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PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE ■ FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1999



TONY  
NORMAN

## Waiting to exhale after police stop

A lot of thoughts go through your head when the cops stop you.

Last Saturday evening, a police van's flashing lights startled me out of my reverie.

Parking on the left side of Agnes in front of the Triangle Grill in Swissvale, I noticed a faded yellow line on the crumbling curb. Momentarily distracted by the short burst of a siren, I wondered if I should've pulled farther away from the line and closer to the curb.

"Get back into the vehicle," a chubby young officer shouted from behind the wheel of his SUV. His partner had a face so blank that her expressions seemed to disappear like smoke. Suddenly, it was obvious for whom the siren tolled.

It tolled for me.

Looking at the curb's faded yellow line, I eased back into the car. In Swissvale, a man leaf-blowing his yard the wrong way can be hauled off to jail on an officer's whim. If it happened in Kafka, it's still happening in Swissvale.

The cops flanked my car, the woman on the passenger side and her partner cheek to jowl on the driver's side. He asked for my license and registration but I kept my eye on his partner. Her hand rested on her holstered gun, which made me more than a little nervous.

"I guess things are pretty slow today," I quipped, thinking the stop was about my proximity to the thin yellow line. I was determined not to let them see my hand shake as I handed over the license.

"You have no idea why we stopped you, do you?" he asked. Whenever a cop asks a question he already knows the answer to, he's either a sadist or desperately hoping you'll give him a better reason for the stop if the original pretext proves too flimsy. I kept my mouth shut because a black man arguing with cops of any color is always bad policy.

"You made a right turn without coming to a full and complete stop at the [stop] sign," he said.

He took my license and retreated to his SUV with his partner. Instead of ferreting out the car's registration documents in the glove compartment, I scribbled some lines in a note pad.

When the cops returned two minutes later, they assumed their positions. The lady cop hovered on my passenger side again. I told her partner I was still looking for the registration, but he waved it off as unnecessary.

"Look," he said. "I believe this is your car, but I won't write you a ticket. In the future, please come to a full and complete stop at a stop sign."

I was dumbfounded. He really seemed to think he was doing me a favor.

"You can shake your head all you want, sir," he said, "but you violated the law."

I bit my lip but didn't concede anything. Instead of gratitude he got silence. I'm funny that way. Too many things could've gone wrong. I wasn't in any mood to walk down long dark tunnels into eternity.

Slowly, I stepped out of my Honda Civic. They retreated to their SUV and drove off. I could exhale again.

After nearly a week in Seattle, I remembered that it's these kinds of "quality of life" issues that can get a brother killed in Pittsburgh if he's not careful.

Inside the Triangle Grill, partners and cooks engaged in small talk. The onions smelled great sizzling on the grill.

Finally, there was something to feel grateful for.

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# Gay rights stirring campuses

250 demonstrate at Pitt over challenge to city law

By Bill Schackner  
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Shawn Collington has gotten used to the ugly words thrown his way since he began telling people he's gay. But the name-calling doesn't faze him anymore.

What frightens him, the South Side teenager said, is the prospect of losing a law that protects him from employers who would fire him or landlords who would not rent to him because of his sexual orientation. It's why he joined 250 protesters at the University of Pittsburgh yesterday for what has become a noisy battle over gay rights in the city and how far tolerance should go on a college campus.

"Without this law, I could lose my job. It could be tossed out of my apartment," said Collington, 19, a waiter in a hotel downtown. "This is my life. This is all I have."

As university trustees met inside the student union, speaker after speaker outside the building shamed Pitt for filing a legal challenge to a city ordinance that protects gays and lesbians from discrimination. The challenge is among the tactics being used by Pitt to defend itself against having to pay health benefits to same-sex domestic partners of Pitt employees.

The protest drew a mix of students, faculty and others. Some said they wanted to be part of what they would be a protracted fight.

"If I had one thing to say to the board of trustees it would be this, 'Let's get ready to rumble!'" city Councilman Jim Ferlo, who helped enact the ordinance nine years ago, boomed into a microphone as the crowd cheered. "If I have to come back here again, I



Lake Fong/Post-Gazette

Protesters rally outside the office of Trustees of Pittsburgh Chancellor Mark Nordenberg after demonstrating near the board of trustees meeting at the student union. The group was calling for Pitt to pay health benefits to same-sex domestic partners of its employees.

won't be walking out of here. They'll have to carry me."

Inside, the tone was equally resolute. Trustees made no mention of the legal case or the protest during their 90-minute meeting, even as 40 of the demonstrators filed past unusually heavy security and into the meeting room.

In an interview afterward, trustees Chairman J. Wray Connolly said the board had acted responsibly by trying to avoid shelling out a benefit Pitt is not legally required to provide. He disagreed with the argument that the

city law is the only protection that gays have in Pittsburgh.

"That is the kind of scare tactic that those people use, maybe because they can't think of any other thing to say," Connolly said. "They are citizens of this country. I think their rights are protected."

"If these people would like to have these benefits, why don't they get on a bus and go to Harrisburg? Talk to the legislators of the commonwealth and have the law changed."

