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SECTION 2

Editorials — THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR — In Focus

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Why Did Sylvia Die?

Woman And Boy Face Hearing Tomorrow In Girl's Torture Death

By DENNIS D. DONAHUE

Last Sunday morning in the basement of a run down gray double house on the Eastside, a 16-year-old girl who friends said was "shy" and felt she was "the odd one in the family," lay with the words "I am a prostitute and proud of it" freshly carved in her stomach.

It was cold outside — 32 degrees — and the old coal furnace which heated the large house did little to take the chill off the basement where rags were her bed and covers.

Outside, neighbors, some knowing of the torture Sylvia Likens had endured for two weeks, bundled up in warm coats and cars and went to church.

WITHIN 60 HOURS, SYLVIA'S suffering ended in her death. But last Sunday morning she still had ahead of her a branding, a scalding that peeled skin off her back, more cigarettes snuffed on her skin and more beatings in the house where she stayed at 3850 East New York Street.

Today, Mrs. Gertrude Wright, 37, with whom she was staying, and Richard Dean Hobbs, 15, one of the neighbors, are being held on preliminary charges of murder.

Eight other juveniles — three of Mrs. Wright's children and five neighbors — are being held for injury to person in connection with beatings and burnings of Sylvia.

Tomorrow, Mrs. Wright and Hobbs will appear before Judge Harry F. Zaklan in Municipal Court, Room 6, on the charges. The cases are expected to be turned over to the Marion County Grand Jury.

"Sylvia said she felt she was the odd one in the family because she was born between two sets of twins," a former neighbor of the Likens, Mrs. D. L. Burton, 1724 North Colorado Avenue, said. The Likens lived on Colorado when Sylvia's father, Lester Likens, operated a Westside laundry and dry cleaning store.

"SHE SPENT QUITE A bit of time at our house and we always thought very highly of her. She attended the East 16th Street Christian Church with our children," Mrs. Burton said. She said the Likens were neighbors for about 1½ years.

Herman Hinshaw, vice-principal at Arsenal High School, where Sylvia went to school last year, said she passed more than half her subjects despite repeated absences. He said Mr. and Mrs. Likens were called in several times because of the absences.

The family then moved to California where, Sylvia's father said, he worked for Douglas Aircraft Corporation. They returned to Indianapolis last May at the urging of Sylvia's grandparents, Likens said.

LIKENS SAID he then decided to return to the carnival concession business in which he worked before taking over the dry cleaning business. Sylvia, and her sister, Jennie, 15, went to live with Mrs. Wright.

Her brothers lived with grandparents. An older sister is married. Likens said the last time he saw Sylvia alive was about two weeks before she died Tuesday.

The only problem with Sylvia mentioned by her father was school. She had re-entered Technical in September but records show frequent absences. The last day she had attended school was Oct. 6, according to records. Likens said he talked her into returning and Mrs. Wright said Sylvia would go.

MRS. LESTER LIKENS
Mother Weeps At Loss

MISS JENNIE LIKENS
"Too Scared To Tell"

Hinshaw said the school continued to send notices to Mrs. Wright's house. The last one asking if the school could help in any way, was sent Oct. 22, four days before Sylvia died.

Sgt. William E. Kaiser of the police homicide division, said according to statements taken from Mrs. Wright, Hobbs and the other children, the torture began about two weeks ago.

POLICE RECORDS SHOW THAT no one had called them about the matter although neighbors as far as four doors away said they heard screams of a girl from the Wright house. When asked why they did not notify police, they said they had no idea what really was going on.

Jennie Likens told police she was too frightened to tell anybody about the beatings.

Police were at Mrs. Wright's house on the night of Oct. 20 on a report of a man attempting to get in the house. The man was arrested in front of the house and police evidently did not go inside.

Another call was made on Sept. 10 when police took Mrs. Wright's 11-year-old daughter, Maria Baniszewski, to Community Hospital for treatment for a cut wrist.

THE ONLY OTHER calls made at the house by police were on Aug. 18 to serve a warrant for failure to pay a newspaper bill and on Aug. 27 when Mrs. Wright was arrested for defrauding a newspaperboy. Mrs. Wright also was charged with resisting arrest when police picked her up. She was fined $1 and court costs on each charge by Judge William T. Sharp, Municipal Court, Room 4, on Sept. 29.

SYLVIA MARIE LIKENS
Her Torture Is Ended

SYLVIA DIED HERE — THE HOBBS BOY LIVED HERE

The two arrests on Aug. 27 were Mrs. Wright's total police record until Sylvia's death.

