

Accused Alabama prof shot, killed brother in 1986

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More than 23 years before a college professor was accused of shooting six of her colleagues, her teenage brother died from the blast of a shotgun she held in the kitchen of her family's home in Massachusetts.

The 1986 shooting was ruled accidental and no charges were filed against Amy Bishop. The case could get a closer look as authorities try to explain why they believe the Harvard-educated neurobiologist opened fire Friday, killing three.

Bishop, a rare woman suspected of a workplace shooting, had just months left teaching at the University of Alabama in Huntsville because she was denied tenure.

Some, including the husband of one victim and one of her students, have said she was upset after being denied the job-for-life security afforded tenured academics. Authorities have refused to discuss a motive, and school spokesman Ray Garner said the faculty meeting wasn't called to discuss tenure.

It appeared the violent episode in Bishop's past wasn't known to her colleagues in Huntsville.

Bishop shot her brother, Seth, an 18-year-old accomplished violinist, in the chest in 1986, said Paul Frazier, the police chief in Braintree, Mass., where the shooting occurred.

Both William Setzer, chairman of chemistry department at UAH, and university police Chief Chuck Gales said they had not heard about the Massachusetts incident until being asked by reporters Saturday.

The Norfolk County District Attorney's office released a 1987 report with details of their investigation, based on interviews with Amy Bishop and her parents conducted by a state trooper after the shooting. The report concluded Seth Bishop was killed by an "accidental discharge of a firearm."

Amy Bishop told investigators she was trying to learn how to use a shotgun that her father had purchased for protection in the home after a break-in. She said she did not know how to use the weapon and brought it downstairs to the kitchen for help unloading it.

She said she was raising it when "someone said something to her and she turned and the gun went off" while her brother was walking across the kitchen, according to the report.

She then ran out of the house with the weapon. When she talked to investigators 11 days after the shooting, she told them she could only remember hearing her mother scream and she didn't know the gunshot struck her brother until later.

The report by Trooper Brian Howe said Bishop's "highly emotional state" immediately after the shooting made it impossible to question her. The report said she was 19 at the time. Police say she is 42 now, though the university's Web site lists her as 44.

The handling of the case prompted back-and-forth claims from the current Braintree police chief, Frazier, and the former chief, John Polio.

Frazier said Polio instructed officers to release Amy Bishop to her mother, who had once served on a police personnel board. That move upset officers who remembered the 1986 shooting, Frazier said.

"The police officers here were very upset about that," said Frazier, who was a patrolman at the time and spoke to officers who remembered the incident that day, including one who filed a report on it.

Frazier also said the police records of the shooting have disappeared and he planned to meet with the local district attorney over the possibility of launching a criminal investigation into how the Bishop case was handled.

Polio, now 87, said Saturday at his Braintree home that he was astonished at any implication of a cover-up. He said he didn't instruct officers to release Bishop and wasn't close to her mother, who he said served on the police board years before the shooting. "(There's) no cover-up, no missing records," Polio said. "If they're missing, they're missing since I retired."

Polio said that at the time there were questions about whether Amy Bishop intended to kill her brother because of conflicting reports about whether the two had argued or had just been horsing around when the gun was fired.

Polio said the officer who took Bishop into custody told Polio he was upset she was released but "it was an isolated cop, telling

me something. It wasn't a big movement."

Attempts by AP to track down addresses and phone numbers for Bishop's family in the Braintree area weren't immediately successful Saturday. The current police chief said he believed her family had moved away.

In Huntsville, students, faculty and the community struggled to explain the violence.

The three killed were Gopi K. Podila, the chairman of the Department of Biological Sciences, and two other faculty members, Maria Ragland Davis and Adriel Johnson. Three people were wounded. Two of them — Joseph Leahy and staffer Stephanie Monticciolo — were in critical condition early Sunday. The third, Luis Cruz-Vera, had been released from the hospital.

Bishop was arrested shortly after the shooting and was charged with capital murder. It wasn't immediately known if she has an attorney. No one was home at the couple's house. Her husband, James Anderson, was detained and questioned by police but has not been charged. She is the mother of four children.

