

The Ocilla Star obtains copy of Ryan Duke’s confession to killing Grinstead

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Just before press time on Tuesday, Dec. 4, *The Ocilla Star* obtained Georgia Bureau of Investigation documents that included the confession that Tara Grinstead murder suspect Ryan Duke provided to law enforcement last year just before and immediately after he was arrested and charged with causing her death. This comes just days after Bo Dukes, the man accused of helping Duke burn Grinstead’s body to conceal her death, was arrested on a parole violation for failing to meet the requirements set forth after he was released from prison in connection with his involvement in stealing from the United States government while serving as a member of of the U.S. Army.

The documents reveal that GBI agents went to Duke’s residence in the Pleasure Lake community at 3:35 p.m. on February 21, 2017, “in an attempt to locate and interview Duke” as part of the investigation into Grinstead’s disappearance.

The documents state that Duke himself answered the door, and agents asked him to come to the Ocilla Police Department for an interview.

Agents did not disclose the interview was related to the Grinstead investigation; instead they said it was in regards to “an older case the GBI was investigating.” It’s noted that Grinstead’s name was never mentioned.

The report says Duke was “extremely nervous acting as his hands, feet, and lip began



Tara Grinstead

shaking and quivering” and Duke “seemed to be apprehensive about being interviewed.”

The report says Duke’s mother “walked over,” and agreed to take her son to the Ocilla Police Department at 1 p.m. the next day.

Duke arrived at the local police department just before 1 p.m. on February 23, 2017, and the interview took place.

The report says Duke “did not appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs,” though he did admit to taking “a pain pill” that morning.

When agents asked Duke if he knew why the GBI “would want to talk to him,” he “essentially said he knew it was about the Grinstead case.”

He is then alleged to have said, according to the documents, “I was involved with it man.”

He went on to admit he was “a drug addict” when Grinstead disappeared and he “used to break into people’s houses for money to support his addiction.”

The report says Duke said he “was drunk and high” on the night Grinstead disappeared and he “possibly didn’t remember everything.”

He told agents he broke into Grinstead’s home and was “attempting to steal her purse” when she approached him from behind and “may have said something.”

Duke said he turned and “struck her with his fist”, though he said he didn’t mean to, he was “just reacting and scared.”

He said he then ran from her house.

He went on to tell the agents he “was tired of living with himself and what he had done to Grinstead.”

He also said it was “easy” to pop the lock on the door at Grinstead’s home.

Less than an hour later, the report says Duke told agents, “I know I’m going to prison. I waive my right to a lawyer, I’m willing to cooperate fully.”

The interview then continued. Duke told agents Grin-

stead “died when he hit her and left after the initial incident with Grinstead.” He did confirm Bo Dukes “assisted him in cremating Grinstead’s body.”

He told agents he used a credit card to “circumvent” the door lock. He said he “did not remember” cleaning up any blood.

He told the agents he got to Grinstead’s by “stealing Bo Dukes’ white Ford pickup truck, which Bo Dukes did not know until several days later. Duke said he obtained Bo Dukes’ keys from his pants pocket while he was sleeping.”

Duke told agents it was a “completely random act,” and he “didn’t know it was Grinstead’s residence until after the incident.” He also said he “never had any contact” with Grinstead prior to the incident.

Duke said he “went back home and obtained latex gloves and a quilt blanket” then went back towards Grinstead’s residence.

He said he stopped at G&G Convenience Store before going back to Grinstead’s home and “called 441 from a pay phone to connect to her residence.”

The 411 call was “discovered by agents in 2005 and never disclosed to anyone else in law enforcement or the media.”

He said he made the call “hoping she was alive” but when she didn’t answer, he drove back to her house.

He said she was still lying on the floor where he checked her pulse, but she did not have one.

He also said he never went into her vehicle.

He told agents he “wrapped her body into the quilt blanket, carried her with his arms out in front, and placed her into the back of Bo Dukes’ truck.”

He “re-iterated no one helped him at this point,” the documents say.

Agents noted that Duke “seemed to have a very emotional response” when discussing carrying Grinstead’s body out of the home.

He told them while crying, “She’s so small.”

He said he threw her purse and her car keys into a dumpster in Fitzgerald “Behind his aunt’s cleaners,” then drove to “a field”, presumably the now famous pecan orchard, and “dumped” Grinstead’s body.

He said he then “went home and told Bo Dukes what he had done,” but Bo Dukes “didn’t initially believe him.”

The documents say Bo Dukes told agents in the days prior to Duke’s confession that Grinstead was unclothed, but Duke told agents he did not remove her clothing.

The report says “a couple of days later,” Duke again told Bo Dukes that he killed Grinstead; Bo Dukes then drove Ryan Duke to the “orchard/field” and the two came upon Grinstead’s body “in the same location where Duke had left it.”

Duke said at that point, Grinstead’s body had been there “several days.”

He told the agents he asked Bo Dukes “for help disposing of the body” and the two “loaded Grinstead’s body into the back of the truck and drove deeper into the woods.”

Duke told agents he and Bo Dukes “obtained several truckloads of wood from a shed on the property and cremated Grinstead’s body over several days.”

