

LITTLE GIRL LOST BOYFRIEND, 22, CHARGED IN STABBING OF WAYWARD 12-YEAR-OLD

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Christina Brown was a troubled girl looking for answers.

For someone to listen to her troubles. For someone to make her feel loved. For someone.

Things were so bleak at one point in her young life that she wrote a poem about wanting to curl up and die. When Christina needed guidance, she turned to the streets and disappeared into the arms of a 22-year-old man, **LeMarr Monson** . It would not be long before her tragic wish would come true. The 12-year-old was found stabbed to death over the weekend.

Detroit police say **Monson** , operating out of a burned-out apartment building on West Boston, made Christina his girlfriend, got her to sell crack and marijuana and, finally, stabbed her about 20 times after a heated confrontation. He was arraigned Monday on a first-degree murder charge and held without bond in the Wayne County Jail. A preliminary examination is scheduled for Feb. 2 in 36th District Court.

In the west side neighborhood where Christina once lived and played, neighbors said they saw a young girl lost, someone left to roam and find trouble, who never learned right from wrong.

"She never had the right upbringing. She was left to bring herself up," said one longtime neighbor in the 11300 block of Yellowstone. "It's a shame. She was just let go while her mother worked."

Christina had run away several times before. In December, her mother reported her missing to police, but Yolanda Brown found her in time to bring her home for Christmas. On Jan. 3, she disappeared again. At 5-feet-9 and 115 pounds, Christina convinced her new neighbors on West Boston that she was 17.

However, there are no records that Christina's mother relayed the plight of her lost daughter to social service workers who could have helped. If she had notified the state Department of Social Services that her 12-year-old child had run away and was being exploited by an older man, "we could've taken her into protective custody, assuming we could find her," said Margarete Gravina, spokeswoman for the DSS.

Brown said she didn't know about **Monson** .

Brown said her daughter, the youngest of her three children, was a quiet, straight-A student at Winterhalter Middle School until last spring when she suddenly began skipping school. Principal Melvin Seidman said she was neither a good student nor a bad student: "She was an unknown quantity."

Brown, speaking in her sparsely furnished, two-story white and yellow frame house Monday afternoon, said her daughter left every morning as if she was going to school. But instead, it seems, she hung out with friends.

"We didn't know she was missing school until we got her report card and we saw all those absences on it," said her sister Kisha Brown.

At the end of the school year, Yolanda Brown requested a transfer. "She didn't want to go to Winterhalter. She was scared of the gangs there. I wanted her to get a better education," her mother said.

But Brown said that the day she went to request the transfer, Christina ran away from home. School officials said there is no record of a transfer.

For the next several months, Christina appeared at home every now and then, never staying more than a week at a time.

"She would leave. She would just go," her mother said.

Brown was asked where the girl lived when she was not at home.

"How would I know what she was doing? I wasn't out there with her," her mother said.

Brown said Christina's father lives in Los Angeles and that she knows little about his life.

School officials say there are steps teachers and counselors take when students are often absent. But Christina's case was complicated by her many transfers from school to school in a short period, according to Steve Wasko, spokesman for Detroit Public Schools. School officials are trying to sort through the paper trail of transfers to make sure policies were followed.

Christina and **Monson** lived in the first-floor apartment of a large, rambling, brick building for about two months, neighbors said. The building was damaged by a fire in the lobby Aug. 1. About four of the 37 apartments remain occupied.

The landlord, Bernard Bryant of Southfield, said **Monson** didn't belong there.

"He was there illegally," said Bryant, who manages a lawn maintenance business.

Bryant said he saw **Monson** two weeks ago when Bryant went to the building, smelled pot coming from a first-floor apartment and banged on the door. When no one answered, Bryant broke open the door and confronted **Monson** .

Monson told Bryant someone had given him a key to the apartment. Bryant said he ordered **Monson** out of the unit. Bryant said he learned later that **Monson** had moved into another unit, apparently after getting a key from another tenant.

That was the last Bryant knew until Saturday's killing.

Bryant said other tenants knew a girl was living there, but said they thought she was 17 years old.

On Monday, the lobby of the building was dark and charred, like a black, cavernous ruin. Gas lines were strung from the ceiling. Most residents do not have phones.

