



Answers slow to come in teen's shooting death



Brunswick County Sheriff John Ingram and Chief Deputy Charlie Miller talk with Keith Vidal's family on Monday. Photo by Adam Wagner

Mark Wilsey, Vidal's father: 'I watched him shoot my son in cold blood.'

BY ADAM WAGNER
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Long before Keith Vidal carried a screwdriver, before he was shot and killed and before there was an N.C. State Bureau of Investigation probe into his death, he stood in front of a mirror and took a selfie.

Monday, that picture hung from a wall in the lobby outside Brunswick County District Attorney Jon

David's office, earrings in both of Vidal's ear lobes, his hair perfectly coiffed, the word "why" scrawled in capital letters with a black Sharpie in the white space next to his head.

The 18-year-old – his birthday was Dec. 10 – was shot and killed Sunday during an altercation involving officers from the Boiling Spring Lakes Police Department, Southport Police Department and

Brunswick County Sheriff's Office.

Before a 2 p.m. news conference at David's office, family members offered their timeline of the events that led to the shooting.

They also demanded justice. "Why, why did he have to die? ... Where is justice here?" said Mary Wilsey, Vidal's mother.

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A sign shows the spot outside the family's bathroom where Keith Vidal died. Visit this story at StarNews Online.com to listen to the 911 call. Photo by Adam Wagner

VIDAL

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Anthony Owens, a friend of the family, spoke about the officer who shot and killed Vidal.

"I hope he lies in bed at night and cries like we have to," Owens said.

Officials, including David, remained tight-lipped about what exactly happened at the President Road home Sunday afternoon, citing the ongoing SBI probe.

Bryon Vassey, a nine-year veteran of the Southport Police Department, was placed on paid administrative leave because of his role in the incident, said Jerry Dove, the department's chief.

Neither the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office nor the Boiling Spring Lakes Police Department have placed officers on leave, a sheriff's office spokeswoman said Monday.

Boiling Spring Lakes Police Chief Brad Shirley said in a statement Monday that John Thomas was the department's officer who initially responded to the home.

The incident began, Mary Wilsey said, while Vidal was sweeping the floor between the laundry room and the kitchen. He was carrying a screwdriver, but, the family said, never threatened anybody with it.

"He just wanted his screwdriver. It's his screwdriver, he's gonna keep it," she said.

Vidal did have schizophrenia and depression, but did not have a history of violence, according to other family members.

The family also said the deputy was effective.

"She was great with him," Mark Wilsey said. "She talked to him. Everything was fine. There was no escalation, nobody threatened everybody. Keith didn't show a screwdriver, threaten anybody with a screwdriver."

According to a statement by Owens, Vidal was "becoming more rational" at this point.

"In a small town, it's like a family no matter what," Owens said. "And when you deal with somebody like Keith, everybody in the family knows there's something going on. Then you bring an outsider in and instantly that outsider makes a life-or-death decision about a child that is so promising."

At 12:48:41, a Southport officer arrived on scene.

Exactly 70 seconds later 911 records show, a Brunswick County EMS unit that was standing by advised shots had been fired.

When the Southport officer entered the house, the situation escalated, according to family accounts.

"An officer from another town entered the residence and instructed the officers to stop talking and tase Vidal," according to Owens statement. "As Vidal tried to flee into the bathroom adjacent to where he was standing, the two officers simultaneously shot him with their tasers."

The officers who had deployed their tasers then tried to restrain Vidal. It was into that pile that the Southport officer shot, fatally wounding Vidal, Mark Wilsey said.

"Never, not once, have they said he had an aggressive, violent (disposition) toward anybody," said Mark Wilsey Jr., Vidal's stepbrother. "It's always just been, 'Leave me alone.'"

Police have been called to the house before to help with Vidal, another family member said.

"The cops come and talk to him," said Chelsea Wilsey, Vidal's stepsister. "... That's all you have to do is talk to Keith, that's the type of person he is, and calm him down and usually that will solve the problem."

This time, though, at least one officer decided to do more than talk.

Brunswick County 911 records show Mark Wilsey, Vidal's stepfather, called for help at 12:31 p.m.

"He wants to fight his mother, he's got a screwdriver, he's just, you know, he's not doing good," Mark Wilsey said on the call. "She's scared to death of him."

Wilsey also said Vidal had been in the hospital before and was refusing to take his medication.

"We wanted him to put the screwdriver down because he does have schizophrenia and we didn't know if he was gonna hurt himself," Mary Wilsey said.

The first officer who responded to the scene, family members said, was Thomas. 911 records show Thomas arrived at 12:34.

Mary Wilsey said Thomas knew Vidal.

"Come on, bud, let's talk," Thomas said, according to Mary Wilsey.

"I don't want to talk now, leave me alone," Vidal said.

"Let's talk, I'm not leaving until we talk," Thomas said.

Monday, family members praised the way Thomas handled the situation.

"He was in no hurry," Mark Wilsey said.

At 12:45, a Brunswick County Sheriff's Office deputy arrived on the scene.

"There were two cops on top of (Vidal). Two cops and me with a 90-pound kid," Wilsey said. "And then he shot from behind me, (he could have hit the officer.)"

After the shot was fired Wilsey added, the Boiling Spring Lakes office checked his own torso to see if he had been shot.

Soon after, Vidal died. The spot where Vidal spent his last moments is right outside of Chelsea Wilsey's bedroom door.

"Every time I go out of my bedroom now, all I see is a big pool of blood on the floor," she said. "My brother's blood."

Speaking at a news conference on Monday, Jon David said the SBI had been called in to investigate the incident, but that reaching a conclusion as to whether a crime had been committed could take some time.

"The wheels of justice sometimes grind slowly," David said. "We're only 2 hours in at this point, we don't have all the information and what information we have I cannot share at this juncture."

At least six SBI agents were at the scene Sunday conducting interviews and gathering evidence, David added.

"We can certainly understand why this family is upset right now. They just lost a child and certainly my thoughts and prayers are with them," he said. "But what they want from this office today is justice and I intend to give them exactly that."

After meeting with David after Monday's news conference, Mark Wilsey said he would not be satisfied until justice was served.

"I know what happened, was there," he said. "I watched him shoot my son in cold blood right in front of me, and there's no changing that."

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