

Breonna Taylor, June 5, 1993 - Mar 13, 2020, 26 years old

Breonna Taylor was born on June 5, 1993, to Tamika Palmer in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Called “Bre” by her family and friends, Breonna moved to Louisville, Kentucky with her mother and much of her tightknit extended family when she was a teenager. In 2011, she graduated from Western High School in Louisville and began studying at the University of Kentucky. Bianca Austin, one of Breonna’s aunts, called her “mini me.” An uncle, Tyrone Bell, called her “Breezy.” Another aunt, Tahasha Holloway, said “She was cool, a cool cat.” Taylor loved to spend time with her family, and would often be the one to suggest a round of her favourite card games, Phase 10 and Skip-Bo. She gained a love for motorcycles and cars from her mother, who taught her how to ride, and said Breonna had recently bought a 2019 Dodge Charger R/T, that she was “so proud of.”

Breonna’s mother and aunts worked in healthcare, and she grew up wanting to follow in their footsteps. Breonna became a certified Emergency Medical Technician for the City of Louisville, then later worked as an Emergency Room Technician at the University of Louisville Jewish Hospital and Norton Healthcare in Louisville, including during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. She was preparing to return to school to become a nurse. Her aunt Tahasha said Breonna had already found “the perfect balance of being able to enjoy her life and understand the value of working and making things happen within your life.”

In a Facebook post made during her uncle’s recovery from a stroke, Breonna said, “Working in health care is so rewarding. It makes me feel so happy when I know I’ve made a difference in someone else’s life. I’m so appreciative of all the staff that has helped my uncle throughout this difficult time and those that will continue to make a difference in his life.”

On March 12, 2020, Detective Joshua Jaynes received authorization for five no-knock search warrants from Judge Mary Shaw for a narcotics investigation. One of the warrants was for Breonna Taylor’s apartment on Springfield Drive. Jaynes and his partner, Officer Kelly Goodlett, falsified information in order to get the no-knock warrant for Breonna’s address.

In the warrant request, Jaynes falsely claimed that a postal inspector had verified that a suspected drug trafficker, Jamarcus Glover, who Breonna had dated in the past, was receiving packages at Breonna’s apartment. In reality, the postal inspector, Tony Gooden, had concluded in January 2020 that Taylor’s home was not receiving any “packages of interest.” Jaynes’ and Goodlett’s Police Sergeant, Kyle Meany, was also aware of the false information when he signed off on the request. Goodlett later stated

that Jaynes took the warrant requests to Judge Shaw, believing she would not scrutinize them closely. Shaw approved all five warrants within 12 minutes.

That evening, Breonna Taylor and her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, were enjoying Breonna's first day off from work in several days. They had dinner at Texas Roadhouse before returning to her apartment, where they baked cookies, played Uno, and then fell asleep watching "Freedom Fighters."

At 12:40 a.m., on March 13, 2020, Kenneth and Breonna awoke to loud banging at their front door and got up to investigate. Kenneth grabbed the 9mm firearm he legally owned and brought it with him, thinking someone was breaking in.

The plainclothes Louisville police officers serving the no-knock search warrant at Breonna's home that night, Jonathan Mattingly, Myles Cosgrove, and Brett Hankison, had been told that Taylor was likely home alone, as Jamarcus Glover's location had been confirmed elsewhere. Their surveillance before serving the warrant purportedly supported this, with Mattingly reporting that the only light visible in her apartment was the glow of the television in her bedroom. The three officers had no prior involvement or knowledge of the investigation, having been brought on to help with serving the five warrants that night. Mattingly later said, "It was a heavy, manpower-intensive operation, and they just needed bodies."

Mattingly also said that the warrant was changed to a knock-and-announce warrant shortly before it was served, and that the officers repeatedly knocked and announced their presence before deciding to force entry. However, when Breonna's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, was interviewed just after the incident, he said he yelled for the strangers at the door to identify themselves and heard no response, saying, "The only reason I even had the gun out [was] because we didn't know who it was. If we knew who it was, that would have never happened."

