

Nearly two years after her mother died in a Dallas senior living apartment, Shannon Gleason Dion got a shocking call from a Plano detective.

Her mother had likely been murdered, he told her, by a man who could be among the most prolific serial killers in Texas history.

# Guardians

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*Part two of a two-part series. Read part one [here](#).*



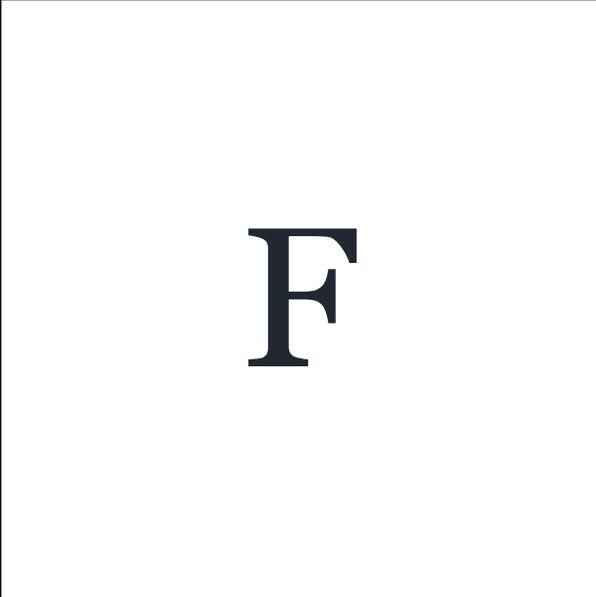
T

Think about a loved one you've lost. Maybe a grandmother, or your father, or a beloved aunt.

You believe the end was peaceful and painless. You've planned the funeral, made sure the estate was settled. You've moved belongings into storage, or sold them, or said final goodbyes on the curb. Maybe you've cried alone in the car when that one song comes on and makes you remember.

Now. Imagine you get a call, as much as two years later. Police want you to come to the station. They say what you were told about the death was wrong.

They want to add your loved one's name to a list of victims of a man who could be among the most prolific serial killers in Texas history.



F

or Shannon Gleason Dion, the call came in July 2018.

Her 92-year-old mother, Doris Gleason, had died nearly two years earlier at The Tradition-Prestonwood, a luxury senior living facility in Far North Dallas. "Old age," the death certificate had said.

No one could explain why jewelry was missing from the apartment. No one knew why Doris wasn't wearing the guardian angel necklace she never took off. But Shannon had done her own sleuthing.

She'd learned that jewelry had been stolen from the apartments of other residents who had died.

She had posted that information in a Yelp review of The Tradition-Prestonwood.

"The food and ambiance are delightful," Shannon had written. "The security is unacceptable."

Now Plano police Detective Jon Hoffman was on the phone. He had seen the Yelp review and wanted to meet with Shannon the next day about a case he was working on. Before he hung up, he told her to look up a name: Billy Chemirmir.

For so long, something about her mother's death hadn't made sense to Shannon. Now everything clicked.

At home, she kept papers about the loose ends of her mother's estate. Among them were the Dallas police reports she'd received after filing a public records request. Many of the documents bore the name of someone who had died, supposedly of natural

causes, and been robbed.

Joyce Abramowitz. Juanita Purdy. Leah Corken. Margaret White. Solomon Spring. Glenna Day.

Doris Gleason.

Shannon had a list of victims. She had connected the dots. She just didn't know it was murder.



Billy Chemirmir has been charged with killing two women at The Tradition-Prestonwood, a luxury senior living complex in Far North Dallas. Six other families are waiting for proof that he murdered their loved ones there in a three-month span in 2016.

ere is how the police figured it out:

# H

On March 19, 2018, a 91-year-old woman opened the door of her apartment at Preston Place Retirement Community in Plano.

A man was standing in the hallway. He was tall, strong.

“Go to the bed,” he said. “Don’t fight me.”

He forced his way into the bedroom. He grabbed a pillow and pushed it over her

face. She struggled to breathe as he pushed down harder.