Linda Woods has lived in the building since 1991.

Woods said Christina had lied about her age.

"She kept telling everyone in the building she was 17," Woods said. "She was kind of a big kid."

Woods also said it was common knowledge that the couple sold drugs from their apartment.

Woods said she once asked Brown if her family knew she was staying in the apartment with **Monson** .

"I said, 'You're staying with him and your people ain't never seen him?'" Woods said. "She said, 'It doesn't matter.' I told her your best bet is to go home."

Woods told police she heard **Monson** drive up to the apartment at 7:30 a.m. Saturday. She got up, looked out the window and saw **Monson** come into the building. About 45 minutes later he left in a hurry. He jumped into his car and sped away, she told police.

Another neighbor, Kenneth Brown, said **Monson** came to his apartment door and told him to call Emergency Medical Services because his girlfriend was lying on the bathroom floor in a pool of blood.

Lt. Joan Ghouhoian of the homicide department said **Monson** 's surprised and frantic behavior around the crime scene was a ruse.

"He tried to play this little thing of leaving and coming back and finding her," she said, adding that **Monson** later confessed to police.

Friends and family members said **Monson** is innocent. A man who identified himself as **Monson's** uncle said **Monson** told his mother he was innocent and that police coerced a confession.

A man who answered the door at the home where **Monson** grew up on Highland near LaSalle would only say that he heard **Monson** found the child stabbed, called for help and then was wrongly arrested.

"He ain't got no rap," said the man who would not give his name but identified himself as a longtime family friend. He would not allow **Monson's** relatives to comment. "It's going to be over. He's innocent."

Inside the first-floor apartment where **Monson** lived with Christina, the two kept a double bed in the living room. The bedroom looked as if it had been ransacked. Clothes and peeling paint littered the floor and more clothes spilled out of dresser drawers.

In the bathroom, the floor looked as if it had been mopped with blood instead of water. Blood splattered the walls and covered the shower stall's corner walls.

The cold blew in through a shattered bathroom window. It was a scene not unlike the world Christina wrote about in one of her poems.

"People talk about poor people but they don't know how they feel sleeping in abandoned buildings not knowing when they're going to eat their next meal," she wrote, "walking around smelling like Wild Irish Rose . . . and burning sticks in barrels."

Funeral arrangements are pending.

HOW TO HELP

Anyone who suspects a child is being exploited, sexually or otherwise, by an adult should contact the local police department, officials said Monday.

Children 15 and under cannot legally consent to an act of sexual penetration and children 12 and under cannot consent to any sexual contact, said Nancy Diehl, director of the child and family abuse bureau of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Other laws intended to protect children include contributing to the delinquency of a minor -- a misdemeanor -- and using a juvenile to sell illicit drugs, a felony.

Also, the Children's Protective Services division of the Michigan Department of Social Services can investigate such allegations and try to locate a missing child, said DSS spokesperson Margarete Gravina. The department is listed in the phone book or through directory assistance.

"Normally, in a situation like this, we would make every effort to locate the child and, based on the circumstances, would probably take her into protective custody," Gravina said.

The DSS funds the Runaway Assistance Program, which provides referrals and crisis intervention for runaway children and their parents. The 24-hour hot line number is 1-800-292-4517.

The department also offers a 24-hour Parent Helpline, 1-800-942-HELP, for parents who need counseling or a referral.

There also is a national hot line to report child abuse or get information and counseling anytime at 1-800-422-4453.

Caption: Photo Color, Photo PAULINE LUBENS/Detroit Free Press; Photo Color; Map Detroit Free Press

: Yolanda Brown says she didn't know where her youngest child was living when she frequently ran away. "How would I know what she was doing? I wasn't out there with her," she said Monday.

LeMarr Monson, 22, was charged Monday with first-degree murder for the stabbing of his girlfriend, Christina Brown. Christina Brown ran away from home often and rarely attended school, yet the Department of Social Services hadn't been informed. Brandon Chadwick, 12, says he was very close to his cousin Christina Brown and she would talk to him about what troubled her. Christina was found stabbed to death Saturday. Her boyfriend has been charged.

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