allen came in during the altercation between John and the assailant."

However, beyond that and some reports of more than one person fleeing the scene following the shooting, police did not have much more to go off of.

Parents have questions unanswered

Less than three days after McFall, Jr., and Stewart, Jr., were killed, Donte Simpson was found shot to death in Cardinal Village, an apartment complex in the same part of town.

"They hadn't even put my son in the ground yet, but that boy got killed in Cardinal Village," Stewart Sr., said.

While Simpson's killer, Karseem Mareese Wilson, pled guilty to murder charges and continued to serve a sentence, the case of McFall, Jr.'s and Stewart, Jr.'s murders remains unsolved.

This time period of 2016 was the height of gang control in that area, Chivvis said. The 17 murders which occurred in Danville that year, many of which were gang-related, totaled the highest number of murders the city has ever seen in one year.

The Stewarts, which continue to live in the same house on Hughes Street over four years later, say they see their son's killer in every stranger they pass on the street.

"I always wanted to know who really did it, man. I'd feel bad if the person was walking right by me every day, or riding up and down the street," Stewart, Sr. said. "They know who his parents were. It's always in the back of my mind."

Too many possibilities

Reportedly, John had been hosting a number of different people in his apartment throughout the day, some of which were known gang members.

Complicating the issue was Stewart's status as a possible drug dealer in the eyes of police. Earlier in 2016, police executed a search warrant in his apartment and found quantities of Cocaine and Marijuana that did not meet distribution levels.

At another point in that night, John reportedly traveled to the other end of the city to meet a female friend, which Chivvis said could have also been another

"There's a number of different scenarios that could play out there, and that's why we have not narrowed it down," Chivvis said. "Was it somebody he owed money to? Was it somebody who was trying to rob him for money or drugs? Unfortunately, that's a high-risk lifestyle."

According to Chivvis, much of the information police have gathered from witnesses has been in the form of anonymous tips or unsubstantiated claims.

"They've all led to people who may have had motive and opportunity," Chivvis said.

What has been consistent, however, is the names that police keep hearing.

"The same names keep coming up," Chivvis said. "We have had multiple persons of interest in this case over the years."

A pair of dice

Lily has not given up on her son's killer being found. She believes the key to finding his killer lies in a phone call her son received that night, which appears to have been the call that brought him back to his apartment that day.

According to Lily, her son had been gambling with dice the day he was killed, and had won some money.

"That day, I believe they had been rolling dice, it sounds like he had won the money and I guess somebody had wanted their money back," Lily said.

According to Chivvis, that lead led police to the same issue as others. DNA could not be recovered from the dice, and even though police have tracked down the people it is believed Stewart, Jr. won the money from, there isn't enough evidence to narrow it down to one person.

"That is a great lead that we have run to the ends of the Earth, but we don't have enough to prove that they were involved," Chivvis said. "That's just one more of several leads that we have run down."

Time could provide new leads

According to Chivvis, the physical evidence officers acquired at the scene was entered into the National Integrated Ballistics Information System (NIBIN), which police departments across the country use to track firearms used in crimes.

Lab technology can identify which type of gun was used at a crime scene based on the strike patterns on a shell casing. Different types of guns have firing pins that leave unique impressions on a casing when fired.

"The examiner can tell us, typically based on the primer strike and marks on the shell casing, the type of weapon it came from," Chivvis said. "Glocks are very specific in their primer strike, even I can look at a shell casing and tell it was from a Glock."

Should another shell casing be entered into the system showing the same "fingerprint," it could be matched to the same gun, giving the police a lead.

"That may help us link it and run information down," Chivvis said.

Additionally, evidence from the scene provided a DNA profile, which could also be matched to a person if their DNA was entered into a police database.

However, Chivvis says that reliable witness testimony remains key to solving the case.

"It would be nice to bring closure to the case, and to the neighborhood for that matter. That's one that folks really remember," Chivvis said. "Certainly we believe [there are] folks out there that have information on the case, that could help us get that last bit of information we need to bring this to a close."