

Police, victims warn against firing guns on New Year's Eve

Associated Press

Kaitlyn Kong thought she had been punched hard in the abdomen as she stood among thousands of people in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, as the new year arrived a year ago. Her best friend, standing next to her, thought Kong had been stabbed as blood poured from a wound.

It wasn't until Kong underwent an X-ray that she and hospital medical staff realized she had been shot after someone fired a gun into the air to celebrate the new year.

Although rare, people being shot by celebratory gunfire on New Year's Eve and other holidays like the Fourth of July does happen, prompting law enforcement authorities to caution people that bullets fired into the air can endanger people's lives.

Raleigh police Lt. Mario Campos said the city receives a small number of calls about gunfire during New Year's Eve celebrations in the city but would not discuss what happened to Kong, saying it remains under investigation. Raleigh police said at the time that the shot could have been fired from several blocks away.

"Our message has always been not to do it because it's dangerous and illegal in our city," Campos said. "Bullets can travel a long distance. Any gunfire discharged into the air has to come down and land on something."

A 9-year-old boy in Cleveland was wounded by a stray bullet last New Year's Eve as he watched television inside



This photo provided by Allyson Cole shows Kaitlyn Kong at the First Night Raleigh celebration in Raleigh, N.C., on Dec. 31, 2018. Kong suffered a gunshot wound after someone fired a gun into the air to celebrate the new year. Although rare, people being shot by celebratory gunfire on New Year's Eve and other holidays like the Fourth of July does happen, prompting law enforcement authorities to caution people that bullets fired into the air can endanger people's lives. (Allyson Cole via AP)

his family's home. The boy's mother declined to be interviewed. Another 9-year-old boy in Atlanta was shot in the abdomen by celebratory gunfire early Jan. 1 while he and his family set off fireworks.

A 4-year-old boy was killed in 2010 in Decatur, Georgia, when an AK-47 round penetrated a church roof and struck him in the head as he sat next

to his parents during a New Year's Eve service.

Kong, then a senior at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, headed to downtown Raleigh with her friend for the city's family-friendly First Night celebration. Kong, 23, said she was pointing her phone upward to capture video of fireworks as confetti floated

down on the crowd when it suddenly felt as if she had been punched "super hard," prompting her to clutch her friend's shoulder, not able to speak.

Bystanders helped move her out of the crowd, and a police officer called for an ambulance while pressure was applied to the wound.

"I didn't think it was that serious, but I was hurting a lot," Kong said.

It turned out to be quite serious. The bullet entered her chest and penetrated a lung, her diaphragm and stomach before lodging near her hip. Kong underwent a four-hour surgery. She recovered enough to return to classes days later with some assistance. She graduated in May with a degree in environmental studies.

"If it had been any higher, it could have done some perma-

nent damage, to say the least," Kong said.

A 2004 study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said people struck by gunfire shot into the air are most likely to be hit in the head.

That's what happened to Texas state Rep. Armando Martinez as he celebrated the new year at a friend's home in Weslaco, Texas, on Jan. 1, 2017. He and his family had waited in the friend's garage until gunfire had subsided to let off fireworks, he said.

Martinez told NBC News that his wife had just wished him a happy new year with a kiss when a .223-caliber round fell from the sky and penetrated his skull. It felt, he said, as if he had been "hit by a sledgehammer."

"I was extremely lucky," Martinez said. "My surgeons

said if it went a couple more millimeters deeper, I may not have been able to have this conversation right now."

Carl Leisinger III, a retired New Jersey State Police major and supervisor of the agency's forensics laboratory, said a 9 mm round like the one that wounded Kong would typically leave the barrel at around 1,100 feet per second and then fall down at 200 to 300 feet per second. How far a bullet fired into the air travels sideways will depend on wind and other factors, he said.

"She's very fortunate she didn't die," Leisinger said.

Kong said she plans to celebrate somewhere this New Year's Eve, but not in downtown Raleigh.

"You can't let it stop you from living your life," she said. "Maybe I'm that kind of person."

for the players doing all that crazy stuff on the field. The coaches should have a standard for their players.

On December 4, at 1:30 p.m., they were in front of my house paving the street. They paved three streets that Wednesday. I was excited, now we need speed bumps. Part of Madison Street they paved is not even, it is bumpy.

On Weems Street they are cleaning up around two old houses and a lot of it is looking good. I saw in the Kosciusko newspaper's magazine, The Buzz, how Attala County is building its future on the foundation of its past. I saw 29 historic homes of Kosciusko. This is what Holmes County needs to show off, its historic houses and places; try to save our landmark houses. Like the one on Madison Street and others.

We need another Fred's and another supermarket. We need the playing field level on these supermarkets. We are getting ripped off at these stores, the food prices are too high.

I hope you had a Merry Christmas.

Frances Patterson
Durant

MEMBER



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

On November 10, Sunday, I was listening to Straight Talk with Ms. Zep. I wanted to know who won the election and did the school bond pass. Ms. Zep did not know whether the school bond passed, Ms. Zep knew that Durant and West did not vote for the school bond. Ms. Zep gave thumb up for four towns that voted for the school bond Thumb down for Durant and West. Ms. Zep said Supervisor James Young did not support the school bond. Ms. Zep said she was surprised because one of the schools was going to be built in Durant. Ms. Zep went Willie Lynch on Supervisor Young. I was shocked, I said, "Are you kidding me?" I could not believe Supervisor James Young did not support the school bond. One of the schools was going to be built in Durant and he is the president on the board. I voted for the school bond.

To the elected officials, don't get it twisted, it is not about you, it is about the people you service. The ones that voted you in and the ones that can vote you out.

Obituary

VIRGINIA MAE
KIMBROUGH GIVENS

Virginia Mae Kimbrough Givens, 77, passed away Saturday, December 21, 2019 in Hattiesburg, MS. Funeral services were held on Saturday, December 28 at 12:00 p.m. at Holly Grove MBC. Professional services were entrusted to Legacy Memorial of Hattiesburg MS



GUIDING LIGHT

Guiding Light C.O.G.I.C. in Lexington will host Winter Revival on Wednesday, January, 1 through Friday, January 3 at 7:30 nightly.

12-26;1-2

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