Slowly, darkness crept in.



Billy Chemirmir

But then.

She started to breathe again. She opened her eyes. Paramedics were all around. A friend had found her and called 911.

The Plano woman told police about the man, what he’d said, what he’d done.

A diamond ring and wedding band were missing from her left hand, and \$270 in cash was gone.

Plano police collected four pillows, a comforter and a plush giraffe doll. They found a cigarette butt and logged that as evidence, too.

Police looked for similar incidents and found one from Parkview Elderly Assisted Living in Frisco, another senior living facility, the previous October.

A 93-year old woman had opened the door to find a well-dressed man. He said he was a maintenance worker. He threw her from her walker and put a pillow over her face, muffling her screams.

She thought she was going to die. She began to pray.

The man got up, rifled through the apartment, and left. She pushed an emergency alert

button and a caretaker came to help her up.

To the cops, the attacks on the woman in Frisco and the woman in Plano seemed too similar to be coincidence.

Police found a report of a suspicious vehicle — a silver Nissan Altima — at the Plano senior living complex. The same car was connected to a trespassing charge from two years earlier at a Dallas senior living complex.

Its driver: Billy Chemirmir.

Police showed the Frisco woman a photo lineup. She “couldn’t swear to it,” but was pretty sure that Chemirmir was the attacker.

All of this — the similar attacks, the silver Nissan, the possible ID — convinced Plano police they had a suspect in the March 19 attack on the Plano woman. They set up surveillance at Chemirmir’s apartment in Far North Dallas the next day.

Around 6 p.m., Chemirmir came home. Plano Officer William Knight, a 20-year veteran, saw him toss something into a dumpster. Knight arrested Chemirmir on outstanding warrants and read him his rights. Chemirmir was gripping jewelry and cash as the officer handcuffed him.

With Chemirmir under arrest, Knight walked to the dumpster and peered in. He found a jewelry box. Inside was a piece of paper with a name: Lu Thi Harris.

Dallas police were sent to check on Harris, 81, at her home a few miles away. In the bedroom, they found her lying on the bed, dead.

A pillow on the bed was smeared with lipstick.

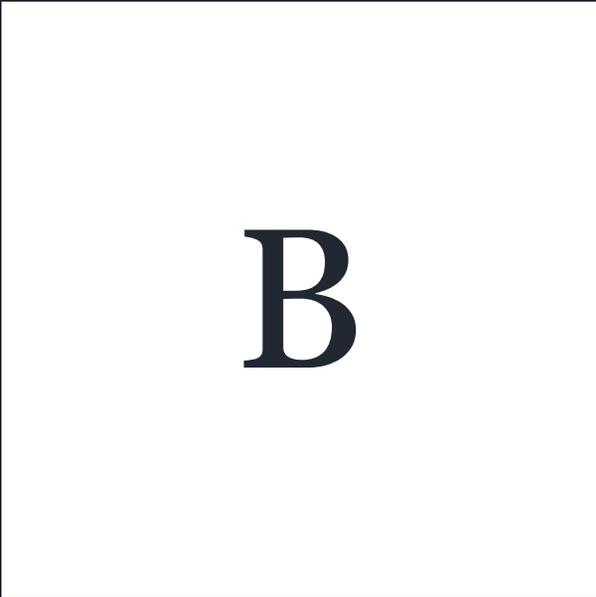
Chemirmir was charged with capital murder in Harris’ death, and would later be charged with the attacks on the two Collin County women.

Given that pattern, police kept digging. Any case of an unaccompanied death — that is, when the person had died alone — that lined up with a report of missing jewelry had to be re-examined. Deaths listed as natural causes may have been murders.

Three days after Chemirmir’s arrest, **Plano police called reporters to department headquarters**. Flanked by officials from Frisco police and the Collin

County district attorney's office, Plano Police Chief Gregory W. Rushin announced a "very large and complex investigation" involving cases in at least four cities: Plano, Frisco, Dallas and Richardson.

