

Slaying Rocks Close-Knit Town; Three Youths Held

By TAMARA JONES,
Associated Press

RAGLAND, Ala.—They panicked at a highway rest stop just across the Florida line.

Two 17-year-olds, surrounded by police, sat atop a concrete picnic table holding cocked guns to their temples while their 14-year-old friend watched handcuffed from a squad car.

A day before, Cayce Moore, Scott Davis and Chris White were considered good, all-American boys, only children from fine families. Clean-cut, polite, intelligent.

Now they were wanted for murder.

"I understand they repeatedly said they had to kill themselves because they killed a woman in Ragland for no reason and could never go home again," Ragland Police Chief Larry Bice said then.

The killing of Missy Macon on May 26 might have been just another headline, just another violent crime, just another sad statistic, had it happened somewhere else.

Families Known

But it happened in Ragland, and the horror visited on this small, close-knit community in the Appalachian foothills of Alabama was twofold. Everybody knew and liked Missy Macon. And everybody knew and liked the three boys accused of killing her.

Missy Macon's parents used to drive Moore to kindergarten with their younger daughter, Janie. Missy's father, once the mayor of Ragland, used to deliver mail and Missy was substitute carrier for the White and Davis families.

Residents say roughly two-thirds of Ragland's 2,000 people are related.

Ragland nestles in wooded hills about an hour's drive northeast of Birmingham, forming an abrupt end to the two-lane Pop Dickinson Highway. It's a rural, isolated town of pleasant houses and unfenced

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Missy Macon

yards with occasional tire swings dangling from old shade trees. Churches hold quilting bees and Independence Day barbecues. Ragland has a municipal pool, a ballpark, a closet-sized library, places to ride, hunt and fish, two stoplights and three convenience stores.

Missy Macon lived just a few blocks from Cubberd's convenience store. When an opening for night cashier came up this spring, she took it to pay off some bills so she and her husband, Tommy, could afford a second child.

She had turned down a similar job outside town because she thought the late shift might be too dangerous in an unfamiliar place.

But this was Ragland, where Missy had grown up, where her father and grandfather had been mayor, where the jail is left open in winter so the reformed town drunk won't have to sleep in his unheated shack.

People from Ragland were always coming into Cubberd's, Missy assured her family, and that made her feel safe working alone. Ragland folks would watch out for her.

Sunday, May 26, was her ninth day on the job. Tommy Macon took

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their 7-year-old son, Wesley, up to the store to say good night around 9 p.m. It was the last time the little boy saw his 26-year-old mother alive.

Her body was found behind a stack of beer cases around 9:30 p.m. She had been shot once in the back of the head with a .25-caliber handgun by someone who didn't even bother to clean out the cash register. Only fives and tens were taken, about \$700 in all. Larger bills and checks were left behind.

As word of the crime flashed through Ragland, the parents of Cayce Moore, Scott Davis and Chris White began to worry.

The boys had gone out a few hours earlier. Final exams were coming up at Ragland's only school, and they had promised to be in by 10 p.m.

When they weren't home by 10:30, their frantic parents reported them missing, fearing that the hoodlum or maniac who had killed Missy Macon might also have kidnapped or harmed their sons.

By morning, their sons were suspects.

Three weeks after the funeral, Aubrey Watson sat on his porch swing in the soft lavender hush of twilight, watching fireflies flicker in the shadows of a pecan tree he planted when his daughter Missy was small.

"We know those families," said Watson. "We feel those boys must have known Missy."

Authorities and townspeople insist no evidence suggests any personal motive behind the killing.

"She was full of life. She loved life," summed up Tommy, a 27-year-old meat cutter.

"I married Missy when she was 17," he said. "I met her in December, asked her to marry me in February and the wedding was that June." That was nine years ago.

Missy was pretty, with doe eyes and a merry smile to match her bubbly personality. She weighed maybe 100 pounds, Tommy said. Anyone wanting to rob her could have easily overpowered her—there was no need to kill her.

The authorities told her family she died instantly. There was no sign of a struggle. Missy had been cleaning a small oven used to make nachos when she was shot, and she fell with its lid still in her hand, suggesting she hadn't been startled.

It was the first murder in 25 years in the town Missy so loved.

"This is where she said she planned to grow old with Tommy," said her mother, Jane Watson.

Witnesses told police the boys were playing video games at Cubberd's sometime around 9:15 p.m. Closing time was 11, and Missy had started cleaning up when one of the boys allegedly aimed the gun at the back of her head and pulled the trigger.

Earlier that night, the boys had stopped by another Ragland convenience store about a mile away where Cayce Moore's mother, Jean, was working the late shift.

