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THE CHEYENNE HERALD

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In depth. Independent. Stories of Local Interest.

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Dwayne Sells *What happened that night?*

People who knew him well cannot accept what is being said about their friend. They don't believe that one who always served as a peacemaker started a bar fight in unfamiliar surroundings, with more than one adversary.

gathered at Maverick Cycles to make the annual Stride Ride. Dwayne was not along for that ride. He had met an unfortunate death just nights before. And his friends began to seek answers even while he spent his final ten days in ICU.

The Herald has made contact with the young man with Sells that night. What did he witness? What did he tell Cheyenne police.

Dwayne knew a few - including bartenders. He said that Dwayne may have had a "buzz on" but was not drunk.

Two young men, known to Cheyenne police now, were described as "cow-boys," began to hassle Dwayne about his hair. As the picture with the Governor shows, his hair was long. They did not hassle him about his attire - a jacket which would indicate he was a biker.

Dwayne had a mixed drink (glass) in his hand, the antagonist had a beer bottle.

Dwayne and this witness were standing next to the dance floor. The two guys were physical, jostling Sells, as well as verbal - about his hair. Within fifteen minutes after they arrived, Dwayne Sells told the offender that he had done nothing to warrant the behavior and asked for an apology. The first guy walked into Dwayne's chest, pushing him backward as though to walk through him, and invited Sells to "hit me." Being threatened, Dwayne did.

He was immediately struck by a beer bottle and went to the floor. The witness told the Herald that both men jumped on him and were hitting or kicking at the head and face of Dwayne Sells. When he tried to come to the rescue of his fallen friend, he was grabbed from behind by a bouncer and carried outside. The door was open and he had a clear view of what was still happening to his friend.

He was quickly handcuffed by a Cheyenne police officer and told to calm down. In the witness's estimation, the fight went on far longer than it should have. It could have been broken up quicker.

Various very graphic descriptions of the condition of the fallen man have come my way. They indicate that he was unconscious or semiconscious when bouncers began to take him to the door. Before reaching the door, they lowered his lifeless body to the floor - still inside the bar. It was there that the ambulance attendants picked him up and took him to UMC emergency room. Dwayne Sells' young friend, still handcuffed, saw the two guys who had administered the beating running across the parking lot to their car(s) and tried to pursue. The cop would not let him go. The assailants got away. Unidentified at the time.

(Story concludes on page 8)



DWAYNE SELLS, ABATE PRESIDENT, WITH GOVERNOR DAVE FREUDENTHAL

Dwayne Sells was known to his friends for his ambition, his compassion for those in need, his dedication as a father, and his commitment to ABATE, a group for which he was serving as its president.

Described to the Herald in an exclusive interview as about 5'11" but only 140 pounds or so, and affectionately deemed "scrawny" by one dedicated to determine to learn the truth about what happened at the Outlaw Saloon that Friday night.

The daily newspaper in Cheyenne portrayed Dwayne Sells as a biker - not what friends preferred. The WTE linked him as an employee at the Eagle's Nest Bar - seemingly to make the biker connection stronger. They didn't make it clear that he worked in the package liquor store on Friday and Saturday nights but that he held a full-time job at Quark Manufacturing during the week.

Yes, he was a biker. And an organizer of fundraising efforts by the bikers, who are demonized but seldom praised for their community work - for the Stride Ride, the Toy Run and other activities beneficial to the community and its residents.

Days after his death, several hundred bikers from Cheyenne and the surrounds

District Attorney Jon Forwood has the police investigation report of the incident.

He has told Sells' friends that witnesses who have come forward all tell a similar story. That is the story that the friends cannot accept. The story is of a slight man, in a bar where he was unknown to most, with an appearance different and perhaps "strange" to the regulars, on an unusual night on the town to show a young friend a good time before the young man moved out of state two days later, known as a peacemaker - not a troublemaker, proud of his leadership role in ABATE -- in spite of this picture, the story is that he threw the first punch.

"With a drink in his hand," he delivered "a blow to the head," Forwood said witnesses have said about Dwayne Sells.

