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Teen's death remains mystery

State's attorney re-opens case, but it's inactive

By KELLY SMITH
Journal staff writer

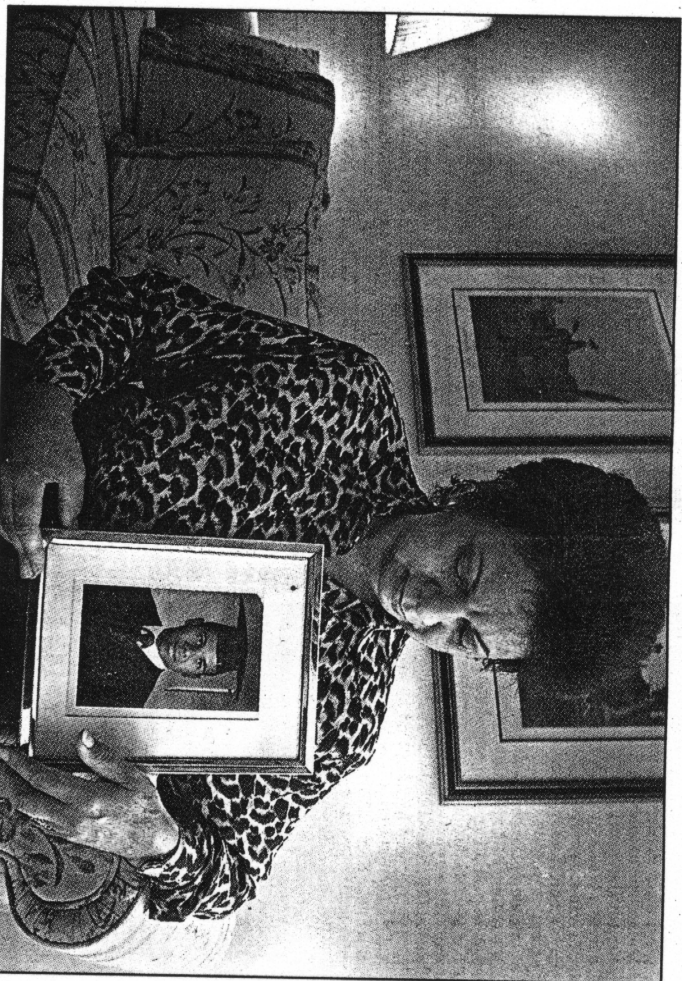
Although it's been nearly 15 years since her son was found dead in the woods behind her house, Mary Couey is still searching for answers.

Keith Warren's body was found July 31, 1986, hanging in a tree behind his home in the 14600 block of "Dynamite Drive" in Aspen Hill.

Police ruled the death a suicide and closed the case. His mother believes police were wrong.

Couey said she believes that Warren was lynched or that the hanging was staged to cover a murder or accidental death. After years of tracking down leads and trying to get the case re-opened, and even hiring her own investigator, Couey appealed to Montgomery County State's Attorney Douglas F. Gansler. He agreed questions surrounded the teen's death and decided to keep the case open, but inactive, status.

"It seemed to me there were a lot of open ends, loose ends [regarding the investigation]," Gansler said. Warren, 19, had just graduated



Jeff Taylor/Journal

Aspen Hill resident Mary Couey holds a picture of her son, Keith Warren, who was found dead in 1986.

from Kennedy High School and was headed for North Carolina Central University in Durham in the fall.

The teen was missing for two days before his body was found hanging in the tree by a neighbor who was walking her dog.

Couey didn't hear about Warren's death until hours later, when a police officer went to the lab where she works to break the news. It would be nearly a week before she glimpsed the body of her son.

Couey said police released Warren's body immediately to a local funeral home, where embalming procedures were started.

When Couey's brother attempted to see his nephew, the funeral home told him he wasn't permitted to look

at the youth's body, said Couey.

Couey didn't see Warren's body until a viewing before burial in a North Carolina cemetery.

Couey said she blamed herself at first, saying she and Warren had a strained relationship in the months leading up to his death. The two quarreled about a Corvette given to the teen by his father, which his mother would not allow him to drive.

Shortly after the funeral, Couey began to hear rumors from Warren's friends and classmates that the teen's death may not have happened as police surmised.

Warren's classmates told her the police wouldn't talk to them when they told officers they had information about Warren, Couey said. When

paramedics found the youth's body, Couey said, the rope was loose around his neck and he was "almost in a sitting position."

Couey wrote letters and called several offices, including the police and the State's Attorney's Office, all of whom said they would look into the case, but it was never re-opened.

In 1992, after numerous attempts to find information about Warren's death failed, Couey decided to "let it go."

Then, a large, brown envelope she found on her doorstep on April 9, 1992, Warren's birthday, changed her mind.

Couey opened the envelope and

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Gun show ban faces first legal challenge

By KARL HILLE
Journal staff writer

Frank Krasner has made good on his promises to sue Montgomery County over the passage of what he calls a "gun show ban" earlier this spring.

On Friday, attorneys for the outspoken owner of Silverado Promotions filed suit, arguing the bill limits commercial and not commercial rights to free speech and to the legal sale of firearms. Krasner is suing it \$500,000 in damages for gun shows he can no longer hold at the county fairgrounds in Gaithersburg and asking for a restraining order to keep the county from enforcing the law.