A 9 mm handgun was found in the bathroom of the building where the shootings occurred, and Huntsville police spokesman Sgt. Mark Roberts said Bishop did not have a permit for it.

Descriptions of Bishop from students and colleagues were mixed. Some saw a strange woman who had difficulty relating to her students, while others described a witty, intelligent teacher.

Students and colleagues described Bishop as smart, but someone who often had difficulty explaining complicated concepts.

Bishop was well-known in the research community, appearing on the cover of the winter 2009 issue of "The Huntsville R&D Report," a local magazine focusing on engineering, space and genetics.

Setzer, the chemistry chairman, said Bishop was appealing the tenure decision made last year. "Politics and personalities" always play a role in the tenure process, he said. "In a close department it's more so. If you have any lone wolves or bizarre personalities, it's a problem and I'm thinking that certainly came into play here."

Don't ask when: Repeal of gay ban won't be soon

By ANNE FLAHERTY
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As promised, the Pentagon has begun examining how the ban on gays serving openly could be eased and then repealed, but a complete repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy is probably years away.

The two officials appointed to lead a yearlong internal assessment — Gen. Carter Ham, commander of U.S. Army forces in Europe, and Pentagon General Counsel Jeh Johnson — met for the first time on Feb. 9.

As that study gets under way, officials were expected by mid-March to suggest ways to relax enforcement of the law. Of particular interest is minimizing cases of "third party outings," where a service member is kicked out after being reported by others to be gay.

The protracted time line is about more than giving military leaders time to assess the impact on troops and put new rules in place. The multiyear process also is a strategic way of getting troops used to the idea before they have to accept change. Politically, the time line puts off congressional debate over lifting the ban until after elections this fall.

Reversing the military's policy on gays, which is based on a 1993 law and would require an act of Congress, would mark the biggest upheaval to the military's personnel policies since the 1948 executive order on racial integration.

The goal, according to senior defense and military officials, is to avoid the backlash that could result from imposing change too fast. While officials expect resistance from only a minority of service members and believe that it could be contained with discipline, officials fear isolated incidents of violence could erupt as a means of protest.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates suggested as much in recent congressional testimony, when he said he had learned from "stupid" management attempts to dictate change too quickly as a senior CIA official in the 1980s.

"Stupid was trying to impose a policy from the top without any regard for the views of the people who were going to be affected or the people who would have to effect the policy change," Gates said.

As part of the internal review, Gates said the military would survey service members and their families on any changes to policies.

"A guiding principle of our efforts will be to minimize disruption and polarization within the ranks, with a special attention paid to those serving on the front lines," Gates told a Senate committee this month.

President Barack Obama, who says the ban is unjust, is counting on a major cultural shift among American voters in the 17 years when it went into effect. Then, Democratic lawmakers joined the military in resisting a proposal by President Bill Clinton that would have let gays serve openly.

Clinton emerged from the debate politically bruised, with GOP critics casting the new president as a social liberal who was woefully out of touch with the military.

Since then, Democratic lawmakers have been reluctant to take on the issue as well. Since taking control of Congress three years ago, following the 2006 elections, Democrats have focused their efforts instead on more popular military-related issues like ending the war in Iraq.

According to a Washington Post-ABC News poll, three-quarters of Americans say that they support openly gay people serving in the military. The 75 percent figure is far above the 44 percent of Americans who said so in May 1993.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney, defense secretary in the first Bush administration, said Sunday he supports a review of the policy.

"When the chiefs come forward and say we think we can do it, it strikes me it's time to reconsider the policy," he said. "I'm reluctant to second-guess the military in this regard."

Cheney, who has an openly gay daughter, said he thinks society has moved on from staunch opposition to gays serving in the military.

"It's partly a generational question," he told ABC's "This Week," adding that "things have changed significantly" since the policy took effect.

Obama's national security adviser, retired Marine Gen. James Jones, said on CNN's "State of the Union" that the policy "has to evolve with the social norms of what is acceptable and what is not."