

Lawmen silent on Berkowitz revelations

By M.J. ZUCKERMAN
Staff Writer

David Berkowitz's admission that the "Son of Sam" murders were the work of a conspiratorial satanic cult was received with cautious silence Thursday by New York City lawmen.

The city's top law enforcement officials said they would take no immediate action after studying "The Berkowitz Letters," published Thursday by the Gannett Westchester Rockland Newspapers.

In those letters, Berkowitz, who once accepted sole responsibility for the "Son of Sam" murders, claims for the first time that he did not act alone and names the late John Carr as one of the members of the Yonkers-based cult.

Berkowitz, serving a 315-year sentence at Attica for

the .44-caliber killings that terrorized the metropolitan area in 1976-77, admits his complicity in the killings but emphasizes that he was not the only gunman.

Dispelling any notion that his letters were designed to clear his name, he wrote, "I'd still be guilty of conspiracy in some of the cases. I'd even be guilty of second-degree murder in others. So regardless, I would still have a long prison term. But this doesn't bother me."

He charged authorities covered up the case and "would have to be idiots to ignore the overwhelming evidence" demonstrating that he was one of a team of murderers.

"We are looking at the story and the case remains open," said Thomas McCarthy, an aide to Queens District Attorney John Santucci. "We have maintained the position of not commenting (on our investigation)

and will continue to maintain that position."

Impressed by a continuing Gannett investigation into the likelihood that Berkowitz did not act alone, Santucci, in late 1979, reopened his probe into two murders and five woundings committed by the ".44-caliber killer" in his borough.

Other New York City law enforcement officials, while not branding Berkowitz's claims of a murderous satanic cult false, did not move to reopen investigations of the murders that left six dead and seven wounded.

After reviewing the story, a spokesman for New York City Commissioner of Police Robert McGuire said, "We will have no comment."

And Bronx District Attorney Mario Merola said, "From his own confession, from the physical evidence and from eyewitness accounts in our cases there is no question in our mind that (Berkowitz) was acting alone

in the Bronx cases."

Merola emphasized that his comments were directed only to the cases within his jurisdiction and not to the "Son of Sam" murders committed in Queens and Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn, where one woman was killed and a man blinded in the last "Son of Sam" attack, District Attorney Eugene Gold said through aide Ronda Nager, "Our investigation is closed and it remains closed."

"We followed up all the leads. We investigated a second shooter theory and there were pieces of a puzzle that concerned a cult, but we were never able to come up with the requisite evidence necessary to reopen the case," she said.

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Kidnap story a hoax to cover girl's truancy

By WILL DAVID
Staff Writer

The reported kidnapping of a 13-year-old Yonkers girl near her home Thursday was a hoax made up to hide three days of truancy, police said today.

The girl, with a 12-year-old sister and a 12-year-old friend, concocted the abduction story because they played hooky from Walt Whitman Middle School Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and to punish the girl's mother for a family argument, police said.

The girl turned up today at a friend's house, where she spent the night sleeping in a closet and admitted the hoax under questioning by police, according to Detective Lt. Donald Christopher.

The sister and friend of the girl told police they were walking several blocks from her home when a car pulled up and two men grabbed the girl, forced her into the car and drove off shortly after 4 p.m. The girls supplied descriptions of the suspects, whom they identified as white, and the car. The incident was reported as

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'Possessed'

Arne Johnson, a 19-year-old Brookfield, Conn. man, is brought to court in Danbury Thursday. He claims he was under 'demonic possession' last month when he allegedly killed his landlord. Story on A11. —AP Photo

Board withdraws integration plan

By GAIL HOROWITZ
Staff Writer

A plan to desegregate Yonkers' five public high schools was withdrawn Thursday night from consideration by the Board of Education, leaving it up to the federal courts to decide the issue.

The decision to withdraw the plan was met with thunderous applause by the more than 1,000 residents who packed the auditorium of the Saunders Trades and Technical High School.

"The board's action tonight is a confirmation that the people have been heard," said Marge Lovero who helped organize a citywide coalition against the plan.

The integration plan, drafted in re-

sponse to a racial discrimination lawsuit brought by the U.S. Justice Department, had been strongly opposed by a large portion of the city's white community and by a coalition of black leaders for a host of different reasons.

The U.S. Justice Department, which brought the suit against the city in December, says the city is not moving fast enough to eliminate "intentional" segregation of the city's 22,000 public school students.

The board's decision now sets the stage for a federal court judge to decide the issue of whether the schools should be integrated—and if so, how and when.

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Judge to decide pre-trial issues within 30 days

By JOYCE INGRAM
Staff Writer

NEW YORK—A federal judge said Thursday he will rule in 30 days on a series of pre-trial motions sought by the City of Yonkers, its school board and the NAACP on federal charges of school and housing discrimination.

In the interim, U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence Sand once again ordered all sides in the dispute to hammer out a settlement.

Among the motions he is expected to decide on is a request by the national headquarters of the NAACP to join the U.S. Justice Department in the suit which is seeking to force school and housing desegregation. The organization is acting on behalf of a Yonkers parent whose daughter attends Yonkers High School.

The other motions are from school board attorneys who want the two-pronged suit be separated into an individual case for the schools and one for housing, and from the city attorney who demand that the entire suit be dismissed.