Krasner's attorney, Jonathan Kagan, filed the suit in the U.S. District Court in Greenbelt.

"Laws banning gun shows simply can withstand judicial review, because the court recognizes the dangers such bans pose to our basic constitutional freedoms," he said.

The suit alleges the law violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Maryland Bill of Rights and other state statutes.

County Council President Blair Ewing, D-At Large, who sponsored the bill, said the county was expecting the suit and expressed confidence the law will withstand the challenge.

"The chief thrust of our total gun legislation is to protect families and children and people in places of public assembly," he said. "I don't see how people can't buy guns or sell guns in Montgomery County... This is only the extension of existing law, which has not been challenged in court."

The law bans private landowners or organizations who host gun shows from receiving

Teen's death still a puzzle to family

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pulled out five pictures of a boy dangling from a tree.

It was only after her daughter, Sherril, examined the photos closer that they realized it was Warren.

Coney hired a private investigator, who requested Warren's body be exhumed and an independent autopsy be conducted.

In 1994, the body was exhumed and an independent pathologist performed an autopsy. The examiner found heavy levels of toxins in the teen's body, so heavy that if Warren had digested the toxins himself, he would not have been able to hang himself before they took effect, Coney said.

Coney said the scene was never treated as a crime scene, and police had neighbors make a positive identification of the teen's body.

"In my mind, I was determined I wasn't going to give up," Coney said.

Coney met Myrna Taylor, now a vice-president with the Montgomery County Civic Federation, through a mutual friend.

The federation was founded in 1925 to promote civic, community and general welfare in the county.

When Taylor heard Coney's tale, she suggested the woman tell her story to the federation's board.

The board supported Coney and helped her get in touch with Gansler.

The MOCF gave Gansler numerous documents with information about Warren's death, and staff at the State's Attorney's Office began to sift through the material, trying to determine what happened; a difficult task nearly 15 years later.

After assigning an assistant state's attorney to the case and tracking down witnesses and evidence, the State's Attorney's Office determined the case was not any closer to resolution.

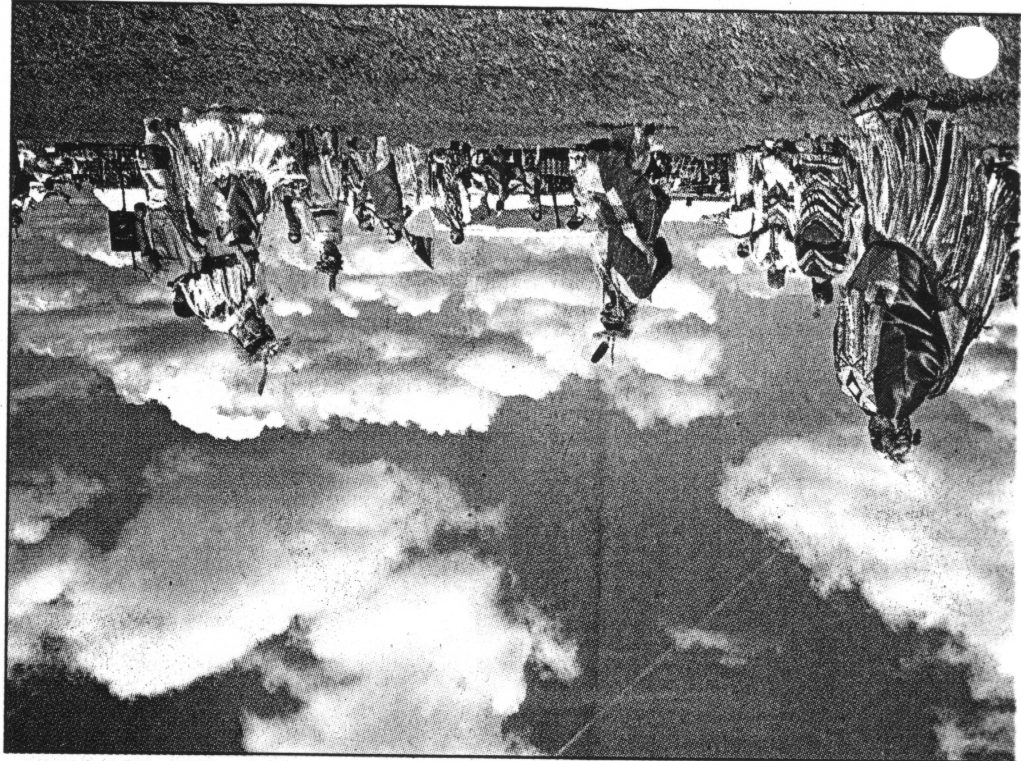
But the death was "suspicious enough," and there were enough alternate theories that Gansler decided to keep the case open.

"Clearly circumstances surrounding Keith's death had not been fully investigated," Gansler said.

Coney said she just wants to know what happened to her child.

"Everybody wants to bring this to some type of closure," Coney said. "This may never be solved, but I want to know what happened to Keith."

Man sues



Photos by Rick Kinzel/Journal

