

WHO,

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truthful or simply don't want to come forward with that information," said Det. Tim Lathrop, the lead detective in Christina's murder.

What can be said is her death — like any loss — is still felt vividly by her family that includes her mother and Christina's four children, two boys and two girls. The youngest recently turned 16.

Jasmine, the second youngest, now 23, was wracked with grief as she spoke of the day she found out what had happened.

"I was on my knees and I couldn't get up. My dad had to carry me to the couch. I may not have known her well, but she was my mom," Jasmine said. "Every time we talk about it I wish she hadn't taken her path. She had her kids to take care of and we were taken away because of her choices."

IMPERFECT BEGINNINGS

Sharon gave birth to Christina on Aug. 2, 1967. At the time, Sharon herself was only 16.

"If she would have waited another day, she would have been born on my birthday, but she wouldn't wait," said Sharon. "She was a beautiful baby, but I was not the best mother."

Sharon, now 68, provided as best she could, but it was her mother who did the majority of the parenting. Looking back on it now, Sharon has many regrets, but the most painful ones are the times she made choices that took her away from her daughter.

"I would go out every single weekend and dance, Thursday through Sunday. I'm sure not perfect, I just felt like I never had time. She took her own path because I wasn't there," Sharon said.

Long before Christina was a teen, Sharon struggled with the demands of parenting. She said she never laid a hand on her daughter, but one night got particularly bad.

"I got very afraid, one night,

that I was going to hurt her. I called everyone in my family to ask if they could come and take her for a few hours. Then I made the mistake of calling Children's Services," Sharon said.

Christina was taken into custody by the state and then turned over to her grandparents, but she was eventually placed at the Hillcrest Youth Correctional Facility in Salem. Sharon said drug problems that would haunt her for the rest of her life began when Christina was a teen.

"She's was a good girl, she had a big heart and would give you the coat off her back, but she got on the wrong path," said Sharon.

Christina left Hillcrest with a diploma and managed to hold onto a series of jobs, mostly of the construction and repair type, and eventually reunited with Sharon. That led to one of the happier moments Sharon was party to, the moment she met her biological father.

"He lived in Hubbard at the time and I walked her up to the door and introduced them to each other. I said, 'Robert this is your daughter, Chrissy, this is your dad.' She was shaking all over, but her dad and his wife opened their arms to her," Sharon said.

Christina fought hard against her demons of addiction, specifically heroin and cocaine, and sought faith as a support. In her short life, she was baptized into three different churches. Still, she struggled as a parent, much like Sharon did.

"Chrissy was a good mom, she never laid a hand on them even though there was yelling and screaming," Sharon said.

Sharon suspects it was one of Christina's friends who made the call that put the family into another upheaval. All four kids were taken away from Christina when Jasmine was only 2 years old. The youngest went to live with her father, while the older three went to live with other families. Sharon managed to stay in touch with all of them and Jasmine now serves as Sharon's care provider.

Through it all, and for the

next decade, Sharon feared for her daughter's life, not just because of the potential for overdose, but because of the company she was keeping. When Sharon visited Christina's apartment, she frequently kicked out the associates she knew to be bad influences. Eventually, Christina began ushering them out before Sharon arrived.

"When I would try to warn her, Chrissy said, 'Oh no, that's not going to happen to me, they wouldn't do that to me.' I said, 'Chrissy, they will do this to you.' That's what happened," Sharon said.

THE SEARCH

Sharon had been looking for Christina for four days before finding her on Feb. 14. Sharon was trying to coordinate a Valentine-themed crafting day with Christina and her youngest daughter.

"We were going to pick Chrissy up and take her shopping so they could make some gifts together," Sharon said.

For four consecutive days, Sharon visited Christina's apartment knocking on the door and screaming to get her daughter's attention. By that point, Christina was on living on disability, but making strides to get clean.

"She was even trying to quit smoking," Sharon said. "I think the people who killed her were upset that she was getting clean and they weren't."

