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Holding on to Carlton

Family members of a slain Norfolk man struggle to move on with their lives

By Patrick Wilson

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NORFOLK

Nanette Dean often goes into her son's bedroom and lies on the side of the bed where he did.

After his death, she straightened the room, folded his shirts and put his dirty clothes in a hamper. But Carlton Dean Jr.'s room mostly remains as it was before he was found fatally shot on Sept. 22 near the family's Ballentine Place home. On his desk sit his college textbooks and a home repair manual his father told him to read.

Little else has gone back to normal following the unexplained killing. Now, when asked about his day, Carlton Dean Sr. replies with one word: agonizing.

Carlton graduated last year from Maury High School. He was a champion swimmer and went to the state tournament on a relay team. He was attending Tidewater Community College and learning how to run his father's pest-control business. They worked together.

At 19, he was a role model for his 16-year-old brother Deion, who grew up taking swim lessons with Carlton. Most important, he made people happy and made them laugh.

Nanette Dean has so many sympathy cards, she hasn't gone through all of them. One, from a Maury classmate, is a piece of orange paper folded in half with a note. A hand-drawn medal says "1st Place, Carlton Dean/First in style, swimming and personality."

Detectives still are investigating Carlton's death. He was at a party Sept. 21 at a house near 25th Street and Colonial Avenue. He got a ride there with a friend. What happened after he left in the early morning hours remains a mystery.

A 911 caller reported hearing gunfire about 5:45 a.m. in the 2700 block of Vincent Ave., one block from the family's home. Police found Carlton's body near the road.

Was someone out to get him? Was it a random robbery? Was he doing something wrong?

Norfolk Police Department spokesman Chris Amos on Friday said detectives have some good leads.

However, the answers haven't come yet.

"It would give us some peace of mind to know what happened to our son," Nanette Dean said. "It's hard for us to move forward not knowing."

Dean teaches robotics and engineering at Blair Middle School, which Carlton attended. She took about four weeks off after his death and appreciates the support from the school and swim communities.

She has not yet been able to participate in after-school groups. She always looks forward to the swim season at Maury, but this year is not the same. Dinner at home is not the same. Relaxing in the house is not the same.

With Carlton gone, nothing is the same.

Deion, a junior at Maury with plans to go to college, gets up around 4:45 a.m. five days a week for swim practice at the Mount Trashmore Family YMCA and practices again after school. Carlton's death is making him train even harder, he said.

"Sometimes I picture him, like, practicing with me," Deion said.

Carlton Dean Sr., disabled from leg and back surgeries, started Absolute Pest Prevention in 1991. His son was going to make the company more of a regional business; he had been nominated for a position on the board of directors of the Tidewater Pest Control Association.

The association is finalizing a plan to offer a reward, said Charlie Church, a past president and close friend of the Deans.

“It’s devastating to the family. It’s devastating. I don’t know how to put it any other way,” he said.

Dean Sr. said he wants his company to continue but doesn’t plan to be involved.

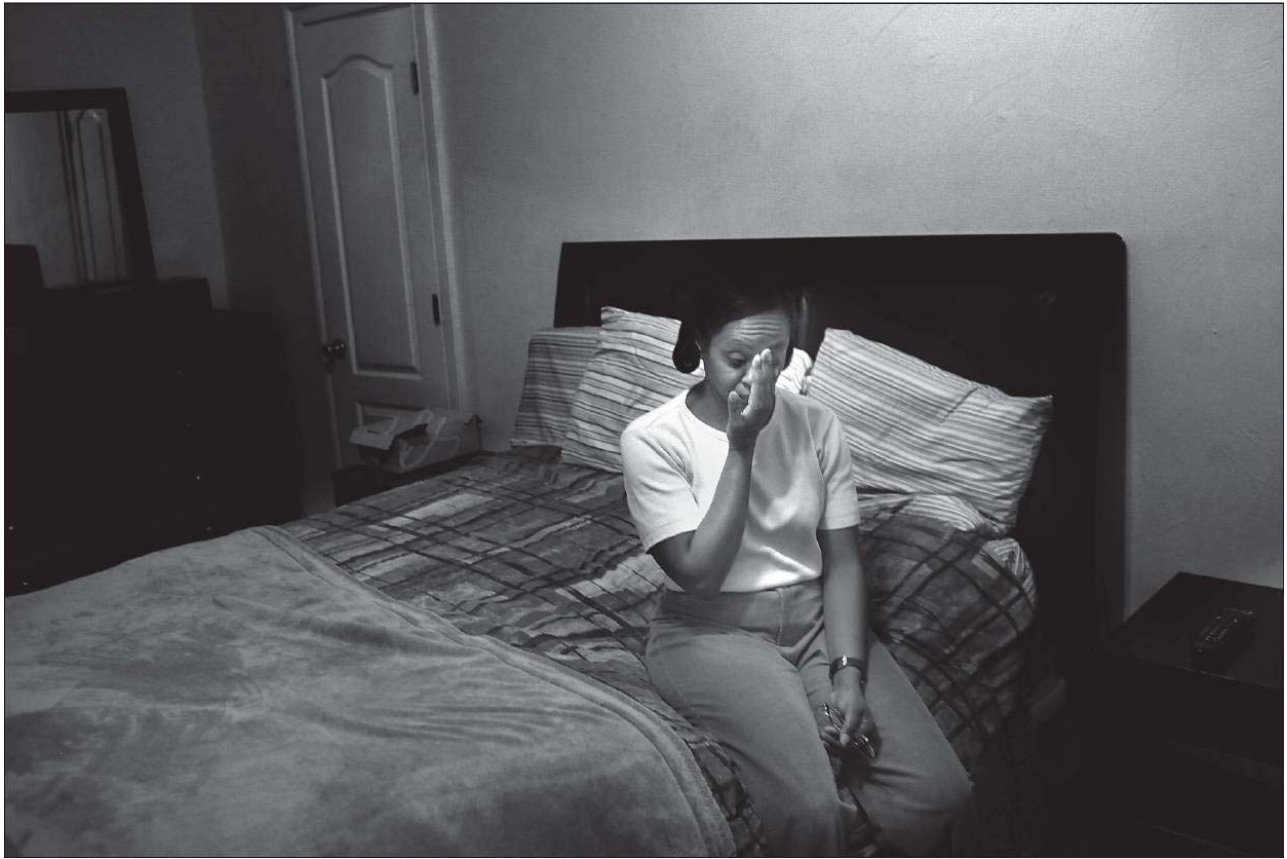
“I was holding onto that stuff for Carlton.”

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Deion Dean, Carlton Dean Sr. and Nanette Dean pose Thursday in their home with a picture of Carlton Dean Jr., a Maury grad who was shot to death Sept. 22.



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Nanette Dean teaches robotics and engineering at Blair Middle School. She took about four weeks off after her son's death, but she hasn't been able to participate in after-school groups yet. Often, she goes into his bedroom and lies on the side of the bed where he did. "I wake up every morning almost to the exact minute that he died," she said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DEAN FAMILY

Carlton Dean Jr., above, reached the state swimming tournament as part of a Maury relay team. His brother, Deion, is also a swimmer. "Sometimes I picture him, like, practicing with me," Deion said.

do you have information?

If you have information that could help police solve the killing of Carlton Dean Jr., you could earn a reward of up to \$1,000 by calling Crime Line at 1-888-LOCK-UUP. Callers remain anonymous.