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Mother of man shot by police lays blame

Bar and VGPD criticized by Tennessee woman

Article Text:

Bar and VGPD criticized by mother of man shot and killed

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ELIZABETHTON, Tenn. – State police could present grand jurors with evidence from the fatal Dec. 25 shooting of a Tennessee man by Radcliff police in upcoming weeks, but the deceased's mother already blames several people for causing his death, aside from those who shot her son.

"Those two that shot him are living with that," said Cornelia Everett, mother of Thomas Everett, who was fatally shot by Radcliff Police Department officers Jody Ennis and Steve Lowry around 11 p.m. on Christmas. "My son wasn't in his head that night."

Cornelia Everett said she last saw her 39-year-old son Oct. 1. She said he'd been struggling to get back on his feet in Elizabethton, Tenn., since being released on parole a year earlier.

Efforts to get his life back together "went down hill" after he met an older woman in October, the mother said.

Of four people she blames for her son's death, Teresa Hardin, who was with Thomas Everett the night he was shot, tops the mother's list. Hardin also is from Elizabethton, Tenn.

"He went crazy with this woman," Everett said. "People can take you down quick."

Cornelia Everett said Hardin and her son had been "running" together since meeting in the fall, apparently living from a car while traveling from Tennessee to Mississippi to Kentucky. She said neither her son nor Hardin had any legitimate reason to be in Kentucky.

"She told me Sunday that they were planning to go to Grand Cayman to get married," Cornelia Everett said. "I told her that (Kentucky) isn't even on the way."

The pair ended up at Rainbow Tavern, a small bar on Flaherty Road, outside Vine Grove on Christmas. They ran a tab for drinks, 10 packs of cigarettes, and a \$60 cash draw, according to the bar's owner, Gene Cecil.

Cecil said the tab would have been nothing unusual had the couple given the bartender a credit card up front.

"A lot of people will say they have a credit card, so we'll start a tab instead of swiping it each and every time they get something," Cecil explained. "He never handed the card over, but the guy I had working for me didn't know no better."

The bartender called Cecil after Everett asked for a second cash draw.

Suspicious, Cecil went to the bar. Upon his arrival, the first pursuit of the night began.

"When I showed up, he (Everett) took off," Cecil said. "When I ran 'em down in Vine Grove, I had 911 on the phone."

Cecil stopped the couple on Church Street in Vine Grove and Vine Grove Police Officer Walter Karr arrived soon thereafter, Cecil said.

"They got there quick," Cecil said. "And Officer Karr took it from there. When I left, he was still standing there talking to them."

Cecil headed back to the bar expecting to file a report with deputies from Meade County Sheriff's Office. He had no idea what occurred after leaving Karr alone on Church Street with the pair.

Vine Grove Police Chief Steve Manning said Karr directed Everett to return to Rainbow Tavern and pay Cecil what was owed.

Manning said Everett started driving toward the bar, then darted off route, trying to lose Karr. The second pursuit of the night then began, but ended when Everett crashed on North Mills Street.

Manning said Karr left his cruiser and was walking toward the wreck when Everett fled on foot. Hardin stayed inside the wreck.

The third pursuit of the night had begun - this time on foot.

Manning said Everett looped back to North Mills Street and got into Karr's cruiser.

Shifting into drive, Manning said Everett used the cruiser to strike Karr in the legs, causing him to crash onto the hood and windshield before falling off.

The stolen cruiser left Vine Grove and headed into Radcliff, where Radcliff officers intercepted Everett, beginning the fourth pursuit of the night.

Responders deployed "stop sticks" in an attempt to disable the cruiser's tires.

"Everett then attempted to run over a Radcliff police officer and that officer fired his duty weapon at the stolen cruiser striking the vehicle but not Everett," a KSP news release stated.

With a tire flattened by the stop sticks, the disabled cruiser came to a stop near John Hardin High School.

That's when the situation escalated for police and turned deadly for Everett.

KSP Post 4 spokesman Bruce Reeves said Everett brandished a toy pistol as police from RPD and Post 4 approached the stolen cruiser.

With the suspect appearing to be armed with a pistol, Radcliff officers Ennis and Lowry fired multiple shots each, striking Everett multiple times.

Reeves and Hardin County Coroner Dr. Bill Lee could not confirm a specific number of rounds that hit Everett.

Deputy Hardin County Coroner Ken "Spanky" Spangenberg pronounced Everett dead shortly after midnight Dec. 26 at Hardin Memorial Hospital.

Everett's mother said her son was struck by more than three rounds, with at least one hitting him in the chest and at least two hitting him in the legs.

She doesn't, however, begrudge Ennis and Lowry.

Instead, she blames Hardin for what she considers leading her son down a troubled path.

Second, Cornelia Everett said, she blames the bartender at Rainbow Tavern for allowing Everett to accrue such a large debt for alcohol and cigarettes - two things that go against her religious beliefs.

"I raised my son to be good and honest," she said. "I don't tolerate any alcohol or drugs in my house."

She also blames Cecil, because he owns the bar.

She also blamed the Vine Grove Police Department for not arresting her son after learning he

and Hardin had stiffed the bar for such a high tab. She suspects anyone having accrued a \$200 bar tab would be too drunk to drive, too.

"I don't understand why she wasn't jailed, too," Cornelia Everett said of Hardin. "I don't know why the bartender did what he did."

Cecil said Everett was not intoxicated when he spoke to him in Vine Grove, claiming most of the large bill he accrued stemmed from the purchase of 10 packs of cigarettes, the cash draw and drinks he bought for others, including Hardin.

Manning said Karr's actions are not under scrutiny, nor does he believe Karr reacted improperly after coming into contact with Everett.

"The only thing I can say is that more manpower would've helped," Manning said. "We usually have two units on duty – sometimes three on the holidays."

Sickness and the Christmas holidays cut staff at Vine Grove Police Department short on Christmas, Manning said.

Having suffered mere bruises and scrapes, Manning said Karr has returned to duty since the incident.

Radcliff spokesman Bryce Shumate said Ennis and Lowry will remain on paid administrative leave until Jan. 10, when they are expected to return to work.

Reeves said the investigation has not produced anything to keep the officers involved in the shooting from returning to duty.

"Whether or not they return to work is up to Radcliff," Reeves said.

Reeves said a KSP Post 4 detective is preparing to turn the case over to Commonwealth's Attorney Chris Shaw for possible review by a grand jury.

Hardin was not charged with a crime and has returned to Elizabethton, Tenn., according to Cornelia Everett.

She paid Cecil for most of her son's tab.

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