


as released to papers

Polk



Allegheny County Chapter

OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

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President
Dr. Norman Mulgrave
Executive Director
C. A. Peters

October 24, 1972

TO: Dr. Norman Mulgrave, President ACC-PARC
FROM: Edward Harris, Rehabilitation Counselor
SUBJECT: Investigation of resident death at Polk State School
and Hospital

A site investigation was made to Polk State School and Hospital for the specific purpose of inquiring into the death of Raymond P. Helman, age 32, on October 17, 1972. The coroner's report indicated death was due to asphyxiation from strangulation but an API release, this date, reported that the State Police in Franklin were holding a resident of the State School for suspected homicide. It was this news release that prompted an immediate inquiry.

The investigation team was made up of Ronald Archer, Associate Director of ACC-PARC; Henry ~~Pearce~~^{Pierce}, Post Gazette reporter; and the undersigned.

We arrived at the Pennsylvania State Police Barracks, Franklin, Pa. at approximately 1:00 P.M. and spoke with sergeant Joll and a corporal. They reported that [REDACTED], age 18, was the suspected resident in question. [REDACTED] made a confession as did two other residents, but his was far more accurate and ~~this~~^{thus} the only plausible confession. [REDACTED] is a borderline (65-75 IQ) MR who can drive a car. Their record indicates that [REDACTED] has stolen cars from the grounds and has been A.W.O.L. from the institution several times.

Charges have been withheld pending the completion of a psychiatric examination by Dr. Johnson of Franklin. [REDACTED] has remained in the custody of Polk State School where the examination is being conducted.

An autopsy on Helman was performed by Dr. Griffin a Pathologist at Franklin Hospital. A large piece of window glass was found in Helman's stomach during the autopsy.

The staff attempted to revive this victim with mouth to mouth resuscitation and by so doing had released the cord and restraint before the authorities were notified.

The Coroner, Jonathan Hutchinson is a mortician and the District Attorney is Miles Linn. They are to review the findings of Dr. Johnson and the evidence in the near future to determine the final disposition of this case.

The officers volunteered information that their relationship with "Doc" (Dr. McClelland, Director of Polk) was a good one and that the last incident of this kind occurred in 1968.

The inspection team proceeded directly to Polk State School and was immediately seen by the Director, Dr. James H. McClelland. After a brief introduction, Dr. McClelland received a phone call from someone named Bob and said "the gentleman you spoke to me about is here in my office now." Dr. McClelland appeared to speak freely to the caller concerning the incident. He mentioned that hopefully the District Attorney and the Coroner would meet Wednesday or Thursday of this week to make a final decision.

After the call Dr. McClelland asked us again for our names and our connection with PARC. If he was startled to learn that Mr. Pearce was a reporter, it was not apparent.

Dr. McClelland answered our questions freely. He was quite hesitant though to give the names of the attendants when asked by Mr. Pearce, but did give us this information. A summary of the information ^{Pierce} given us by Dr. McClelland is as follows:

Raymond Helman was admitted to Polk on June 15, 1950. Prior to that he was a resident of Torrance State Hospital for approximately 1 1/2 years. Commitment was by court order. Helman was a paraplegic with spasticity of the upper extremities. He was ambulatory, but only with the help of the attendants or other residents. His behavioral problem was wandering about at night awakening the residents or poking at them. He liked to be hurt and to hurt others. He was strong despite his handicap. It was for this reason that he was placed in Cottage #1, a long range maximum security detention unit for residents with aberrant behavioral problems. Therapy is difficult but various programs are carried out by professional staff. Detention itself must also be considered as therapeutic.

Helman was a resident of this cottage for 4 years
Mr. David Martin was the night attendant at the time of the incident. He remained on the ground floor most of the evening which is customary and checks the sleeping residents on the floor above at least six times per evening. At 5:15 A.M. of October 17, Mr. Martin found Helman out of bed. It had become necessary to restrain Helman in his bed to prevent him from disturbing the others and Mr. Martin refastened the restraint at that time.

The restraint (only described by Dr. McClelland) was a canvas jacket laced up the back. It did not impede the free movement of arms and legs. A long cotton cord was laced through the waist bank and the ends were wrapped around the bed rails several times and tied. Helman was capable of untying the cord. *The cord was a piece of cloth folded over several times and was about 3 inches wide.* When Mr. Martin retyed the cord, one long end of excess cord was left on the floor. Mr. Martin returned to his station downstairs. At 5:40 A.M., Mr. Martin returned to the sleeping quarters specifically to arouse one diabetic patient at the opposite end of this room from Helman. At 5:55 A.M. the day attendant, Mr. Joseph Wertz, arrived and Mr. Martin took the diabetic patient downstairs and then directly to the dispensary for his insulin injection. Mr. Wertz went upstairs, turned on the overhead lights to arouse the residents and found Helman sitting on the floor with the loose end of cord around his neck.

Dr. McClelland took us to Cottage #1. There were approximately eight residents and four attendants in the cottage at the time. Dr. McClelland gave a brief explanation of the aberrant behavior of several of the residents. ~~_____ explained~~

An attendant accompanied us to the second floor sleeping quarters. The locked door opened into the center of a large room with a double row of beds. Each bed was made up with sheets, white spread and pillows. All were clean and many have been changed that morning. There was approximately 1 1/2 - 2 feet between beds.

Helman's bed was the last one on the right. The diabetic's bed was to the left of the door and [REDACTED]'s bed was at the far left. * See attached diagram. *Suspect's*

Helman's body was found in a sitting position facing the wall with his back against the bed.

The attendant confirmed an earlier statement by Dr. McClelland that [REDACTED] and Helman were well acquainted and that [REDACTED] helped Helman several times. The attendant also assured us that even voices could be heard readily by the attendant on duty downstairs.

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The overhead lights were turned out and since the sky was heavily overcast the room was darkened considerably. It seems possible that Mr. Martin could not have noticed Helman's body if he were on the floor at the 5:40 A.M. time despite the night lights and exit light near the bed. (When Dr. McClelland demonstrated the position of the body he sat erect against the bed with his head and neck clearly visible - it is not known how tall Mr. Helman was or how erect he may have been because of the restraining jacket).

Helman had surgery on September 11 for the removal of six spoons, three popsicle sticks and several pieces of plastic knives. He was released from the hospital on September 22 and returned to Cottage #1. Since he walked up and down the stairs twice a day and a good city block to and from the dining room three times a day suggests that he was fully recovered from his surgery. The autopsy report indicated that healing was complete.

Dr. McClelland stated that the district attorney had contacted the public defenders office as an insurance of the suspects rights. It is not known if this public defender visited the suspect or not.

[REDACTED]

Edward Harris
Rehabilitation Counselor

EH:jr

Enclosure

COTTAGE #1

