

SERGEANT'S CHORE: HELP MAYOR'S KIN AVOID TROUBLE

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Detroit Police Sgt. James Harris was usually the guy who got the call when trouble involved Mayor Coleman Young's niece.

Harris, a 30-year veteran, has been on unofficial guard duty for Young's niece, Cathy Volsan Curry, since at least 1985, according to department records and officials who spoke on condition they not be identified.

Harris, Volsan Curry and her father, Willie Volsan, were among the people charged Tuesday with setting up security for FBI agents who posed as drug dealers shipping cocaine and cash to Detroit.

A day before that Feb. 23 shipment, Harris and Volsan surprised a burglar as they arrived together at Harris' west Detroit home.

According to police reports, the burglar jumped out of an upstairs window and started to run down the street with Harris and Volsan pursuing in an unmarked police car; the burglar fired a shot at them with a gun taken from the home.

The bullet struck the car but neither Harris nor Volsan was hurt, and a suspect was arrested after barricading himself in a home for a few hours.

The incident underscored Harris' reputation as a tough cop who was not afraid to stick his neck out.

A former member of STRESS -- the once-controversial Detroit police unit involved in several fatal shootings during the early 1970s -- Harris was involved in a March 1972 shoot-out with Wayne County sheriff's deputies that left a deputy dead. Harris testified he emptied his gun at the deputy, thinking he was a criminal.

Harris was cleared of charges and later was assigned to the Homicide Section and worked many of the city's highest-profile murder cases, including the investigation of the murders of four prostitutes in 1979-80 that led to the arrest of a former high school basketball coach, David Payton.

Payton's confession to Harris later was thrown out of court after Payton claimed it was coerced.

Danny Knepp, a retired homicide detective, said the charges against Harris and Lionel Dickens, a homicide investigator, "really hit me with a bomb."

"All I can tell you is they were two good cops," Knepp said. "Hell, I worked for years with both of them. . . . If you hadn't told me, hell, I'd go out with either one of them right now."

Department officials said that while Harris was assigned to the Special Services Division under then-Commander Gilbert Hill, he spent all of his time making sure Young's niece, Volsan Curry, was safe and out of trouble.

In April 1987, Volsan Curry was named an unindicted coconspirator in a joint federal-Detroit police investigation of a drug ring led by her husband, **Johnny Curry**, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

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