Many of the neighborhood children admitted freely they were frequent visitors to the Wright house and the fact that Sylvia was being mistreated was no secret.

AT LEAST 25 CHILDREN stopped by a newsman on New York Street Wednesday and asked about conditions in the Wright house, spoke of ill treatment of Sylvia.

The children told of witnessing gang beatings of Sylvia by Mrs. Wright's children and often by visitors at the house. In a particularly severe beating about the time the continuous torture began, about 15 children were involved, a 15-year-old Harry E. Wood High School pupil said.

Sylvia fought back as best she could, she said, and added that she witnessed Hobbs take part in at least five beatings.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS of Hobbs described him as a "very nice boy."

"He was the finest boy I ever knew," a middle-aged woman who lives a few doors north of Hobbs on Denny Street, said. "In fact the whole Hobbs family was one of the best in the neighborhood."

Some of Hobbs' high school friends said they could not believe "Ricky" did it.

The Hobbs home, separated from Mrs. Wright's only by a double, is a comfortable, well kept, 1½-story single family residence. A climbing rose grown on a porch trellis and geraniums still bloomed in two planting pots beside the front steps when Hobbs was arrested. A basketball hoop extends from the garage in the rear.

Ricky's father, Woodrow Hobbs, would not talk to reporters on the advice of his attorney. Ricky said yesterday that his mother, who is dying of cancer in Community Hospital, has not yet been told of Sylvia's death and his arrest.

"I've been accused of a lot more than I did," Ricky said as he finished his lunch in the detention ward at Marion County General Hospital. He was moved from the police lockup to the hospital early Wednesday morning because he is a diabetic.

Ricky talked guardedly, saying his attorney had advised him to, but admitted scratching the eight words in Sylvia's stomach with a needle. Police said the instrument used by him was a sewing needle about three inches long.

"GERTIE (MRS. WRIGHT) started putting the words on her (Sylvia), but she got sick and told me to finish it," Ricky said. Asked why he did it, he replied, "Because Gertie told me to." Asked why he did what she asked, he could give no reason.

MRS. GERTRUDE WRIGHT
She "Spanked" Sylvia

RICHARD DEAN HOBBS
"Gertie Told Me To"

But he quoted Mrs. Wright as saying to Sylvia, "You branded my children and now I'm going to brand you."

Ricky said of Sylvia, "I didn't like her, but I didn't dislike her. When I left her Saturday (after the words were carved on her stomach) she was okay and walking around."

Mrs. Wright told police that Sylvia had spread rumors at Tech High School that two of the mother's children by a previous marriage, Paula Baniszewski, 17, and Stephanie Baniszewski, 15, were prostitutes. Paula and Stephanie and their brother, John Baniszewski, 12, are three of the eight youths charged with injury to person.

MRS. WRIGHT told a reporter yesterday that she had no knowledge of any of the torture to Sylvia. "I believe Sylvia was dying from some other cause and didn't realize it. She died five minutes after I had given her a cup of tea."

Mrs. Wright said that Sylvia was a discipline problem and admitted "spanking her a few times." She also said that Sylvia was forced to sleep in the basement because she wet her bed and would not keep herself clean.

"Sylvia never got along with anyone," Mrs. Wright stated. "She encouraged my children to steal and lie for her."

"MY CHILDREN ARE REAL RELIGIOUS children," she said as she sat in the police lockup wearing a green jail dress and brown sweater. She said that last Sunday morning they attended Grace Memorial Baptist Church and took Sylvia's sister, Jennie, with them.

Mrs. Wright said she has been sick for a while and that she was "not aware of many of the things that were going on."

"I have seven lovely children and I wouldn't want anyone to hit and abuse them like Sylvia was," she said.

Sgt. Kaiser said Mrs. Wright admitted she never married the man whose last name she bears and who fathered her youngest child.

WHEN POLICE ARRIVED AT THE Wright house about 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, they found Sylvia's body on a mattress on the floor in the northwest bedroom on the second floor. She had more than a hundred cuts, bruises and burns on her body. No part was unmarked.

Mrs. Wright first told police Sylvia had stumbled into the yard about 5:30 p.m. with a handwritten note stating she had been beaten by a group of boys. Kaiser said Paula Baniszewski has admitted forcing Sylvia to write the note last Sunday.

Cigarettes snuffed on her skin accounted for more than half the marks. The largest were scald marks that had peeled her skin.