The thing that worried Sharon the most was a stick that normally prevented the window from being opened was resting on the window sill rather than in the track of the window itself.

On Valentine's day she decided to go a step further. She

"I know she was holding me, keeping me safe."

— Jasmine, Christina Speten's daughter

found a friend of Christina's at her home and encouraged her to go back to the apartment with her. The friend climbed in the unblocked window and met Sharon at the front door. The friend commented on the cold air of the apartment and a lingering odor.

"I went to the couch and found her under a blanket," Sharon said.

Blake Wheeler, who lived at the neighboring apartment at the time, told the *Keizertimes* he last saw Christina about four days prior to when her body was found. He said she came to their apartment after he overheard her side of an argument with a man, claiming she was being "manipulated." She asked to use a cell phone, and called her own after it apparently had been stolen, Wheeler said. Wheeler described Christina as "very respectful. She was religious, and she felt comfortable around us." He said he heard music playing in her apartment for several days straight before her body was found.

Another neighbor Wanda Derocher, said she and Christina talked occasionally. It had been about a week since they had last seen each other.

"She was real friendly," Der-

ocher said. "It just shocked me. I couldn't believe it — no, no, not her. I'm going to miss her."

Lathrop declined to comment on a murder weapon, details of the crime scene or speculate on a motive, but Sharon suspects it had something to do with Christina's phone.

"The phone caused a lot of trouble. Everybody went to her to use it to set up deals. It had all the phone numbers in it," Sharon said. "I begged her and pleaded with her to get rid of it. I told her I would buy her a new one."

PATIENCE

It's been a long seven-year wait for Sharon and Jasmine. After an initial couple of months investigating Christina's death, the police have only sporadically turned up new leads.

Lathrop said the most recent ones are now two or three years old, but sufficient evidence to charge anyone with Christina's murder is still elusive.

"The wait has been very, very frustrating," said Sharon. "But the cops have to do what they have to do, nothing is going to happen overnight."

Even though their relationship was an imperfect one, Christina remains a real presence in Jasmine's life. A few

years ago, Jasmine fell sick during a trek with her church but still managed to help lug a wagon of supplies up a long, arduous path. When she got to the top, she swears she heard her mom whisper, "Good job, Baby Girl."

"She always called me Baby Girl," Jasmine said. "Another time I was in a roll over accident and I know she was holding me, keeping me safe. I felt her."

Jasmine tries to summon Christina's spirit into artwork and drawings she creates while pondering the path their lives have taken.

"She had gone through so much trouble. When I started drawing, a lot of the themes were about letting the past go, staying in the present and moving to the future when you are ready. You have to move on," Jasmine said.

Sharon remains steadfast in her belief that someone will be held accountable for her daughter's murder.

"I want the people who did this to know they had a good friend with a big heart and they shouldn't have taken advantage like they did," Sharon said. "I know that Chrissy isn't going to be released or have peace until this is taken care of. She made mistakes, but she wasn't a bad person."

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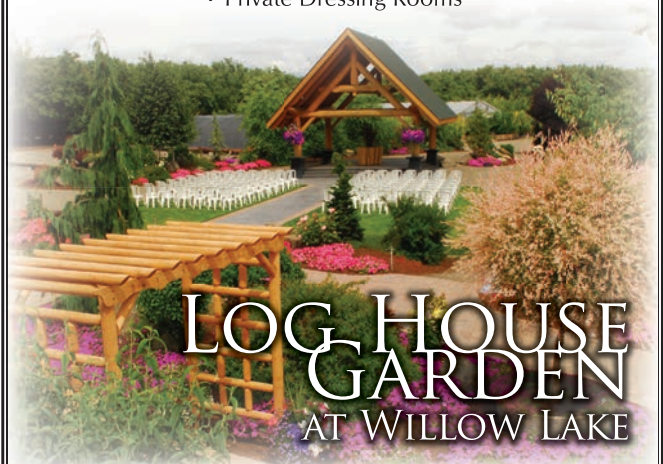
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