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Deadly police chases under scrutiny

Lawmen probe whether pursuit rules were followed

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Article Text:

Cheryl Jones says her friendship with Patricia Trammell couldn't have come at a better time. It was 1989 and both were going through training at East Orange General Hospital, where they had just started working.

"Each of us really needed a friend," said Jones, a registered nurse.

Jones' sister said the pair were a perfect match. "They both were loners. They completed one another," said Sandra Jones-Ross.

The relationship grew and Jones moved into Trammell's Newark apartment on Hill Street in 1999.

As was their custom after working the late shift, Jones, 42, and Trammell, 46, parked their car on Court Street and were headed to a nearby Broad Street restaurant to satisfy their craving for sugar.

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"The guys over at Newark Fried Chicken knew us. They knew I liked ice cream and that Pat liked sherbet," Jones said.

But Trammell never made it across Broad Street.

Their beautiful relationship was shattered forever when Trammell was struck, instantly killed and dismembered by a stolen Lexus hurtling down Broad Street and being chased by Newark police at speeds of well over 100 mph early Thursday.

"She was running. You see the impact and then Pat wasn't there anymore," Jones said. "When it hit her, it was so loud. It sounded like shotgun blasts."

Trammell's death has highlighted the Newark police policy on high-speed chases.

Last Thursday, a 17-year-old girl was killed on 12th Avenue when a stolen SUV being pursued by police crashed into a crowd. One out of every four police chases in Essex County last year ended in an accident, the highest rate in the state, according to attorney general reports.

Newark Police and the Essex County Prosecutor's Office are investigating whether police followed state and city guidelines in both crashes, said Sgt. Robert Koval.

But Trammell's aunt, Annette Davis, 62, wondered whether her niece had to die.

Davis said she's angry at the four people in the stolen car. Ali Carney, 23, of Mercer Street in Newark, is in police custody and charged with murder. Three unidentified passengers, who escaped on foot after the Lexus crashed, remained at large.

But Davis also questions police judgment. "I'm sure the officers meant well, but their techniques are wrong. If they weren't wrong, my niece would be here today," Davis said.

"What have they accomplished? Did they get the car back? Yes. But can they give Pat her life

back? Can they heal this family that will be suffering for the rest of our lives?"

Trammell, originally from Gadsden, Ala., moved to Newark about a decade ago when she came to visit her aunt. She fell in love with the city.

Trammell went to high school and nursing school and got a job at East Orange General as a nursing assistant not long after arriving.

But her love for the city wasn't the only reason Trammell wanted to stay in Newark.

She had one sister and four brothers back home. The youngest sibling was still in high school at the time and Trammell felt a responsibility to make more money to help her family, Davis said.

Trammell's salary as a nursing assistant in New Jersey was double what it would have been back home. "She stayed because she felt she could do more for her family," Davis said. "She was like a second mother to her siblings."

When Trammell's mother's house burned down, she helped her financially recoup from the losses. When Davis was in need of help, Trammell was always there to lend a hand.

Trammel had planned to travel to Alabama on Saturday to visit her family.

"Pat was a loving, kind person. She was always willing to help someone with a smile on her face," Jones said.

Jones said Trammel was known by everyone at the hospital from the orderly staff to the doctors and administrators.

Working in a hospital was a source of joy for Trammell because she felt she was helping people. She was considering going back to school to become a registered nurse, Davis said.

"She felt that she had fulfilled her mission of being a good human being if she could help someone else. She wanted to comfort people and help them feel better," Davis said.

Sitting in the lobby of the Hill Street apartment Jones shared with Trammell, Jones said her calm appearance was just a facade.

Residents in the lobby are talking about the accident, and she had just returned from a crisis intervention session. Witnessing her partner's death is haunting her.

"Every time I close my eyes I see it," Jones said. "I'm going to be dealing with this for the rest of my life," she said.

Caption:

Cheryl Jones, left, with Patricia Trammell, who as an innocent bystander was struck and killed during a police chase early on Thursday.

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