"This is terribly disturbing," he said. "We're going to make every attempt to identify all the victims in the communities across the metroplex to fully investigate this case."



B

illy Chemirmir was born in Kenya's Rift Valley, between the major cities of Eldoret and Nakuru, in 1972. According to the *Daily Nation*, one of the country's largest newspapers, he moved to the United States in the late 1990s after his older sister got visas for him and two other siblings.

Although it was widely reported after his arrest that Chemirmir is an unauthorized immigrant, he is a permanent U.S. resident. If convicted, he could face deportation.

A timeline of Billy Chemirmir's alleged killing spree.

In North Texas, the Chemirmir family owns several senior living homes in McKinney and Allen. No suspicious deaths have been

reported at those facilities in the past five years, according to the Collin County medical examiner's office. The relatives who operate them did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

It is unclear if Chemirmir worked for those homes. But Rushin said Chemirmir had "health care experience" and suggested that he used it in "targeting and exploiting seniors."

[VIEW COMPLETE TIMELINE](#)

Chemirmir was married in Denton County in 2004. His wife filed for divorce two years later, saying she didn't know where he was. She tried

calling family members and previous employers and searched for him online, but couldn't track him down, according to court documents. The divorce was finalized in October 2006.

He was arrested in 2010 on a charge of driving while intoxicated in Addison, and served 18 months' probation. He picked up a second DWI in Dallas in 2011, didn't show up for court and ended up with a warrant for his arrest.

The next year, he and his girlfriend argued about him coming home drunk from a strip club, according to police records. She tried to walk away, but he began punching her in the face. He then beat her in the head with a pot and kicked her in the back. When she called 911, he grabbed a knife and began stabbing a red leather loveseat.

He was still there, angry, when police arrived. They arrested him again.

He pleaded guilty in exchange for a 70-day sentence in the Dallas County Jail.

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arly in 2016, Chemirmir was spotted on the property of Edgemere, a high-end senior living complex in Dallas. When confronted, he gave his name as Benjamin Koitaba, and was told to leave. Dallas police instructed the staff to call back if he trespassed again.

According to police reports and court documents, it's the first time police know of that Chemirmir was at a senior living center.

That July, Edgemere staff called police and said the suspicious man was back.

Chemirmir showed officers his wallet, which had IDs for Benjamin Koitaba and Billy Chemirmir. The officers charged him with criminal trespass. He was sentenced to 70 days in the county jail but was released on good behavior after just 12.

Police have since re-examined the deaths that happened at Edgemere during the period Chemirmir was hanging around there. Phyllis Payne, 91, and Phoebe Perry, 94, died within a month of each other, seemingly of natural causes. But now police say Chemirmir killed both women and stole their jewelry.

After he served his jail stint for trespassing at Edgemere, Chemirmir went to The Tradition-Prestonwood, police say.

He has been charged with murdering two women there. One was Norma French, 85, who died Oct. 8, 2016. She was the unnamed woman from Shannon's records request, the one who was missing over \$6,000 in jewelry.

The other was Shannon's mother, Doris Gleason, who died three weeks later. Shannon wouldn't find out how she died for 20 more months.

**Six other families are waiting for proof** that Chemirmir murdered their loved ones at The Tradition-Prestonwood in a three-month span in 2016. They have filed civil lawsuits against the facility, saying police have named him as the killer.

Joyce Abramowitz, 82, died July 18. Chemirmir had been released from jail eight days earlier.

Juanita Purdy, 82, died July 31.

Leah Corken, 83, died Aug. 19.

Margaret White, 86, died Aug. 28.

Solomon Spring, 89, died Oct. 1.

Glenna Day, 87, died Oct. 15.

Spring is the only male victim publicly linked to Chemirmir. He was found in a pool of blood with a gash on the back of his head, a bloody lamp on the floor nearby. Police were told he was on blood thinners, which may have accounted for the gruesome scene. They marked it as a natural death at the time, and suggested he slipped and hit his head.