These and other resolves were discussed Thursday at a closed-door session in Judge Sand's chambers with school, city and federal attorneys.

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Harris will begin prison term today

By TARA CONNELL
Staff Writer

Jean Struven Harris was scheduled to appear in Westchester County Court late this morning to be given a 15 year-to-life prison sentence for the murder of her lover, "Scarsdale Diet" Dr. Herman Tarnower, last year.

The 57-year-old educator was scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Russell R. Leggett in White Plains on the second-degree murder and weapons charges.

Although she could receive up to 25 years to life in prison, Leggett is unlikely to give her more than the minimum term. That sentence will make her eligible for parole in 1996. She will be 72 years old.

Westchester Corrections Commissioner Albert Gray said Thursday that after Mrs. Harris is sentenced she will be taken directly from the courthouse to the Bedford State Correctional Facility in Bedford Hills, the

only maximum security prison for women in New York State.

Normally, prisoners stop at the county jail for a time after sentencing but state and court officials have agreed to expedite the procedure, Gray said. The suicide watch imposed on her at her arrival will continue until she leaves the jail, the commissioner said.

Because of her celebrity status, Mrs. Harris' presence has created some difficulties at the jail. Among them are security problems, animosity from other inmates, time spent dealing with the press and public and concern that something would happen to her before she could be sentenced.

Gray said Mrs. Harris has calmed down considerably since Wednesday, when she balked at being handcuffed for a trip to a nearby hospital. She verbally and physically lashed out at corrections officers.

On Thursday, she taught a class and ended the tutorial program she began after

her arrival at the jail, Gray said.

Mrs. Harris was convicted on Feb. 24 of repeatedly shooting Tarnower in the bedroom of his Purchase estate shortly before 11 p.m. on March 10, 1980. He bled to death moments before midnight.

Tarnower, a 69-year-old bachelor, was a well-known cardiologist, founder of the Scarsdale Medical Center and best-selling author of "The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet."

Mrs. Harris, Tarnower's lover for 14 years, was the headmistress of the exclusive Madeira School in McLean, Va. until her arrest for killing Tarnower. She had been a teacher and school administrator for more than 25 years.

Her trial on the charges began Nov. 21 before Leggett and a jury of eight women and four men in White Plains. She was convicted of murder after 50 days of testimony and eight days of deliberations.

The jury of eight women and four men

found her guilty of intentionally killing Tarnower. They were not given the option of finding her guilty of first-degree manslaughter, or intentionally killing the doctor while suffering from an extreme emotional disturbance.

Defense attorney Joel Aurnou has become the object of some criticism since the verdict for his failure to provide that option for his client. He is expected to make a series of routine, post-verdict motions before Mrs. Harris is sentenced.

Although he is likely to ask Leggett to set aside the verdict and order a new trial, the motion is not expected to be granted.

Also, Aurnou is expected to plead for leniency toward his client. Westchester District Attorney Carl Vergari has said he and his staff will not take a position on the length of Mrs. Harris' sentence.

Taking no position means the district attorney will not oppose a 15 year to life term or request a longer term.

Inside

Lifestyles Two of Westchester's cultural organizations are in today's news. The Hudson River Museum has a new director, and Main Street Theater is going to throw a big gala to honor one of their biggest supporters, Liv Ullmann. See page C1.

Sports Brigham Young denied the luck of the Irish Thursday, ousting Notre Dame from the NCAA tournament in the final seconds. In the NIT, Syracuse kept rolling along, destroying Michigan. See page B4.

World/Nation Senate Republicans, moving to exploit their new majority swiftly, are pushing for a floor vote next week on a budget-cutting package containing most of President Reagan's recommendations. See page A7.

Index Today's edition of The Herald Statesman consists of four sections. The A section offers local, county, state, national and world news; the B section has lifestyles, home furnishings and entertainment; the C section contains business, sports and classified advertising and the D section features Keeping Up, consumer advice and education.

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'All clear' call preceded fatal shuttle mishap

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — An "all clear" announcement that it was safe to return to work sounded over Kennedy Space Center moments before one worker was killed and five others nearly asphyxiated in a nitrogen-filled compartment of the space shuttle Columbia, an official says.

The compartment, filled with nitrogen as a precaution against fire during a dress rehearsal Thursday for the shuttle's launch, should have been refilled with oxygen before workers were allowed back in the area, said Dick Barton, a spokesman for Rockwell International Co., the major shuttle contractor.

Five of the men, including the dead man, worked for Rockwell and the sixth was a security guard.

"I just happened to be in the area, and I heard the announcement: 'Clear for return to normal work.' Regretfully, it was not," Barton said.

Asked if someone at the space center gave an all-clear announcement prematurely, Barton said: "That's the inference, but I can't go any further. I did hear the one statement, I can say that. But I didn't hear any other statements that were made after that."

The men would not have smelled anything peculiar or have had any other warning that they were entering a deadly area. All five reportedly passed out almost immediately, and soon after they were evacuated from the compartment.

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Rushed to hospital

Forrest Cole, a worker on the space shuttle, is moved from Parrish Hospital in Titusville, Fla. to

Shands Hospital in Gainesville Thursday after he was nearly asphyxiated in a nitrogen-filled

compartment of the shuttle. One man was killed and five others injured. —AP Photo

