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## **Justice for Keaton Otis**

*Nearly four years after her brother's homicide - at the hands of police - a sister speaks out.*

(Washington, D.C., 22 April 2014) Alyssa Bryant (22) will for the first time take a national stage. Ms. Bryant was a generally quiet presence as her father Fred began seeking justice for his son, Keaton Otis. Following Mr. Bryant's own death in October, 2013, Ms. Bryant has stepped into a leadership role. "I want people to know my brother's killing was wrong. I want police held accountable for their actions," says Ms. Bryant. To that end, she has traveled to the capital, to share her family's struggle. She'll address 'Raise Your Voice, Break the Silence,' a conference highlighting lethal, race-based injustice.

"May 12, 2010 changed my dad's life," said Ms. Bryant. Once he realized gruesome news reports actually depicted his own son's death, "He was so hurt."

### **In the beginning there was a lot of noise.**

2010 was a bad year. Portland police shot 7 people. Six died, four were persons of color. In January, a sniper had killed unarmed, African-American Aaron Campbell during a 'welfare check.' Demonstrations broke out. City officials had twice in its history tried to fire killer cops: every officer found out of policy for using force had been re-instated. Demands for change grew intense.

Press coverage was amplified when video of Otis' killing was posted on YouTube. Cops at first called Otis a gang member, and then the media realized he'd never known the life. A judge opened Otis' juvenile records. Cops then put it out he was mentally ill; his mother went with that, so it became justified in most minds to racially profile a young father, and kill him.

### **But there was also silence.**

A primary witness, Otis, was dead. Lawyers didn't want the case; officers were wounded, cops said they found a gun. The City's Independent Review Division refused to give Mr. Bryant standing; despite their rules, he couldn't demand a review of Internal Affairs' depictions of what happened. The City wants the Bryants to be quiet.

### **Mr. Bryant broke the silence.**

He read and digested thousands of pages of evidence obtained from the District Attorney.

- Officers first laid eyes on Otis at 6:20pm. By 6:25 he was dead.
- After beating him through a car window, 3 officers each Tased him twice, then 3 other officers fired 32 rounds, shooting Otis 23 times. After he was dead several minutes, officers fired three less-often-lethal rounds at his body.
- Otis had no criminal record. There was no contraband in his car. There were no drugs or alcohol in his blood.
- None of the officers who shot Otis say they saw the gun.
- Neither the forensics team nor police investigators ever linked Otis to a weapon found at the scene.

Mr. Bryant went to the funeral home. The Director provided photos of Otis's hands and Mr. Bryant called a news conference to announce those wounds showed Otis was unarmed & cooperating. He contacted witnesses the DA had discounted. He reached out to Ms. Barnes, who testified Otis pleaded with her, "Don't leave... they're gonna kill me." He went to – and became close friends with – the woman who filmed Otis's final moments. He discovered the DA had asked her to leave the room before he showed an unknown version of events to a Grand Jury.

When investigators refused to, Mr. Bryant had the video enhanced.

- Otis's last words were, "I got my hands up! I got my hands up!"
- The police command to open fire was, "Let's do it!"

### **Mr. Bryant organized.**

He began monthly vigils at the site of the killing.

Friends created a facebook page, 'Justice for Keaton Otis.' Hundreds now 'like' the cause.

He held annual tributes on the anniversary of Otis's death. Academics, clergy & community activists added their voices.

He testified at Portland City Council, demanding victims be allowed to call for review of police self-exoneration.

He addressed Department of Justice Investigators investigating illegal use of force by Portland Police.

He overcame his fears, to address public events (Occupy Portland's commemoration of Dr. King's 'I Have a Dream' speech and Justice for Trayvon Martin).

He allowed himself to be interviewed by the press. His story became part of the film 'Safe & Sound?'.

He spoke in schools. Law School students are now reviewing the evidence in depth, page by page.

Author David Whitfield built a website, Justice for Keaton Otis, calling the homicide a 'public lynching.'

Author Kalei Luyben (*Shooting the Sick*) helped submit a request that the United Nations review Otis's case.

Mr. Bryant addressed FIGHT BACK! in Harlem, on behalf of families & communities struggling against police terror.

### **The noise continued.**

The Department of Justice declared race-based civil rights violations 'beyond the scope' of their investigation.

Portland hired outside consultants to review the killing. The group declared the police investigation sound. The report refers to no other witnesses but police.

- Mr. Otis was wearing a sweatshirt with the hood up on what was described as an uncharacteristically warm day; (almost two years before Trayvon Martin was gunned down);
- Mr. Otis was slouching in the driver's seat;
- A look from Mr. Otis that seemed to say, "Do they know what I know?" and suggested to the officer that Mr. Otis may have just committed a crime;
- Mr. Otis did not seem to fit the car, in that it seemed like one an older woman and not a young man would drive; (officers ran the plates before beginning a 'low-speed' chase; they learned it was registered to Otis's mother);
- Mr. Otis looked like he could be a gangster.

The consultants concluded that the racial profiling which drew officers' attention to Otis was less important than officers' ability to subsequently articulate "race-neutral reasons for doing so." They reported people of color have perception problems. "Some portion of the community believed that this incident began as a racially-motivated traffic stop. The Police Bureau still has work to do ... when communicating with the public on these sensitive issues."

Portland's current Mayor, campaigning for office, referred to Otis as a gang member. Mr. Bryant was quick to correct him. Candidate Hales acknowledged Otis had never had *any* relationship with gangs. Hales is now Portland's Police Commissioner. The City is reluctant to admit wrongdoing as it negotiates a settlement with the DoJ for unconstitutional use of police force.

**Mr. Bryant fell silent** at the end of October last year.

He died of a stroke, aged 53. He had overworked himself.

The press reports over 500 people showed up at his memorial service, to hear Fred Bryant called a "drum major for justice."

Portland Community Media paid tribute to Mr. Bryant's work in a one-hour program.

Ms. Bryant made a decision to carry the work forward. "I'm not gonna stop until I get justice for my brother, because that's what my dad wants."

**The Bryant's call for justice remains clear**, community voices still speak.

The website Daily Kos posted an account of Otis's murder in March; it is still being re-posted around the Internet.

The community continues organizing. Next month Ms. Bryant will host Otis's 4<sup>th</sup> memorial service.

Community organizers, who became close friends of the Bryants, plan to convene police accountability activists throughout the Pacific Northwest, to build strategies so future victims will have ready support, and to demand a means of getting justice for police killings. (Contact Consult Hardesty.)

Following one of Mr. Bryant's last speeches, local TV news stopped reporting Otis shot anybody ... only declaring "an officer had been shot" in the stop.

A pending agreement between the City of Portland and the DoJ will require establishment of a Community Oversight & Advisory Board ... to guide police reform. Ms. Bryant will continue demanding justice for Keaton Otis.