In November, a man matching Chemirmir's description was spotted at The Tradition carrying a leather satchel, according to police reports.

Then there's a break in the timeline. From October 2016 to October 2017, no victims have yet been identified in criminal indictments or civil lawsuits.

The known attacks resumed on Oct. 29, 2017, at Parkview in Frisco. That's when police say Chemirmir pushed the Frisco woman from her walker and tried to smother her.

His rate of killing started to pick up in late 2017, police say.

Minnie Campbell, 84, died Oct. 31 at Plano's Preston Place apartments.

Doris Wasserman, 90, died Dec. 23 at The Tradition-Prestonwood. Chemirmir has not been indicted in her death, but her family has sued The Tradition, saying she was also a victim.

Carolyn MacPhee, 81, died at her Plano home on Dec. 31.

In a 60-day stretch at the beginning of 2018, police say, Chemirmir attacked seven more people, killing six.

Rosemary Curtis, 75, died at her northwest Dallas home on Jan. 19.

Mary Brooks, 88, died at her Richardson apartment on Jan. 31.

Martha Williams, 80, died at Preston Place on March 4.

Miriam Nelson, 81, died at Preston Place on March 9.

Ann Conklin, 82, died at Preston Place on March 18.

The Plano woman survived the attack at Preston Place on March 19.

The attack on that woman helped lead detectives to Lu Thi Harris, killed on March 20.

In all, Chemirmir has been indicted in 12 deaths. The cases are largely circumstantial because it is difficult, so long after the fact, to get physical evidence that the victims were smothered.

He has been named as a suspect in seven other deaths, plus the attacks on the two Collin County women who survived.

That's 21 alleged victims in under two years. Chemirmir, in jail in lieu of \$16.2 million bail, says he's innocent.

Shannon Gleason Dion, whose mother's death at The Tradition-Prestonwood in October 2016 was listed as being due to natural causes, obtained police reports about other residents of the facility who had died under similar circumstances and been robbed.



hannon sued The Tradition-Prestonwood after detectives reopened her mother's case. The language of the suit echoed the themes of her Yelp review.

Chemirmir, the suit said, "had gained access to the apartment as a result of

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failure by [The Tradition] to exercise reasonable care in providing security for the premises.”

A series of other suits — all in cases in which Chemirmir has not been charged — include more damning allegations.

They claim that police would not have brushed aside the deaths as natural if The Tradition had been more forthcoming.

“Unimaginably, at no point in time during the string of murders and robberies does The Tradition share plainly relevant information with the families of the victims, the residents who are still in danger, or the police who were viewing each death through a skewed, incomplete lens due to The Tradition’s failure to disclose,” the suits claim.

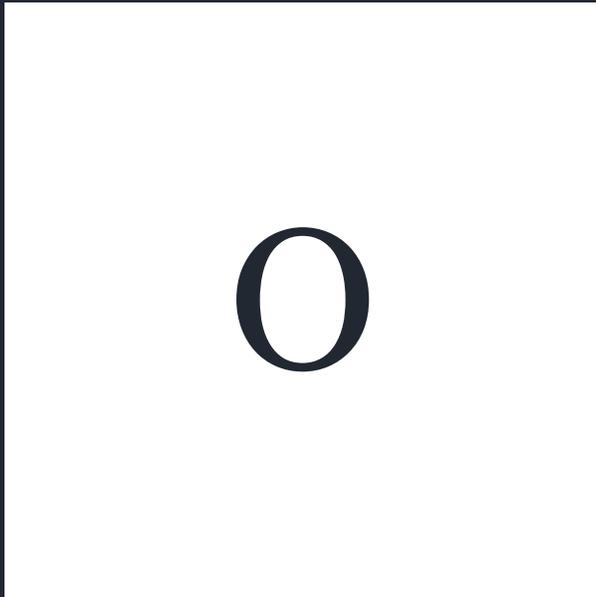
Tradition Senior Living, which has facilities in Houston and Dallas, was founded by Jonathan Perlman, a graduate of Baylor University and Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law and a former big-league pitcher. Neither he nor the company has commented on the allegations, releasing the same prepared statement when asked about each of the lawsuits.

