

Black remembered as a hero at funeral - 73-year- - Denver Post, The (CO) - August 26, 2018 - page 1B

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As three men in American Legion uniforms folded an American flag into a tight triangle, Jeanette Black clutched the hand of her 11-year-old grandson as they mourned the man who had saved them from a violent intruder only to be shot and killed by an Aurora police officer who had responded to their 911 call.

The boy wiped tears streaming down his face as two buglers played taps, and his father pulled him close as family, friends and military veterans celebrated the life of **Richard Gary Black Jr.**, the 73-year-old Vietnam veteran who died July 30 in what has been described as one of the most tragic police shootings in the city's history.

After Saturday's service at Fairmount Cemetery, Jeanette Black said she felt good about the tribute -- even the presence of Aurora Police Department Chief Nick Metz and a handful of other uniformed officers. The service reflected her husband's dignified personality, she said.

"I miss him tremendously," she said. "There was never a day where we didn't love each other."

Black's heroism on the battlefield and his heroism on the day he died were front and center during the service.

"He was a hero coming out of that war, and he died a hero defending his family," said Mark Potter, chaplain for American Legion Post 22 in Northglenn.

The Rev. Kate Bradsen, the officiant, acknowledged Black's death as an "unspeakable tragedy" and one that his family may never understand.

"It's hard to think of Gary's death as peaceful. It was anything but," Bradsen said. "God was with Gary because God always was with Gary."

The shooting death happened after a naked intruder burst through the Black family's front door about 1:30 a.m. and attacked the 11-year-old grandson, who was sleeping on the couch. The intruder, who was a stranger to the Blacks, carried the 11-year-old to a bathroom and began assaulting him in the bathtub.

The boy's father, Chad Hyabashi, and Black fought the intruder, who hit Black in the head with a vase during the fight. Unable to pull the intruder off the child, Black retrieved his 9mm handgun and killed the intruder.

Aurora police officers heard Black's gunfire and, as they approached the house, saw Black turn a corner holding a gun and a flashlight. Officers yelled for Black to drop the gun but never identified

themselves as police. When Black did not drop his gun, one officer fired four shots, killing Black. The officer had been involved in a shooting the previous month and had been back on the job for just over two weeks.

The scene has been described by Metz as violent and chaotic. The intruder had been at a party across the street, and a crowd, which included his mother, had chased him into the Black family home. There was screaming and yelling from the partygoers and the child who was being attacked.

The shooting has raised questions about how police officers are trained to recognize law-abiding, armed homeowners and how departments prepare their officers to return to work.

Those issues were set aside during Saturday's service as a community mourned together.

Jeanette Black said she had invited the Aurora police because she wanted her children and grandchildren to respect law enforcement in spite of what happened.

"They're still here to protect all of us," she said. "They're still representatives of our city."

Gary Black was born on a dairy farm in Anderson, S.C., in 1945. His father abandoned the family, and his mother remarried. But the family struggled financially and with the illness of a younger stepbrother.

At age 12, Black asked a church pastor for help, and he ended up moving to the Epworth Children's Home, an orphanage in the state capital of Columbia.

There, he worked on the school's farm and cut hair. As an adult, Black would tell his family that Epworth had saved his life and he was a generous donor, Jeanette Black said.

He earned a scholarship to The Citadel and graduated in 1966. By 1967, he was in Vietnam working as an intelligence officer. Black served two tours -- July 1967 to February 1968 and April 1970 to October 1971. He was awarded four Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart for his service.

After receiving an honorable discharge, Black settled in Aurora after being offered a job by Carl Fronabarger, an Army buddy. Fronabarger owned the S.O.S. Motel and C&C Motors on Sixth Avenue in Aurora. Black managed the motel and lived there, and the two of them eventually opened the Sandtrap Lounge at the motel.

"We were like brothers," Fronabarger said. "I never heard him say a cross word about anybody or anything."

Black met Jeanette, a single mother, in 1974 at the Blue Onion, where she worked as a hostess.

"He was very, very quiet," Jeanette Black said. "I thought, 'He's in here all the time. What's going on?' "

Black eventually spoke, and the two fell in love.

They married and had two daughters -- Catherine and Elizabeth. Together, they managed the hotel and lounge while raising the daughters and Jeannie's son. In 1990, Black went back to school to study accounting and computer information systems. He became a CPA in 1994 and went to work for the IRS until he retired in 2015.

They had bought their home at 10609 E. Montview Blvd., two weeks after they married. Jeanette Black said she had once asked for a bigger home because she wanted to add a sewing room, but her husband had insisted it would be their home for the rest of their lives.

There, he kept an immaculate garden and built a zipline in the backyard for his four grandchildren.

After the memorial service, Black's grandchildren and daughter, Catherine Braun, spoke about his life. The 11-year-old boy, whose life he saved, said his favorite memory of his grandfather would be their Saturday trips to Sam's Club.

Braun recalled trips to hardware stores, his grilling skills and his daily bowl of ice cream. He was the only father who would attend her Girl Scout camping trips, she said.

"It didn't bother him even when he ended up setting up all of the tents," she said. "You knew his love for you in everything he did."

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