Newspapers by ancestry

The Courier-Journal (Louisville, Kentucky) · 4 May 2010, Tue · Page A2

Downloaded on Jul 17, 2021

THE COURIER-JOURNAL | FROM PAGE ONE | courier-journal.com

COLD CASE | Sister disappointed that suspect won't be tried

Continued from A1

the case."

Jones was 34 when she was killed; she'd become a county prosecutor only six months earlier.

"I'm hurt. I'm angry. I'm disappointed," Shanklin said Monday of the decision not to indict, adding of the suspect: "He's lived free for 45 years and, evidently, he doesn't have much of a conscience."

Although police released the name of the suspect, who was 17 at the time of the slaying, The Courier-Journal is not identifying him because he has not been charged.

Lt. Barry Wilkerson, head of the homicide unit, said he understands Shanklin's frustration.

But he said police "do the best work that you can do and pass it on to the commonwealth's attorney's office. You try to explain to the family that this is the best closure we can give them."

Denial from suspect

Sgt. Denny Butler, who oversees the homicide unit's cold case squad, said initial investigators were diligent in hunting down leads about Jones' death in 1965 but could never make an arrest.

In 2007, Detective Terry Jones began working the case and asked the FBI to check six fingerprints that were collected from a car Jones had rented.

One matched a man who had lived in Louisville but moved to Orange County, Calif.

Detective Jones traveled to California in December 2008 to interview the man, who denied having anything to do with the crime but failed a polygraph test.

Police turned their case — years of documented leads in the case and notes on evidence that was processed but doesn't exist anymore — over to the commonwealth's attorney's office. That was part of a new practice police use when they feel they have exhausted a cold case investigation — by either determining that there could be an arrest or that the perpetrator is dead but could have been convicted.

According to the letter he sent to police, Stengel's office determined that convicting the suspect would be unlikely because most of the material witnesses, as well as the original investigators, are dead; a polygraph test is not admissible in court; no blood samples from the scene remain for DNA testing; none of the evidence can be found in the property room; and it cannot be determined where the fingerprint was taken in the car.

Tom Van De Rostyne, an assistant commonwealth's attorney who has been working on the case since 2008, said that while the age of the case is unusual, it is not uncommon for his office to issue similar letters to police when officials don't believe they can prosecute.

Van De Rostyne said the letter was issued to affirm that police had exhausted all leads and had found a legitimate suspect — but did not have the evidence to prosecute.

"We investigated every single lead in the file," Van De Rostyne said.

But no case is ever permanently closed, he said, adding that if new information arises, the case could be reopened and prosecuted.

Though in a case this old, he said, the prospect of new information becomes more unlikely.

Sister asks 'why'

For years, police have believed at least two people were involved in Alberta Jones' death, based on witness accounts, including a couple who said they watched two men grab Jones and force her into a car.

Shanklin, interviewed at her Louisville home, said she believes the fingerprint evidence proves the California suspect was involved — and she'd ask that he answer one question:

"Why?"

Why was her sister, a promising lawyer and one of the first black women to pass the bar in Kentucky, murdered?

Did it have something to do with her job prosecuting cases in domestic relations court? Was it a robbery attempt? Or even a random crime?

Shanklin said those questions have haunted her for decades.

Never returned home

Shanklin said that since becoming a prosecutor, her sister hadn't gone out alone at night much, knowing that her job put her at risk.

But about 10 p.m. on Aug. 4, 1965, Jones told her mother and sister that she was going to meet a friend who had called to say a wig she'd ordered was ready at her beauty salon near 21st Street and Broadway. The friend, Gladys Wyckoff, told police later that after Jones arrived at the salon and tried on the wig, the two had sandwiches at a restaurant before going to Wyckoff's home to talk more.

Jones left about 1:30 a.m., Wyckoff told police. But she never arrived home.

Shanklin said a convenience store clerk told police that Jones came in after that to buy soft drinks, and he saw two men talking to her.

Two other witnesses told police that in the early morning hours they saw Jones screaming and being forced into a car on West Magazine Street, according to Stengel's letter.

Jones' body was found floating in the Ohio River about 10:30 a.m. the next day. The coroner's office ruled her death was caused by drowning.

Jones' law partner, Darryl Owens, now a state representative, went to the hospital and identified her body.

"It was one of the most difficult things I've ever done in my life," Owens remembered Monday.

When the car Jones was driving — a rental she was using while her Thunderbird was in the shop — was found, there was a large amount of blood in the back seat, along with her upper denture on the floor mat, according to Stengel's letter.

"There was quite a fight in the car," Shanklin said.

Police would eventually determine that Jones was thrown from the bridge, according to police accounts. Three years after her death, her purse, with some of its contents, was found tangled in the girders of the bridge.

A sister's wish

For the first 10 years following her sister's death, Shanklin said she'd cry every time Alberta's name was mentioned.

The two women shared a home with their mother, and they were close friends as well as sisters, Shanklin said.

She recalled that everyone in the family had been proud of Jones, who had graduated from Central High School and earned a scholarship that she used to major in accounting at the University of Louisville. She started law school there, but transferred after her first year to Howard University in Washington, D.C.

A woman 'on her way'

After graduating in the late 1950s, Jones opened her own law practice, which she maintained even after being appointed as a prosecutor.

Owens, who joined Jones' firm a couple of months before her death, said that in the short time they worked together, they'd become good friends.

"Alberta was a young lady who was on her way," Owens said, "just to have (her life) snuffed out in what appears to be a senseless killing leaves you sort of empty."

Shanklin said Jones was very active in her church, loved to bowl and read, and enjoyed her family.

It's difficult, she said, knowing now that there is a specific person who may have been involved with her sister's death.

"I had thought after so many years, (the police) would never come up with any answers," Shanklin said, adding that having a name is little consolation.

"I'd like to see him do some time," she said of the suspect, "but I know that's not going to happen."

Still, she added, "I would like him to be honest — give us an apology and show some remorse."

Reporter Jessie Halladay can be reached at (502) 582-4698.

By Matt Stone, The Courier-Journal

Flora Shanklin keeps old newspaper articles about her murdered sister Alberta Jones, Jefferson County's first female prosecutor. Shanklin said of the suspect in the slaying, "I'd like to see him do some time, but I know that's not going to happen."

1965 Courier-Journal photo

Alberta Jones, left, discusses a voter registration campaign with Mrs. William Fielder and Harvey C. Schwartz.

Lou Ferrigno, Mr. Universe and television star, wears Audibel hearing aids. You should too!

Hearing Aids From $545

Louisville's Exclusive Audibel Dealer

HEAR IN KENTUCKY
Hearing Centers

www.hearinkentucky.com

ST. MATTHEWS 153-5 Shelbyville Rd. 897-9560 | OKOLONA 7722 Preston Hwy. 961-9560 | MIDDLETOWN 12420 Shelbyville Rd. 244-2005 | EASTERN PARKWAY 1257 Eastern Pkwy. 635-0775

Clipped By:

Brettjtalley
Sat, Jul 17, 2021

Copyright © 2021 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.

Powered by Newspapers.com