“The Tradition-Prestonwood regards all our residents as family,” the statement reads. “The Tradition-Prestonwood relied on the investigations of the Dallas police, its detectives, and other reputable, established governmental entities ... The Tradition-Prestonwood has cooperated with authorities and will continue to do so.”

**For the families that have sued**, mediation has been a painstaking process, lawyers say. Survivors have been left feeling exhausted and overwhelmed.

Shannon’s suit settled in August. As part of the agreement, she can’t discuss details.

Shannon visits her parents’ gravesite at Restland Memorial Park monthly to bring fresh flowers and clean their marker. Jerry and Doris Gleason died within a year of each other, in November 2015 and October 2016.



One day not long ago, Shannon got a call from an 806 area code — Amarillo. Immediately, she knew it was the William P. Clements Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, where her sister's attacker is still in prison.

She has tried to compartmentalize, to silo Nancy's awful ordeal from their mother's death. There is only so much Shannon can handle. Some days, it all collides.

She talked to the man from the parole board for a half-hour, explaining what had happened to her sister, how the trial and the years after only made the pain worse, how losing her mother so violently brought back all the old hurt.

"What else do you want to tell me?" the man asked.

"What else do you need to hear to keep him locked up?" Shannon said, sitting cross-legged on her bed.

After the call, she sat in her living room shaking softly, trying to think about what's next.

"It makes me remember all the things I've lost," she said. "At some point, I've got to grieve my mom. I'm still putting that on the back shelf. I'm not ready for that yet."



Loren Adair (from left), MJ Jennings and Shannon Gleason Dion, all of whose mothers police investigators believe were killed by Billy Chemirmir, have formed a tight bond, along with Ellen French House, whose mother died under the same circumstances. The four stay in touch constantly and are focused on lobbying for new laws for the protection of senior citizens.

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hannon has made a group of friends who know exactly what her year has been like. She calls them her sisters.

Ellen French House, whose mother was Norma French, knew something was wrong when she saw her mother's bruised finger, like someone had ripped the wedding ring right off her hand.

MJ Jennings, whose mother was Leah Corken, lives a half-mile from The Tradition-Prestonwood and not far from where the alleged killer lived.

“Chemirmirville,” she calls it now, and she wants to move.

Loren Adair, whose mother was Phyllis Payne, goes into the garage now when the grief is too much to handle. She sits in her car and closes the door before she screams, so she won’t upset her blue-heeler mix, Scout, inside.

The four are in nearly constant communication. They talk on the phone every day. They text each other late at night. They compare the progress of their mothers’ civil and criminal cases. They show off their jewelry — the heirlooms they wear, the ones they still have left.

Not long ago, they got together to talk about everything they’ve gone through. Loren said it took a month after her mother died for her to realize that a large cache of jewelry was missing. She had always kept it in a coffee can in the fridge.

“I can’t even say it,” Loren said, her voice cracking. “He had to have asked her where it was.”

“Don’t even think about that,” Shannon said, reaching over and gripping Loren’s hand. “I have the same things. Don’t think about it. It’s OK.”

The women don’t doubt that Chemirmir killed their mothers. But getting the justice system to say so is a long, grinding process.

Each woman got that shocking call from a detective. Each waited for the cause of death to be amended. Each feared that the medical examiner would list the cause as “undetermined” — a purgatory they couldn’t imagine living with.

After the homicide rulings came through, each waited for a grand jury to decide whether Chemirmir should be charged with the crime. MJ, whose mother’s death certificate was amended in early October, is still waiting for the indictment.

Through it all, they’ve had to mourn their mothers again and again, all while reckoning with feelings of anger and guilt.

“I just keep saying, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,’” MJ said.

“Oh, yeah,” Shannon said. “I’m sorry I didn’t protect you from this.”