She also had a brand in the shape of the numeral 3 which was added, admittedly by Hobbs, Monday. The mark was made by two applications of the hot hooked end of an anchor bolt about two feet long, Sgt. Kaiser said.

HOBBS TOLD POLICE THE poker was heated with a match but evidence that the poker was nearly red hot indicated it was heated over burned papers found in a basement sink or in the coal furnace, police said.

Police took from the house a black crow bar, one wooden paddle, a furnace hook, three pieces of orange colored wood, four pieces of brass colored tubing and a black leather belt, as well as the screw hook. Kaiser said all may have been used in the beatings.

Kaiser also said that as far as investigators have been able to determine, sex was not involved at any time during the torture period.

MRS. WRIGHT'S CHILDREN described some of the torture this way to police:

"Q. How many times did you burn her (with cigarettes)?

"A. Oh, many. I don't know how many.

"Q. How many times did Gertie (Mrs. Wright) burn her?

"A. Oh, lots of times.

"Q. How long was Sylvia in the basement?

"A. About two weeks."

AND ANOTHER ANSWER from one of Mrs. Wright's children:

"I broke my wrist on Sylvia when I hit her in the jaw."

Here is some testimony from neighborhood children:

"I hit her six or seven times in the head with my hand."

"I saw Mrs. Wright throw Sylvia down the basement steps and Mrs. Wright told her that's where she (Sylvia) was going to have to sleep there and that she was not going to give her even crackers and water to eat."

"I SAW ONE of Mrs. Wright's daughters put salt on Sylvia's sores after Mrs. Wright told her to do it."

"I hit her in the head and she passed out and she was unconscious."

Sgt. Kaiser was asked about motives. Here are the answers he received from those involved:

Mrs. Wright—"She (Sylvia) spread rumors that my girls were prostitutes."

Richard Hobbs—"Mrs. Wright told me to."

The other eight children—"She (Mrs. Wright) told me to."

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS HELPS KICK HABIT

Prisoners Start War On Dope Addiction

By PHILIP F. CLIFFORD
Star Staff Writer

Michigan City Ind. — Behind the towering walls of the Indiana State Prison, a small but steadily growing revolution is brewing and prison officials are watching it in hopeful anticipation of its success.

The sole purpose of the "revolutionists" is to cure themselves of addiction to narcotic drugs.

Under the name of Narcotics Anonymous a handful of addicted convicts banded together early in January starting a determined war "to kick the habit."

AND THIS TAKES some doing, especially among the men who have been "hooked" for many years. As one of the men said, "It would be stupid to say, that just because we are in here, we live in a drug-free world Convicts are a cagey group, and have devious and inventive minds. Bootleg raisin booze is available if you have the right connection. It would be humanly impossible for the warden to police this whole d----d place.

"Why right now, at the cost of a couple of packs of cigarettes I could get higher'n a kite on morphine, or anything else."

A convict must admit he's an addict and prove that he is willing to be cured. He is invited to attend the weekly N.A. meetings where he gets the help and counsel of the men who have won their battle over drug addiction.

LECTURES and soul-searching form the basis of the program. The ultimate physical and mental destruction resulting from continued use of narcotics is pounded into the new man's brain. Even when he is not attending a weekly meeting, he is constantly aware that "big brother" is watching him.

Should will power fail him, and he crawls off to some obscure spot in the vast prison for "a quick lifter," N.A. leaders have a way of knowing it before the drug has had a chance to course through his veins.

Summarily, the back slider is ordered to appear at a "tribunal" where he is not too gently told the "facts of life."

REPEATED offenses result in his dismissal from the project. Fortunately, however, back sliding is the exception rather than the rule, because of the men's intense interest in the program and their dedicated desire to be cured.

With the approval of Warden Ward Lane and the co-operation of institutional staff members, the men were given recognition and assigned a prison cell in which to hold their weekly meetings.

The exact number of current, former and potential addicts among the prison's 2,365-man population is not known. The estimated figure runs between 200 and 500. Lane seems to think the latter figure "is too high."

BUT SAMUEL L. Taylor, who is doing a 1-to-10-year term for vehicle taking, and one of the leaders in the movement, believes the figure "to be nearly close to accurate."

"Regardless of statistics," Lane says, "I think it is a real fine thing the men are doing. I am not naive enough to believe the program will work for all the men, but I know it can and has worked for some."

THE POSSIBILITY of reverting to addiction once a man has been released from prison was suggested to Oscar W. McClure, a husky,, intelligent man from Gary, who is serving a term for forgery.

