

**BRADLEY C. BERRY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY**



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
FOR YAMHILL COUNTY
535 E. 5TH STREET
MCMINNVILLE, OREGON 97128**

PHONE (503) 434-7539 FAX: (503) 434-5760

Prosecution Declined Memo

From: Bradley C. Berry

To: Detective Todd Steele, Yamhill County Sheriff's Office

RE: Deceased: Meighan Elizabeth Cordie
Incident No.: 18001859

Charge(s): N/A

Detective Steele:

I have reviewed all of the reports in the above referenced matter. I will summarize the findings from the investigation, the cause and manner of death, and my review of applicable criminal liability, if any, with this death.

On August 18, 2018, Jennifer Weathers, her 27 year old daughter Meighan Cordie, and Meighan's 3 year old daughter, Gia, attended a wedding on Grand Island, about 8 miles from the City of Dayton. They had previously discussed who would be driving. Jennifer did not want to take them all as she anticipated that Gia would get tired and they would need to leave before she would want to. Meighan didn't want to drive, as she wanted to drink if she decided to.

About 10:20pm, Gia was getting tired and/or fussy and they went to leave the wedding. Jennifer commented to Meighan about this being the 'reason she didn't want to drive'. The two began arguing while walking to the car, and that argument continued in the car as they left the wedding scene. According to Jennifer, after a short distance, the argument got physical and Meighan grabbed her by the hair. Jennifer said that Meighan wanted out of the car and as she braked to about 5mph, Meighan jumped out of the back seat. Jennifer said it was dark, with no street lights or houses. She said she turned the car around, but could not find Meighan.

Jennifer indicated that after looking for a while, she headed home with the child who was in a car seat in the back seat of her car, assuming Meighan would walk back to the wedding or find another way home, but since Jennifer had Gia, she was sure Meighan would show up the next day. When Jennifer got home, she said she found Meighan's shoes, purse and cell phone in the front seat of the car. The next morning Jennifer

returned to the area to look for her and made a report to Deputy Summers that Meighan was "missing".

Your involvement started the next day, August 21st, when the full 'missing person' entry was made and search parties were being dispatched to the Grand Island area to look for her. The information from Jennifer was given to you. She initially withheld the incident with the 'hair pulling', until you confronted her with finding a clump of hair in her vehicle. It was only after that confrontation that she told about the physical nature of the prior argument. You continued to press her on the facts of the case, eventually asking her to submit to a polygraph to eliminate her as having caused the disappearance of Meighan. You did not find evidence of wrongdoing at the time, but some things still did not make sense, including the fact that the hair was found in the front seat, and the items left in the car by Meighan were found in the front seat, but Jennifer indicated that Meighan had jumped out of the car from the back seat.

Extensive searches were done by resources from Yamhill County and from Clackamas County, along with friends and family. Fixed wing and rotary aircraft were utilized in the search. Meighan was not located.

The polygraph was scheduled for August 21st, in the morning. When Jennifer arrived, she disclosed that she'd taken a muscle relaxer the night before. I won't go into the details here, but that was disconcerting at best, and the polygraph was moved to later in the day. She did submit to the polygraph, but it was "inconclusive" and the post-test interview did not really reveal a reason why it was. She agreed to take another polygraph on the following day.

On August 22nd, you were waiting for the polygraph examination time when you were notified by the polygraph examiner that Jennifer had sent him a note, late the night before, indicating that she was not going to be able to make the exam. He returned her note suggesting that it be rescheduled. To this date, it has not been rescheduled.

On August 23rd, at 1000hrs, deputies were dispatched on a call of a deceased woman, located below SE Foster Road, in Dayton. This is the road that approaches Highway 18, from Dayton, to access the westbound lane of travel on Hwy 18. The woman found about 20' below the road surface, behind the guard rail, and down a relatively steep grade, matched the physical description of Meighan. The visible clothing did also. Positive identification was made after the scene was thoroughly processed and the body was pulled from where it came to rest.

An autopsy was performed the following day by the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office. There were significant injuries to the body, including two broken or severed vertebrae. However the most significant injury and immediate cause of death was from an aortic separation. That would have caused an immediate loss of blood pressure and internal bleeding. It was further determined that these injuries were not caused from being struck by a vehicle but were consistent with her leaving a vehicle and striking a fixed object.

Without going into exact detail, there was scene evidence consistent with her having hit the support post, or posts, of the guard rail. At sufficient speed, striking them with

her head and body, would be consistent with the injuries discovered and the findings made by the ME's office. The speed necessary would be significantly more than the 'less than 5mph' reported by Jennifer.

The injuries to the body and the location where she was found do not align with the 'facts' as relayed by Ms. Weathers. First of all, the body was found 9.4 miles from the location of the wedding. Meighan left the vehicle without shoes, yet her feet did not have injuries consistent with having walked over 9 miles without shoes on. Additionally, her injuries were not consistent with having been walking on the road and being struck by a vehicle.

The area where Ms. Weathers indicated that Meighan 'jumped' out of the car, also was over 9 miles from where the body was found. This caused a significant search effort in an area that was not remotely close to where her body was found.

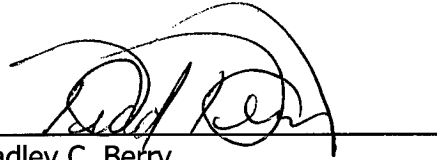
Ms. Weathers described Meighan leaving the car at a very low rate of speed, less than "5 mph." This too is inconsistent with the injuries to the body.

The investigation uncovered several other things. First, both Meighan and her mother had been drinking at the wedding. Multiple witnesses have been identified that described Ms. Weathers as intoxicated and several who have said she should not have been driving. Additionally, it now appears that Meighan got out of the car on two occasions. The first may well have been in an area near where Ms. Weathers identified (and the search was conducted and consistent with the "pin" identified from the cell phone examination). Meighan got out of the front seat of the car on that occasion. She was convinced to return to the car and at that time sat in the back seat by Gia. This explains her personal effects being in the front seat, but not as relayed by Weathers.

It is clear that they drove from the wedding site to the area on SE Foster. Ms. Weathers took a path that was incorrect to go home, either unaware of the turn to get on Hwy 18 toward Portland, or missing that turn. The area on Foster is a curved area with the outside of the curve to the north, the right side of the vehicle. The injuries to Meighan are consistent with her leaving the inside of the car, in that curve, but at a much higher rate of speed than described by Ms. Weathers. I am not comfortable saying whether she jumped from the car, or fell from the car in the curve, perhaps after unlatching the door. Her injuries are consistent with leaving the car, striking the guardrail support beam(s) and roadway, killing her instantly, with her body continuing down the embankment.

The issue before me at this point is singular. Was there a crime committed causing the death of Meighan. There is nothing to indicate that she was forced, or pushed from the car. She was clearly in the back seat, and seated away from the only other adult in the vehicle, the driver. Whether she jumped or fell from the car does not change the criminal analysis. No evidence about the death points to a criminal cause. This too is consistent with the ME findings that the manner of death was "accidental". I concur with that opinion.

This memorandum is not intended to address whether any party committed any other crime. Review of other potential crimes not directly related to the death, will be done separately. For now, all evidence should be retained. Lastly, I want to compliment you and the MCRT for an excellent, exhaustive, investigation. A tragic case that deserved much attention. Thank you for your efforts on this.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bradley C. Berry", written over a horizontal line.

Bradley C. Berry
District Attorney
Yamhill County
September 27, 2018