“I’ve said that so much,” Loren said. “I’m so sorry this happened.”

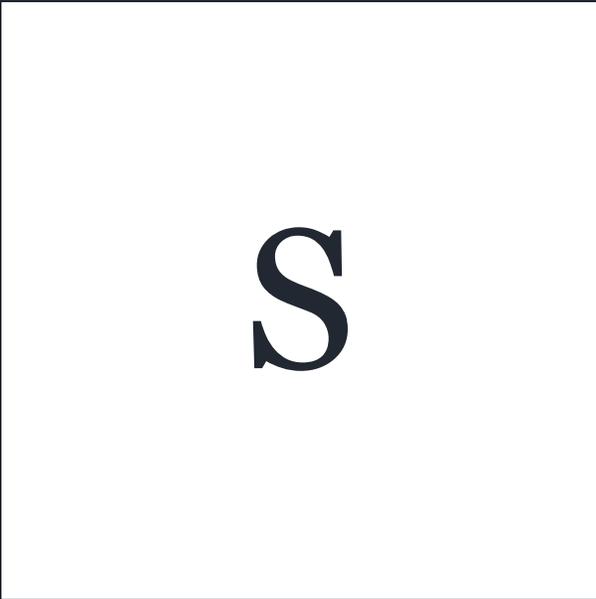
The four women are making it their mission to lobby for new laws protecting seniors. A while back, they met with state Rep. Julie Johnson and state Sen. Nathan Johnson, both Dallas Democrats, to push for laws requiring security at independent senior living communities.

“Something needed to change; I wanted my mother’s friends safer than she had been,” Shannon said.

Together, they are starting a foundation to support their activism. They’ve named it **SOSS: Secure Our Seniors Safety**.



Shannon pauses before beginning an equine horse therapy session at Paws for Reflection in Midlothian. The sessions, which she began attending in October 2018, have helped her cope with the tragedy of her mother’s slaying. Just three months earlier, she had learned how her mother really died.



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hannon doesn't use Chemirmir's name.

Just like she doesn't use the name of the man who attacked her sister all those years ago.

To her, they're The Rapist and The Murderer.

She has faith in the prosecutors who are preparing for Chemirmir's trial. In July, Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot's office **said it would seek the death penalty** in the death of Lu Thi

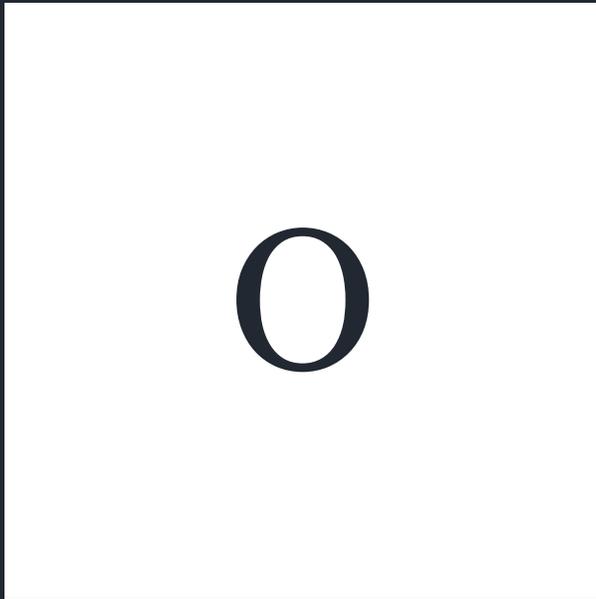
Harris.

A conviction in any one of the dozen killings he's been charged with will mean at least life in prison without parole. Then Shannon won't have to constantly relive it all, as she does in Nancy's case.

She found out in August that her sister's attacker will stay locked up in Amarillo until at least next August.

Though relieved, she also realized that his next parole board hearing could happen close to Chemirmir's trial. The cases could converge again, leaving Shannon feeling trapped between the stories of two women who trusted a stranger on their doorstep.

