

## Wounded officer's credit card number stolen during surgery

BALTIMORE (AP) — As doctors fought to save a wounded police officer, a nursing assistant scribbled down his Social Security and credit card numbers and later charged more than \$15,000 in electronic goods and jewelry in his name, federal agents say.

Officer James Beck was shot three times by a driver he had stopped on Halloween night 1993 and brought to the University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center.

"While he lay severely injured and bleeding in the emergency room, his personal identifier numbers were copied," said Steve Mason of the U.S. Secret Service.

John Wayne Cunningham, 43, who no longer works at the hospital, was arrested Wednesday on charges of felony theft and filing false applications.

Investigators say Cunningham used Beck's credit card number to order stereos, televisions, CD players and jewelry from catalogs. They believe Cunningham sold the equipment as part of a fencing operation.

Beck, 42, who recovered from his wounds and has since retired from the force, is not granting interviews. "He has really tried to forget everything," Police Lt. Michael Howe said.

Hospital officials declined to comment.

## Cancer stricken mom gives life for baby

DENVER (AP) — Three months after learning she was pregnant, Melissa Smart found out she had breast cancer, leaving her with a life-or-death choice.

She chose both.

Smart, 32, passed up a chance to live longer, so she could give birth to her baby. Smart died 18 days after Michelle Elizabeth was born.

"She never acted frightened; she never gave up. She was the bravest person I ever saw," said John Eger, Smart's boyfriend and the baby's father.

When she was diagnosed with cancer that had spread to the lymphatic system, doctors told Smart there was a 10 percent chance she would live five years. Doctors told her in June that in order to undergo intense radiation treatment, she would have to abort her pregnancy.

Eger said the choice was clear.

"That baby meant everything in the world to her," he said.

And when Michelle was born on Aug. 31, Smart was able to savor a short time with her daughter.

"Once they had cleaned the baby off and gave her to Melissa, she just started loving it and kissing it," Eger said.

But on Sept. 16, the night before Smart was to visit her daughter in the hospital, she told Eger, "Pray for me."

Smart died the next day.

"I've thought a lot about what I'll tell Elizabeth about her mother," Eger said. "One thing for sure I'll tell her is, 'Your mother really loved you.'"

## 300-year-old tree in intersection may stay — for now, anyway

ALBANY, Ga. (AP) — A 300-year-old oak tree threatened by a road-widening project will remain standing in the middle

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

of a busy intersection here after the Georgia Supreme Court granted it a temporary reprieve Thursday.

The high court ordered a delay in cutting down the tree to give justices time to rule on an appeal by tree supporters, whose efforts to save the tree were rejected by a lower court judge.

"I'm pleasantly surprised," said attorney W.T. Gamble III, who is representing tree supporters.

"We believe the folks who live in southwest Georgia who have red clay running through their blood are the people who ought to decide," he said. "And they've overwhelmingly said, 'We want the tree.'"

Known as the "Friendship Oak," the tree is recognized as a state landmark. It stood in the center of an Army camp where veterans of the Spanish-American war were mustered out during the winter of 1898-99.

The state Department of Transportation wants to cut it down and put up a traffic light.

Tree supporters want the DOT to adopt an alternate plan that calls for construction of a roundabout to ease traffic congestion at the intersection.

DOT officials have ruled out the roundabout because it would be unsafe.

"They have not once looked at this alternate plan," said David Edwards, who has led the three-year battle to save the tree. "We have a plan that will save \$100,000 on the project. For it to be ignored is unacceptable."

DOT spokesman Jerry Stargel had no comment Thursday.

Superior Court Judge Loring Gray granted a temporary restraining order two weeks ago, but lifted it last week after DOT lawyers argued that tree advocates didn't own the tree and had no standing to ask him to save it.

Supporters asked him to reconsider, but Gray decided Tuesday that he had no legal authority to block the DOT from cutting the tree.

## Deadbeat diner leaves teeth as security for his unpaid bill

OPEINDE, Netherlands (AP) — A deadbeat diner tried to put the bite on a restaurant, so the proprietor took the bite out of him — forcing him to leave his dentures until he returned to pay his bill.

Jetske van der Heide-Hento, who runs a cafe in this northern town of 1,700, said a man bought a meal Sunday and a round of drinks for the locals, then confessed he had no money.

Heide-Hento noticed that the deadbeat had a loose top plate.

"So we told him 'If you don't want to pay, then give us your teeth as a deposit. And he did,'" van der Heide-Hento said Thursday. She said the man returned Thursday to pay his \$36 bill and collect his chop-pers.

"Restaurant pirates" who dine out and then say they can't pay the tab are news in the Netherlands, where eating out is considered a luxury.

The newspaper *De Telegraaf* gave the tale a half-page spread Thursday and reported that the man, who was not identified, had a long history of freeloading.

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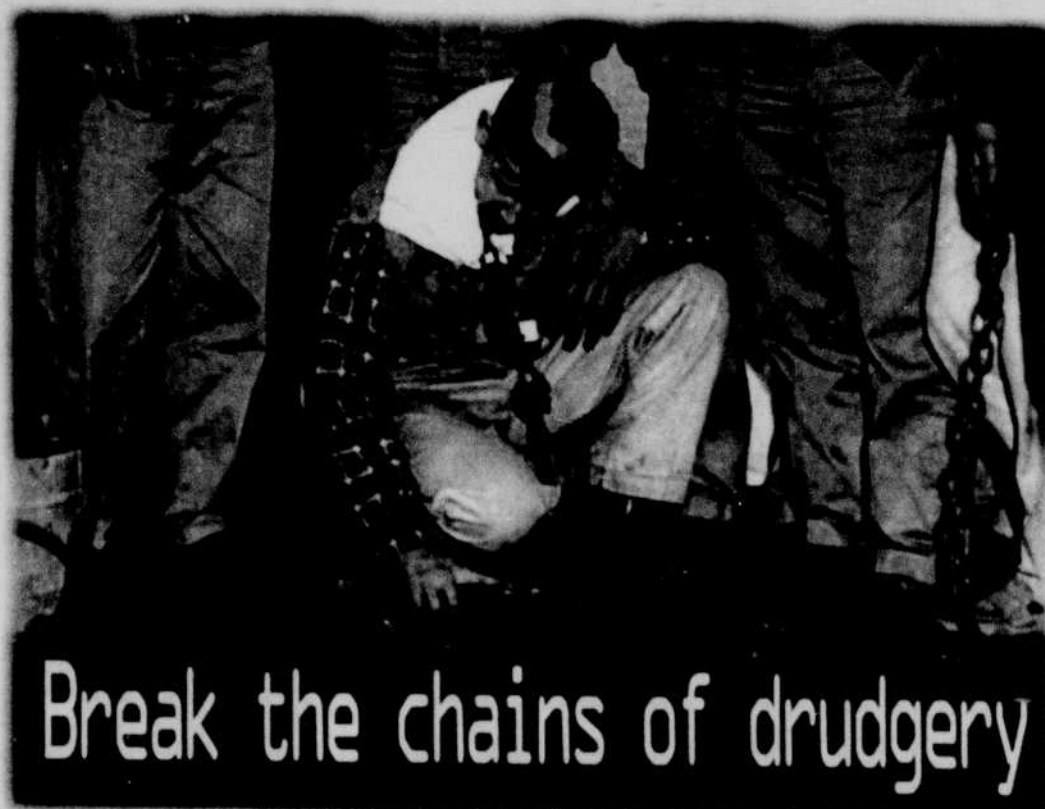
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