Duke said he “vaguely remembered the location where the body was burned.”

He also said he “had never hurt anyone before or after Grinstead.”

He said he “had been carrying around the guilt of what he had done for a long time and it had been bothering him. He told agents he had “discussed the incident through Facebook Messenger with Bo Dukes.”

The report said the day before the interview occurred, the GBI obtained those messages from Bo Dukes.

He told agents he had “multiple suicide attempts” which “hindered his memory, and that he “just wanted to get high” when he broke into

Grinstead’s home.

The agents’ report says Duke “never acknowledged choking or strangling” Grinstead, though Bo Dukes told agents that is what occurred.

Duke only said “it is possible it could have happened.”

The documents say Duke told agents, “I know I destroyed her family. I used drugs and alcohol to cope with what I did. I’ve been tired about this a long time. I was a coward or I would have told this a long time ago and I cannot take it back and I am ashamed of my behavior and hiding a lie.”

He also told agents he was “a dumb kid who was scared,” and added, “I’m sorry for the pain I’ve caused. I took her life, robbed her of a chance to get married and have children, growing old, and she didn’t deserve that and there is nothing I can do to change it.”

He told the agents he was in the military just before the incident and broke up with his girlfriend several months before the incident occurred.

He said he believed the “breakup was another incident in his life that sent him into a spiral of drugs and alcohol.”

Duke was then formally arrested and the report said he told agents, “I could have lied, but my family and their children would have to live with this.”

He told agents the incident took him “approximately six hours” from start to finish.

He also said the incident “was not sexual” in nature.

The documents were provided to The Star just days after Bo Dukes was arrested last Wednesday, November 28, and charged with a parole violation.

A judge in Middle Georgia ordered Bo Dukes back to prison for violating his parole.

Dukes was ordered to pay restitution and ordered to complete 40 hours of community service after defrauding the federal government of over \$100,000 while serving in the U.S. Army.

Dukes has not completed the community service and was behind on his restitution payments.

His attorney told the judge Dukes was “scared for his life,” which is why he hadn’t completed the community service.

Ryan Duke is set to go to trial on April 1, 2019.

A motion for a change of venue has been filed and will be further discussed on Friday, December 14, 2018, with a hearing likely to follow.

Individuals convicted of trafficking marijuana

Lynnette Murillo, age 19, and Brian Sandoval, age 20, were tried and convicted of trafficking marijuana in the Atkinson County Courthouse last week. The trial ended in a verdict of guilty against the pair. A third co-defendant, Kim Hughes, pled guilty and testified against the other two at trial. Sentencing was put off until a later

date, however, the pair are being kept in custody until a sentencing hearing can be held. The case stems from a traffic stop conducted in December of 2017.

“These two young people did not want to take responsibility for their own actions and now potentially face lengthy prison sentences for their

trafficking in illegal substances. I am proud of the work of my office and must commend Assistant District Attorney Jennifer Rue Smith for all her hard work. I must also thank the Wilcoochee Police Department for their work in investigating this case.” stated District Attorney Dick Perryman.

Internationally known Bradford sings jazz at VSU

By Carol A. Moore

Under the direction of VSU Jazz Ensemble David Springfield, this group is the premier performing jazz company at Valdosta State University (VSU). The group performs at least four concerts per year on campus with a repertoire ranging from Big Band Era standards to contemporary styles and original jazz compositions. Guest artists such as saxophonists Don Braden and Chris Vadala; trumpeter Marvin Stamm; trombonists John Fedchock and David Gibson; drummers Dennis Mackrel and Mike Clark; guitarist Bob Sneider; bassists John Clayton and Chuck Israels; and composer Fred Sturm. Just over a week ago, a number of Lanier Countians were thrilled to hear internationally known Carmen Bradford sing with our local jazz group!

Bradford grew up with “...music in her home and in her heart!” She follows in the footsteps of her great family legacy. Daughter of the legendary trumpeter and composer Bobby Bradford and world-renowned jazz vocalist and author Melba Joyce, she was also the granddaughter of the



(Top) Internationally known jazz soloist Carmen Bradford as she performed with the VSU Jazz Ensemble. (Bottom L-R) Jon Moore (LCMS 7th grader), Leslie Smith (LCHS graduate and Percussion Teacher) and Emma Moore (LCMS 8th grader and percussionist) after listening to Carmen Bradford perform with the VSU Jazz Ensemble.

Not Forgotten

As the 3rd Anniversary is drawing near since our loved one, Brandon Lee Helms, went missing from a residence in Lanier County, we would like to express our deep sadness. We still do not have closure concerning Brandon’s disappearance and although it has been three years, we love and miss Brandon very much. We feel someone out there may have information concerning Brandon’s whereabouts and would encourage them to step forward and share it with the Lanier County Sheriff’s Department. Though Brandon is not with us, he is not forgotten or loved. A piece of our hearts is still missing. Please continue to lift our family up in prayer that Brandon will be found and we will have the strength we need for each passing day he is missing.

**The Loving Family
of
Brandon Lee Helms**