"My mom and my sister both opened their doors to evil," Shannon said. "They were trusting and not suspicious and something came to their door and they opened and let it in."



n Sundays, Shannon spends time at the playground her mother helped plan at Church of the Holy Communion in Far North Dallas. She remembers Doris standing on a little rise with the bishop as they imagined what it would look like.

Last spring, Shannon and her husband, Eric, bought a tree for the playground. The Chinese pistache will bloom red each October near the anniversary of Doris' death. At its base, the tree has a large brick marker:

*THIS TREE IS GIVEN  
IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
DORIS GLEASON*

Now Shannon sits there, a cool breeze moving the limbs softly. A group of boys runs up and asks her to check the Rangers score. She pulls out her phone to look.

One of the boys spots a big blue ring on Shannon's right hand.

"What kind of stone is that?" he asks.

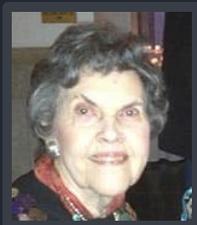
"That is a blue topaz," Shannon replies. "My mother used to have one like this."

No one has been able to track down Doris' topaz ring. The gold necklace, too, is likely gone forever.

So Shannon has been buying back similar pieces, one at a time. The blue ring is just the latest.

Informed of the score, the boys scamper off. Shannon watches them play. She thinks of her mother. She reaches up to her neckline and touches the gold chain. The guardian angel, she knows, is still there.

## In memoriam



**Phyllis Payne**

91 years old

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**Phoebe Perry**

94 years old

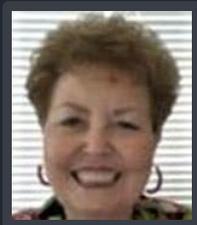
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**Joyce Abramowitz**

82 years old

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**Juanita Purdy**

82 years old

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Leah Corken

83 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Margaret White

86 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Solomon Spring

89 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Norma French

85 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Glenna Day

87 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Doris Gleason

92 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Minnie Campbell

84 years old

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Doris Wasserman

90 years old



Carolyn MacPhee

81 years old

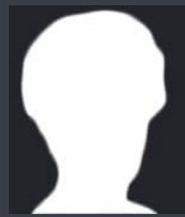
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Rosemary Curtis

75 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Mary Brooks

88 years old



Martha Williams

80 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Miriam Nelson

81 years old

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Ann Conklin

82 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



Lu Thi Harris

81 years old

[Read Obituary](#)