Moore and his 51-year-old mother had lived alone in their modest white house with a dirt driveway opening onto the highway since his father died of cancer when Cayce was 22 months old.

Moore had a home computer and, on his 16th birthday, his mother gave him a Chevy Celebrity Eurosport car. Relatives say she always encouraged him, telling him he was special.

"He had anything he wanted,"

said Joan Ford, the assistant principal at the school and a girlhood friend of Mrs. Moore. "He was his mother's life."

Moore's mother was hospitalized for shock after hearing that Cayce was being sought.

"She withdrew to the point that she was curled up into a fetal position for 5½ hours," said someone who visited her.

Wanted to Be Surgeon Before

his arrest, Moore had talked about skipping his senior year and starting college early. He wanted to be a surgeon.

He was described as a quiet, intellectual boy, a polite and meticulously dressed loner who didn't flirt or ask girls out. He liked to sit in a front corner of the classroom with empty desks around him.

"We tested Cayce back in grade school and his IQ was 142 or 143," Mrs. Ford said. "He finished high school algebra in the sixth grade."

He never got into trouble. The Ragland school doesn't shy from corporal punishment, and Moore is the only boy his classmates can recall who avoided the principal's paddle from kindergarten through 11th grade.

Classmates say the bond among Moore, Scott Davis and 14-year-old Chris White was "Dungeons and Dragons," a fantasy game other playmates urged them to burn after an evangelist told them the devil inspired the violent, imaginary plots involving medieval monsters. Moore called them religious fanatics and declared he was an atheist.

"Cayce lived 'Dungeons and Dragons,'" said one classmate who,

like others closely associated with the families involved, spoke on condition he not be identified.

Moore was the dungeon master, a sort of referee, and was a skillful enough player to invent his own "campaigns" or adventures for the other players to act out. He and Davis had been playing since they were 12.

Davis was well-liked by classmates, teachers and townspeople. They described him as a bright, friendly, slightly hyper boy who had never made trouble. Scott was considering a career in law enforcement, maybe the FBI.

While his best friend, Moore, expressed disdain for school activities like dances, Davis evidently yearned to be more popular. He was going to play varsity football this fall.

The class prom was the night before Macon's death, and other boys said Davis was upset because he hadn't been able to get a date. But girls in his class seemed surprised by this; Davis had asked several to go with him but in a jesting manner.

"That's just Scott's way," explained a boy who grew up with him. "He hides behind jokes when he wants something really, really bad."

His attorney, Lou Wilkinson, the only one of the boys' lawyers willing to discuss his client, described Davis as a "bright, normal, pleasant type" now consumed with guilt. When he was found at the rest stop with Moore, Davis had two guns—one to his temple, the second in his other hand.

"He's depressed, remorseful and guilt-ridden," Wilkinson said by

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Scotty Davis

telephone from Birmingham.

According to other sources close to the investigation, Davis was waiting in the car when Missy Macon was killed. "I don't think Scott necessarily knew what was happening," his attorney said.

Asked why Davis, in that case, didn't run for help instead of driving with Moore and White to Georgia and Florida, Wilkinson said it "was such a quick thing. . . . He was more of a mind to kill himself than go to authorities. . . . (that) what he had done was so horrible he could not go back, had nothing to go back to."

It was, in fact, Chris White who summoned authorities on the Florida-Georgia line after the boys had apparently spent the night in a Lake City, Fla., motel and crossed back over the state line to call their homes from Lake Park, Ga.

White lived on the same un-

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Cayce Moore

marked country road as Davis—a dairy farm separates the two homes—and had gotten lifts to school from the older boy ever since Davis turned 16 and got his black Trans Am.

White, unlike Moore and Davis, was considered an average student. A good-looking boy, he was popular with girls and active in sports.

The boys became suspects in the slaying when a legally owned .25-caliber handgun was reportedly discovered missing from the White household.

When they were apprehended, six guns, including a .25-caliber, were seized along with a length of nylon rope, a roll of two-inch tape and an undisclosed amount of cash, according to Florida authorities.

"They talked of the shooting but they did not know she was dead until after they were in custody," said a source close to the investiga-

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Chris White

tion. "They thought they had critically wounded her, but that she might make it."

The last picture the Macon family has of Missy is one Wes took a few days before she was killed. It shows her in the kitchen laughing as her small son tried to hold the camera straight.

Wes knows his mother isn't coming back but he doesn't talk about it, as if his loss is too great for a first-grade vocabulary.

"This boy has been my greatest source of comfort," Tommy said. "I wish I had half the strength he does."

When Wes recently found his father crying at the kitchen table over a stack of family pictures, he wrapped his arms around him. "It's all right, Daddy," he assured him. "It'll be OK."