The question that needs an answer is why, if he threw the first punch, did a guy so unlikely to take the first swing, do so.

Jon Forwood has asked friends of Sells to get any witnesses who saw something different - or have heard anyone who witnessed something different speak about it - to call him. The Cheyenne Herald asks the same. Contact Jon Forwood (633-4360) or call the Cheyenne Herald (637-2879).

According to an e-mail from Jon Forwood to one of Dwayne Sells' friends, there were no witness statements supportive of the friends' claims.

However, the one person who could provide such a defense was readily available but not contacted.

That one person was the young man with whom Dwayne Sells had spent the evening. The young man that Dwayne had known for a long time and had wanted to take out to dinner and a night on the town before he moved away.

It took two telephone calls on Saturday, June 11th, to reach the fellow who had left for Tennessee three days after the incident. Two calls. The first one to the home where he is staying and his grandfather readily and willingly took my name and phone no. to pass along. The second call to the cell phone no. the grandfather had provided, saying his grandson had it with him.

There was no answer and I did not leave a second message - relying on him calling back once he returned home.

But, within an hour, he called - said his cell phone caller ID had shown my number and he asked if I were "the investigator?" I found out in the course of our conversation and a subsequent one with his mother locally that he had been awaiting a call from a Cheyenne police department investigator so he could give his version of events that night.

That call never came. His mother told me she had provided three telephone no.'s in Tennessee to "the investigator." All their phones down there have voice mail and caller ID. No message was left for this witness to call Cheyenne police - nor the District Attorneys office.

This eyewitness's account went as such: Dwayne and he had spent a night on the town, going to the Eagle's Nest, Green Door, Cowboy Bar and then to the Outlaw Saloon, where the beating occurred. They arrived at the Outlaw about 1 a.m. This guy knew hardly anyone except band members, including Danny Rogers, and

Cheyenne Herald receives VFW News Media award

(Story on page 2)

Pine Bluffs Post violates journalistic ethics

Much bigger and more illustrious publications than the Pine Bluffs Post have used cropped or doctored photos.

In one publication some time back, there was Texas Governor Ann Richards sitting astride a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Or so you were to believe. Actually, her head was placed on the body of the real woman on the Harley.

O.J. Simpson's mugshot was printed on the cover of both Newsweek and Time magazines. Newsweek used the actual photograph, Time darkened the skin. Why? To make the accused murderer look even more sinister?

Recently, just prior to Martha Stewart being released from prison, Newsweek ran her full length "photograph" on its front cover. "After Prison, She's Thinner, Wealthier & Ready for Prime Time," said the printover headline. The "photo illustration" was Martha's head, but someone else's body - and that someone was about 40 pounds lighter than Ms. Stewart.

"Trick" photography has put Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan ("Why me, why me?") in the same action shot, as though they were skating together. The award-winning Newsday had an exclusive on that contrived photograph.

National Geographic went them all one better. That magazine moved the pyramids closer together - those wide shots are just not as attractive, presumably.

What did the tiny Pine Bluffs Post do?

They cropped down a photograph of the "finish" of the recent state track meet 400m dash.

In the Post's version of the finish of that race, hometown heroine Bradi Nelson was ahead of four other runners in the frame and the caption under the picture taken by a Pine Bluffs resident was:

"Bradi Nelson won the 400 meter dash with at (sic) time of 1:00.30 at the state track meet in Casper."

That's not quite what happened.

To get the angle of the race at that point, not at the finish line, lanes one and two were dropped.

But the glaring omission from the reproduced photograph was lane four.

The reason there was no runner shown in lane four at that point in the race is that she had finished the race and was well out of the picture to the left.

"She" was Amanda Gordon.

Amanda won the race going away but was disqualified based on an inattentive official ruling she had strayed from her lane.

In the story itself, written by the ubiquitous Post scribe, Becky Christofferson, while the depiction wasn't exactly right, it was closer than the caption under the misleading photograph. Becky wrote, "... Nelson took first place in the 400-meter dash in a time of 1:00.30 ..."