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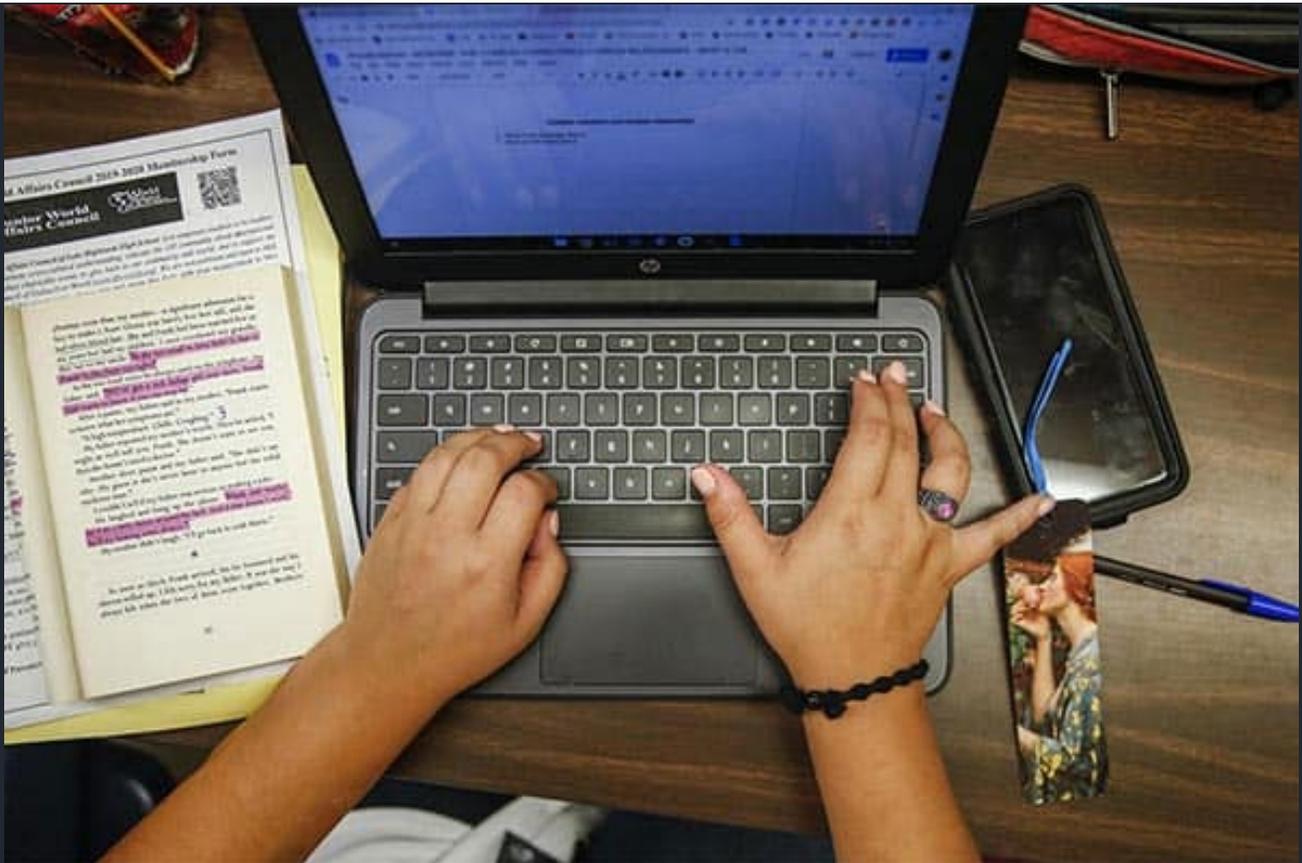
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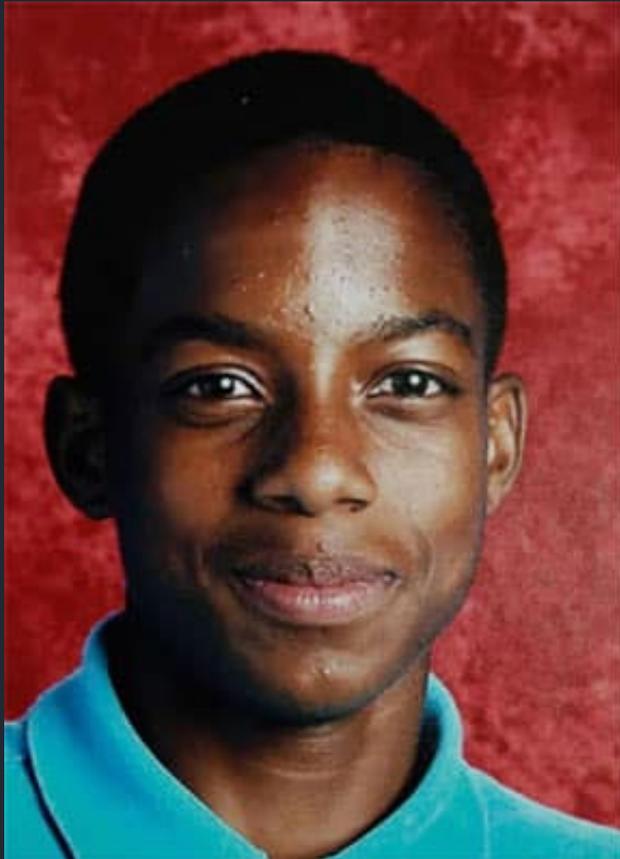
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