

## Signs of mental illness in man shot - Sacramento Bee, The (CA) - September 13, 2018 - page 1A

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As the clock ticked toward midnight on a cool September night in Sacramento, a young man wearing a dark hoodie and a medical face mask walked alone along the city's busy Broadway corridor, passing restaurants, bars and bookstores and waving an object that looked like a gun.

The first calls to police dispatchers came around 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 5. A "suspicious subject" was roaming the area.

One caller said a man wearing a mask had pointed a gun at a group standing in front of Dimple Records before moving on, according to dispatch audio recorded by Broadcastify, an online archive. The man walked past Tower Cafe, where callers said he brandished the weapon at a few employees cleaning the restaurant.

The suspect was **Darell Richards**, 19, who grew up in Elk Grove and, following altercations with a younger brother that resulted in criminal charges, had recently moved in with his grandparents in Oak Park. Family members and friends believed Richards was mentally spiraling, showing signs of paranoia and aggression - a stark change from his mostly quiet and gentle past.

He was scheduled for a psychiatric evaluation, but he ran out of time.

Three hours after police began pursuing Richards that Wednesday night, SWAT team members shot him dead as he crouched under a stairwell in Curtis Park, just a few blocks from where Richards was first spotted on Broadway and 16th Street. Police later determined that his weapon was a pellet gun that resembled a handgun and that he also was carrying a knife.

The most recent fatal shooting of a young black man by Sacramento police has shaken the community, with some wondering if officers could have subdued Richards without shooting him dead. Protesters said they intend to confront City Council members Thursday to demand police changes and justice for Richards and others killed by police, including Stephon Clark, whose death in March became a national controversy.

"Every time they kill somebody, we are going to be in their face," said Tanya Faison, a leader in Sacramento's Black Lives Matter movement.

Police said that prior to approaching Richards, they sent in K9 officers to help pin down his whereabouts. Officers never engaged in a foot chase with him - unlike in the Clark case - and instead tracked him with a California Highway Patrol airplane crew.

SWAT officers, upon finding Richards in the back of an occupied house, ordered him "to drop his weapon." When he pointed it at them, officers had no choice but to open fire, police said.

"When a suspect is pointing a firearm at officers, they're in immediate danger," said Sgt. Vance Chandler, police department spokesman. "At that point, a less lethal weapon is not an option."

'Very mellow' teenager changed dramatically

Richards leaves a large, tightly knit family and close friends.

"He was a good kid. He was always helpful around the house," said Aina Eden, his former girlfriend of two years. "He always wanted to make his family proud. I know that for a fact."

Richards was born in Oak Park but spent part of his childhood in Elk Grove, where he attended Monterey Trail High School before transferring to Hiram Johnson for his junior year, Eden said. He was drawn to music and art, and wrote and recorded his own rap songs. He was rarely seen without his earphones, dancing to different beats. He liked working out in gyms and playing basketball on public courts.

Eden said he enjoyed playing with air guns, such as the replica of a Sig Sauer handgun that he carried the night he died.

"He was still trying to figure out life," said his older sister, Marlena Lee. After graduating from a continuation school, she said, he became interested in following a cousin and an uncle into the military. He had already met with recruiters and filled out paperwork, but his plan was derailed by arrests.

The confrontations with his brother were out of character, Lee said. For most of his life, Richards was polite and respectful. "Very mellow," she said. "He didn't like loud arguing or confrontation. He tended to laugh things off."

But something changed within Richards in the past year or so, according to court records and interviews.

His personality changed, and family members and friends began to suspect he was mentally troubled. His unpredictable behavior and eruptions of anger led to the confrontations with his brother, Lee said. The fights led to criminal charges and a restraining order against Richards.

Following the incidents, Richards moved to Oak Park to live with his grandparents. He was staying with them on the last night of his life.

"I did see signs recently that something was wrong," Lee said. "Darell was not ever violent or argumentative. It wasn't like him."

He also seemed paranoid at times, worrying that people were out to get him, friends and acquaintances said.

"We worried about schizophrenia," Lee said. "We were trying to get him help, but it came a little too late. It's heartbreaking."

The first confrontation with his then-15-year-old brother was April 24, according to court records. Police were called to the house after Richards allegedly hit his sibling with a "ceramic bank," court records and a police report show. Richards was arrested on assault charges. His brother suffered minor injuries.

About a month later, things escalated. Richards allegedly hit his brother on the head with a "wooden club" and fled his family home on foot, according to court records and the police report. His brother was taken to the hospital for treatment.

'Let's get you some counseling'

Richards' mother, Khoua Vang, applied for a domestic violence restraining order against Richards in response. In it, she said her younger son had a concussion from the blow and a bump on his head. She said Richards was "sick in the head to beat up his little brother."

A warrant was issued for his arrest, and he was taken into custody July 9 by the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department.

Quoc To, who grew close to Richards and his family while serving as his public defender in the cases, said his client had never been in trouble with the law prior to those incidents and expressed deep remorse for what happened. "Darell loved his brother," he said, "and his brother loved him."

At the urging of family members, the lawyer said he filed a petition this summer to appoint a doctor to evaluate his client's mental condition. Richards was next scheduled to be in court on Oct. 1.

Richards at first resisted the notion that he might be mentally ill, his lawyer said.

"But I told him, 'Look, Darell, you have the rest of your life ahead of you. Let's sit down with a doctor, let's get you some counseling.'"

The lawyer spoke with a psychiatrist, and last Thursday morning phoned his client's family members to let them know that he had taken that step. He got a devastating reply, he said.

"I was told, 'The coroner is here right now,'" To said.

'pow-pow-pow-

pow-pow'

Interviews, police reports and court documents fill in the details of what happened in a slice of Curtis Park between railroad tracks and 21st Street the night Richards died.

Shortly before midnight, Candace Schuncke was awakened by a voice from a police loudspeaker.

"Get in your house and lock your doors," was the command.

"I wasn't that concerned," said Schuncke, who lives on 20th Street, just south of Broadway. "Obviously they were looking for someone." She went back to bed, she said.

While she slept, SWAT and K9 teams began arriving. Police learned that the suspect had fled to the neighborhood and had jumped a fence. They blocked off the area and began searching for him.

Officers caught glimpses of Richards a few times that night as he scrambled between backyards, knocking over garbage cans, according to radio communications.

Around 3 a.m., Schuncke's two dachshunds began barking hysterically. She peered into her backyard and saw flashlights. Her doorbell rang, and she opened it to find a pair of SWAT officers, heavily armed and in dark uniforms, standing before her.

"They were very polite," she said. They urged her to remain indoors and continued their search.

About 15 minutes later, "I heard pow-pow-pow-pow-pow, and I thought, 'I guess they have their man,'" Schuncke recalled. She estimated that she heard 15 to 20 shots.

Later that morning, she saw officers place a backpack and other evidence into plastic bags. She learned that a man had been killed by police while hiding under a stairwell at a house around the corner from her, on First Avenue.

The reality of what she had experienced began to sink in, she said.

"A young man had been shot to death. Couldn't they have stunned him or shot him in the arm or shoulder? I just felt very sad. It's a sad situation."

Lee said the family is gathering information and reserving comment on what happened to Richards in the wee hours of Sept. 6. They did not want to address why he was outdoors at midnight wearing a face mask, or why he was carrying a pellet gun.

On Wednesday they were still in shock, she said, as they planned his memorial service.

"It's still so unbelievable," Lee said. "I can't even put into words what I am feeling right now. I can't believe my brother is gone."

He was a good kid. He was always helpful around the house. He always wanted to make his family proud. I know that for a fact.

Aina Eden, former girlfriend