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State, The (Columbia, SC)

1995-04-08

Section: METRO/REGION

Edition: FINAL

Page: A1

HARVARD REJECTS PAROLED TEEN-AGER \ LEXINGTON MURDER SHADOWS CAREER PATH

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When Gina Grant applied to Harvard University, she said her mother was dead. She neglected to say she had beaten her mom to death with a lead crystal candleholder five years earlier in their Lexington home.

Now, Grant's early acceptance to one of the nation's most prestigious universities has been withdrawn. And Grant's story has become a media feeding frenzy.

It's really a story about how a young woman tried to turn her life around. Friends say Grant snapped only after years of emotional stress brought on by her father's death from cancer and her mother's alcoholism. Gina Grant was 14 when she killed her mother. She spent four years in a juvenile prison and on parole.

She's 19 now and is considered by some to be a model of how the juvenile justice system can turn around even a deeply troubled child.

Grant, a straight-A student, lost her early admission to Harvard in Cambridge, Mass., on Thursday.

Three days before, someone hand-delivered South Carolina newspaper reports about Grant's role in her mother's death to Harvard and Boston newspapers.

That action followed a story Sunday in the Boston Globe Magazine that featured Grant in an article about children who overcome tough obstacles. In the story, Grant said her parents were dead. She didn't say she killed her mother. Harvard spokesman Joe Wrinn declined Friday to discuss the school's decision to refuse admission to Grant. He said the university withdraws early admission, which it offers only to exceptional young scholars, in cases where students fail to maintain excellent grades or lie on their admission application.

Harvard applicants are asked whether they have been put on probation or disciplined. Grant was on parole for her mother's death until she turned 18.

Grant served six months in a South Carolina juvenile prison after pleading no contest in January 1991 to voluntary manslaughter for killing her mother, hitting her skull 13 times with the candleholder during a heated argument.

A psychiatrist hired by Grant's attorneys testified in a court hearing that Grant killed her mother, 43-year-old Dorothy Mayfield, who had been drinking heavily the night she died, after years of emotional abuse.

In 1991, a South Carolina judge transferred Grant from a juvenile prison near Columbia to a special school for young offenders in Massachusetts.

At Lexington Middle School, Grant had excelled in academics and athletics and was a popular student. That pattern continued at the schools she attended in Massachusetts. Administrators and students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, where Grant enrolled in 1992, voiced strong support for her Friday.

Grant appeared to be fulfilling many of the goals that her supporters had hoped she would achieve. They wanted her to excel in school, enroll in a top-rate university and prepare herself for a professional career.

"I was upset for Gina because I knew she had worked day and night to put the past behind her and achieve her goals," said one of her South Carolina attorneys, **Jack Swerling**. "She is someone who can make a significant contribution to society."

But Marlene McClain, chairwoman of the S.C. Juvenile Parole Board, said Harvard's decision to withdraw Grant's early admission raises concerns about whether she accepts her role in her mother's death.

"We were always concerned that she never seemed to accept full responsibility for what was a very violent crime," McClain said.

"We knew she needed to break through denial," said Hu Eaker, a former treatment supervisor at the state Department of Juvenile Justice. "It was never a question about her mind. It was a question about what was in her heart."

In a prepared statement Friday, Grant said, "I deal with this tragedy every day on a personal level. It serves no good purpose for anyone else to dredge up the pain of my childhood."

News of Harvard's decision disappointed Grant's friends in South Carolina. Memories of the case remain vivid in Lexington, where Grant's former family home off U.S. 378 has not been sold five years after it was put on the market.

Grant wrote upbeat letters to her Lexington friends, said Norma Brown, who treated Grant like a member of her family. Brown, the former owner of a child-care center that Grant attended, keeps all letters that Grant sends her.

"Gina has always been positive, even when she was in jail. She kept saying she would get through this and asked me to pray for her," Brown said. "I think Gina is a brilliant girl and a nice person. She can accomplish whatever she wants to "

While Grant had many supporters in Lexington County, prosecutors are not convinced that she has accepted responsibility for killing her mother.

Grant apparently still lacks remorse, said 11th Circuit Solicitor Donnie Myers.

"Rehabilitation cannot begin until you admit your sins," Myers said. "Remorse was kind of nonexistent on her part. It was a brutal crime."

Concerns about not disrupting Grant's schooling and her progress toward a professional career overshadowed the grisly nature of the killing, Myers said. "I never had any doubt that this young girl was intelligent, but being intelligent can indicate a little deviousness."

Gina Grant, a former Lexington Middle School student, reads in her Massachusetts home. She has worked to start a new life but her aspirations have been sidetracked, five years after she pleaded no contest to beating her alcoholic mother to death. **BILL GREENE / BOSTON GLOBE**



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