Technically, "took" first place is much more correct than "won" the 400 meter dash.

Most accurately, the story should have said that the Pine Bluffs sprinter was "awarded" first place upon the disqualification of the winner, Amanda Gordon.

Does it matter?

Well, it doesn't seem like the newspaper photograph is one that the runner-up will frame and hang on her dorm room wall. She might be asked where the missing runners were because they're not in the picture.

Why would the Post risk alienating subscribers in the rest of the county? The story had been well-circulated as to the outcome of the race. Pine Bluffs' readers couldn't be fooled into thinking that the photo shown in their newspaper was the way the race really ended that fateful day in Casper.

The photograph of Ann Richards was probably harmless. It had no beneficial effect on voters. Harley riders are not that huge a constituency that an election would be determined on a mistaken belief that the silver-haired sharp-tongued Richards was, indeed, a biker.

Photojournalism has provided some incredibly memorable images. Baby Jessica being carried away after removal from a well. The little Vietnamese girl, naked and running down the street. The sailor kissing his wife or girlfriend on the street (the Herald always has to sneak in something about a sailor).

But, as time moves forward, with the advent of computerized graphics and other advancements, what a reader or viewer sees is not always what they think they saw.

Not content to await a real photograph of Martha Stewart, Newsweek concocted one of their own. They had heard that she had lost weight in prison - who doesn't or wouldn't - so they doctored a photograph. Inside the magazine, they wrote that the body photograph was from Michael Eilins and the head shot from Ron Galella. Originally, Newsweek credited the head shot to Marc Bryan-Brown.

In make-believe, it is hard to keep the characters straight.

Other than credibility, what damage was done by using a doctored photograph? Maybe none if it had been done by Star Magazine, but when Newsweek or Time doctored photographs, it ain't good.

How about the World History or Geography teacher who has to argue with the student who saw the pyramids placed side by side? Perhaps National Geographic thought that memories would fade over 3500-4600 years and no one would still be around to contradict their picture(s).

In Laramie County, where newspaper readers are frequently subjected to less than accurate or truthful portrayals by the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle, it is not helpful if the weekly from Pine Bluffs starts to "adjust" the facts and the truth to fit some other agenda. The picture they printed should have been better described.

Dwayne Sells

(concluded from page 1)

The police officer in control of this witness did not pursue the fleeing guys and did not radio for any assistance to detain or identify them, according to the witness.

The officer would not let the young friend accompany Sells in the ambulance and released him only after the ambulance was gone. (*The "young man" referenced here is 22 - above the legal drinking age.*)

He told the Herald that he could see into the bar from where he was detained and that there was no subsequent "fall" in which the head injuries suffered by Dwayne Sells could have come from.

Several friends of Sells, not at the Outlaw, went to the hospital right away and were with him during the ten days he survived. One who was there from the first was asked by the neurosurgeon, Dr. Judson Cook, what had happened. She told him she had heard that Dwayne had been injured from a fall or a blow to the head with a beer bottle. The doctor said there "was no way in hell" that his injuries were due to a blow to the head or a fall. He said the head had taken "at least three heavy blows" that caused the damage consistent with the injuries. At least one woman came into the hospital covered with blood from the beating. Has a statement been taken from her?

The following Sunday, police officers visited the Eagles Nest (where Dwayne worked and had friends) and expressed concern over any violence coming from this incident. Not intending to even look for anyone who was with Sells that night, HE approached one of officers and told them he was with Dwayne Sells that Friday night (early Saturday morning) and wanted to tell them what had happened. He said that the cop wrote down his comments on a "little tablet" they carry in a vest pocket and that was the last time he spoke with anyone in law enforcement or from the local district attorneys office.

The officer he gave his statement to, and that should be easy to trace, told him, according to this witness, "That's the sort of thing you should expect when you go out on a Friday night."

This witness is readily available. His mother will put police in touch with him. He asked me to tell police how to contact him. His mother said they are willing to fly him back here if necessary. There ARE other witnesses, Jon. Delay a decision on charging until you or the police interview them. You must.

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