"I realize," said McClure, who has earned three years of solid college credits, "that the major test comes when the man goes outside. But even though we are on this side of the wall we have ways of knowing who's doing what on the outside; we find it out faster on the prison grapevine than the warden or anyone else."

The convicts' sponsor for the N.A. program is Melvin W. Wenzel, who is a high school teacher at the prison.

OSCAR W. McCLURE
Has High Hope For N.A.

SGT. JAMES F. HILTON
Addict "Pitiful Sight"

"AT OUR WEEKLY therapeutic meetings we try to get the men to discuss openly and freely their problems, the avenues which led them to addiction, and attempt to get them to understand themselves," Wenzel said.

The meetings, Wenzel added, are not for the timid. "They can be brutal in content and meaning. It isn't easy to see a cringing, addicted man trying to find his way out of the bewildering and crushing world of narcotic addiction. It is even somewhat crushing to see a hapless man begin crying under the jibes and harassment of his fellow inmates," Wenzel said.

Another of the group's dynamic leaders is Frank Lewis, a 40-year-old Indianapolis man, who was returned to prison for parole violation. He had been convicted in 1952 for forging narcotic prescriptions.

ALTHOUGH HE completed only two years at Crispus Attucks High School, Lewis, a soft spoken, gentle man, speaks with authority and conviction when he discusses the aims and hopes of N.A.

Admittedly a "mainliner" —a man who injects powerful shots of heroin into his bloodstream—Lewis said he had been on the "big stuff" since 1946.

Addiction, Lewis said, came through a combination of "idle, stupid curiosity" and a "bull-headed feeling that the world owed me a living."

Lewis said he quit using drugs of "my own free will about eight years ago." This was prompted, Lewis said, "by the loss of my family, society's and my own self respect."

BEFORE BEING committed to prison, Lewis said, "I was employed as a psychiatric aide at an Indianapolis hospital." At the height of his addiction, Lewis, who speaks more like a college professor than a high school drop-out, was spending between $50 and $75 a day to satisfy his craving for drugs.

Due for discharge from prison late in December, Lewis said he was going to devote the rest of his life to "getting the message across."

Anyone familiar with the mental processes of the men behind the high walls, is aware of how convicts are always "shooting an angle," either to make life more palatable or to win favor for an early release.

WAS THIS THE case with N.A.? Did most of the convicts see it as a way to "butter up" to the parole board?

"Not by a long shot," said Taylor. "Most of them viewed it with suspicion. The addict-convict felt he'd worsen his chances for parole if he admitted being an addict."

"The cons thought we had some kind of a phony angle and shied away from our meetings," Lewis said. "It wasn't until they saw the program in its true light, that they started to come around. But even now, after nearly a year, N.A. is moving along slowly. In a place like this you'll always find the malcontents, the destroyers. Under pressure of cell block politics and harassment, some of our weaker members dropped out. But we have a tough core of some 70 men who not only believe in N.A., they are ready to fight for it."

THE PROGRAM, said McClure, who, by the way speaks seven languages, including Yiddish, is patterned after the highly successful Synanon House project, which came into being in 1958 at Santa Monica Beach, Calif.

Synanon, which modeled itself after Alcoholics Anonymous, uses ex-addicts to give active addicts the support and understanding they need to kick the evil habit.

Statistics show that addicts, after being given intensive treatment at special Federal hospitals, have had a relapse rate as high as 90 per cent. Synanon has cut the relapse rate to as low as 20 per cent.

FROM A SOURCE outside the high white wall which incloses the men here, came another helping hand. It was a hand feared and hated by many of the men from the Gary area now in prison.

Sgt. James F. Hilton, boss of the Gary Police Department's narcotics squad, heard of the men's efforts here to rid themselves of the habit. Hilton talked with Warden Lane, and urged that the men be given the "green light."

"I know most of the men and their records," Hilton said. "And to say that I was amazed would be a complete understatement. I walked softly at first, but when I saw the possibilities I couldn't resist trying to give a helping hand.

"THIS IS THE first time in my career in narcotics work, that I have ever actually heard of a junkie asking for help. It's absolutely amazing, but I feel sure this will work. Perhaps the percentages will be small, but percentages are what we are shooting for."

Hilton, who has spent 10 of his 17 years with the Gary force on the narcotics detail, added this comment:

"A heroin addict is a pitiful sight at best. It's like a guy reaching up out of the mud begging for help."

(Star Photo)
SAMUEL L. TAYLOR BALEFULLY EYES SYRINGE
Leader In Narcotics Anonymous

Sylvia Likens

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