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Same-sex benefit backers doubt PSU will relent

By Tom Gibb  
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — At a Harrisburg rally five weeks from now, his allies plan to hand state legislators petitions laden with thousands of signatures urging same-sex benefits for Penn State University employees.

But petition drive co-architect Tony North figures that, at most, some minds — but no policy — will change.

"I doubt it will make much of a difference this year," North, a Penn State graduate student from Manchester, England, said yesterday. "But this is a foundation in a movement for equity for gay and lesbian employees."

Movement is the nice word for it. Bare-knuckles fight might be more fitting.

Petitioners call denial of same-sex benefits "immoral" and ask that the Legislature declare publicly that it won't pressure Penn State to reject same-sex coverage. But they are up against state officials who call same-sex benefits socially unpalatable and who could cut off a major share of Penn State funding if the university crosses them.

In the middle is Penn State President Graham Spanier, a supporter of same-sex coverage but a pragmatist who decided economics trumped principle on this issue.

"We talked to 20, 25 people in Harrisburg — the speaker of the House, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, the governor," Penn State spokesman Stephen McCarthy said yesterday. "They were very strongly opposed to it. They essentially promised they would cut off appropriations to us."

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"I want to know the truth. I want justice. I want to know what happened to Craig Guest on June 26."



Steve Mellor/Post-Gazette

Earlene Herbert cries after making a short statement yesterday in which she and LeRoy Wofford, right, discussed the death of their son, Craig Guest, who was shot and killed by Pittsburgh police Officer John Wilbur in 1996.

# New probe sought in killing by officer

By Johnna A. Pro  
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

The parents of a man shot to death in 1996 by Pittsburgh police officer John J. Wilbur are calling for a second investigation into the incident, claiming they have new evidence in the case.

LeRoy Wofford and Earlene Herbert, the parents of Craig Guest, say they have paid for an independent review of the incident which shows Wilbur acted improperly from the time he got out of his police car until he fired into a stolen vehicle killing their son and another man.

"The evidence we have says he shot before he was dragged," Wofford said at a press conference yesterday.

Wilbur, who was cleared of any wrongdoing, said he fired into the vehicle because his left ring finger was caught in the rear door of the car as driver James Mitchell sped down Fifth Avenue in the early morning of June 26.

Wilbur's shots killed Guest, 19, of Lawrenceville, and Maurice Hall, 20, of Hazelwood.

Mitchell, who subsequently was tried for attempting to kill Wilbur, was convicted of aggravated assault, illegal possession of a handgun and three counts related to driving a stolen car. He is serving eight to 16 years for those crimes.

Wofford contends that ballistics and other tests done by the Allegheny County crime lab were not conducted properly.

Wofford would not say, however, who reviewed the tests on behalf of the family, nor what specific findings were uncovered. He described the individual as an expert who found numerous inconsistencies.

"The tests they've done and the tests we've done are totally different," Wofford said.

The family has not contacted District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. or Allegheny County Coroner Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, Wofford said.

"I just don't think it was proper police procedure," Herbert said. "I want to know the truth. I want justice. I want to know what happened to Craig Guest on June 26."

Wofford said that at the time Wilbur took action, he didn't know the three men were in a stolen car.

"At that point, there was no stolen car. All there was were three kids in a car passed out," Wofford said. "At best you have a joyrider receiving stolen property, not a situation that deserved an execution."

Attorney William H. Difenderfer made similar arguments about Wilbur's actions during Mitchell's trial although he let the case proceed to the jury without putting on a defense.

Wofford said last night he stands by his version of events. He has testified that he reached into the car after Guest, the back seat passenger, popped something into his mouth. Mitchell pulled out, the door swung

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# Together 57 years, united in death

Couple die after being hit by car at Baden intersection

By Jonathan D. Silver  
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

After nightfall, a single street light glows faintly at the intersection of State Street and Dippold Avenue in the tiny town of Baden along the Ohio River.

It's one of those weak vapor jobs that casts a wan, weak halo on the ground. The intersection isn't so dark it's considered dangerous. But to Police Chief Frank Tavern, the street light doesn't illuminate much of anything along Baden's main drag.

Bernard and Thelma Borman were passing through that exact spot Wednesday night. They were going home, what should have been just a short, easy commute from one haven to another. Services for Ash Wednesday at the United Methodist Church had just let out at 8:30 p.m., and the couple was headed for their car in a lot down the hill from the church and across State Street.

As they moved through the intersection, they were struck and killed by a car traveling south. The blow resounded throughout the town of 5,500.

After the impact, the 1986 Cadillac Coupe de Ville skidded 28 feet before coming to a stop. It wasn't going that fast, Tavern said, maybe not even over the 30 mph speed limit. But even at a relatively slow speed, the impact caused grievous injuries.

Neighbors said Thelma, 78, had osteoporosis and was frail. And Bernard — although spry enough to walk the length of the town twice a day during his daily regimen — was 83.

Soon a helicopter swooped in to take them away.

Thelma passed away first at 10:10 p.m. in UPMC Presbyterian. Bernard held on for a few hours longer, and then joined his wife of 57 years.

Surveying the scene yesterday afternoon, passing his gaze over a jumble of white and orange circles painted there by his officers in the dark of the night before, Tavern reconstructed the accident and deci-

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