As police burst through the front door with a battering ram, Breonna's boyfriend fired a single "warning shot" in self-defence, striking Mattingly in the leg. Mattingly returned fire, shooting six times at Kenneth and Breonna, who were both standing in the hallway. Cosgrove, also in the doorway, fired 16 shots into the home. Hankison was standing outside of the apartment and blindly fired 10 shots through a patio door and window, many of which entered a neighbouring apartment, where a pregnant woman, a man and a three-year-old child were at home. The police shot Taylor at least eight times, and she died in the hallway at 12:48 a.m.

In the 911 call Kenneth Walker made after Breonna was shot, he cried “I don’t know what is happening, somebody kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend... Help, oh my God.” Neither Kenneth nor Breonna had criminal records, and an investigation found no drugs in the apartment.

After calling 911, Kenneth called Breonna's mother, Tamika Palmer. Palmer rushed to the apartment, where police outside told her Breonna was at the hospital. She waited at the hospital for two hours before she found out that Breonna had never been there. She went back to the taped off apartment building and waited there for several more hours before an officer told her that Breonna was still inside the apartment. She said she knew what that meant.

None of the officers wore body cameras during the incident, which the LMPD said is common practice for plainclothes narcotics officers.

Kenneth told investigators later that following the shooting, officers told him he was ‘going to jail for the rest of his life and that a dog was going to be let loose on him.’ He said he was also asked if he was hit by any bullets and said no. The reply he received was ‘That’s unfortunate.’ Kenneth also told investigators that police told him the shooting was a “misunderstanding,” and seemed to be trying to cover up what really happened by asking if the couple had enemies. Kenneth Walker was arrested and charged with assault and the attempted murder of a police officer, though all charges were later dismissed.

On March 19, Breonna’s family held a vigil for her in downtown Louisville, with many of her family and friends in attendance. Coverage of her death was minimal at first, with news stories focusing on the injury of Officer Mattingly, and referring to Taylor and Walker only as “suspects.”

On April 27, Breonna’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against officers Mattingly, Cosgrove, and Hankison, alleging their “unlawful conduct” had “caused the death of a young, beautiful human being who was also an essential front-line medical professional in this community.”

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, igniting protests across the country and drawing more attention to other cases of police violence against Black people, including Breonna Taylor.

After Kenneth Walker's frantic 911 call was released to the public on May 28, protests began in Louisville calling for the officers responsible for Breonna's death to be fired and charged. Police clashed with protestors, using tear gas and pepper balls to control crowds.

On June 5, 2020, at the public celebration of life held on what would have been Breonna's 27th birthday, her aunt Bianca said, "I'm praying to God... We need real change in America. I've got to still raise a little black boy here in the world we live in. ... Nobody's safe. If this can happen to Breonna, it can happen to anybody."

On June 12, Mayor Fischer signed "Breonna's Law", banning no-knock search warrants in Louisville. On June 23, Hankison was fired by the LMPD for "blindly" firing 10 rounds into Breonna Taylor's apartment and the neighbouring unit, showing "extreme indifference to the value of human life."

On September 15, 2020, Breonna Taylor's family and the City of Louisville announced a record-setting \$12 million settlement in the wrongful death suit against the officers responsible for Taylor's death. The settlement also required the city to enact a series of reforms, including the establishment of a housing credit program as an incentive for officers to live in the areas they serve, the use of social workers as support on certain police runs, and the requirement that commanders review and approve search warrants before seeking judicial approval, among other changes. Breonna's mother, Tamika, said at the time, "Justice for Breonna means that we will continue to save lives in her honor... No amount of money accomplishes that, but the police reform measures that we were able to get passed as a part of this settlement mean so much more to my family, our community, and to Breonna's legacy."

On September 23, Hankison was indicted by a grand jury on three counts of felony wanton endangerment for firing bullets that went into the apartment next to Breonna's unit, where three people were present. No officers were indicted for killing Breonna Taylor. After that ruling, protests began happening daily in Louisville.

In December 2020, the city of Grand Rapids, where Breonna grew up, installed commemorative Breonna Taylor Way street signs at Monroe Center and Pearl Street.

In early January 2021, Erika Shields was named Louisville's new police chief and Cosgrove and Jaynes were officially fired. Mattingly was exonerated, but retired at the end of April 2021.

On April 9, 2021, Gov. Beshear signed Senate Bill 4, limiting the use of no-knock warrants across Kentucky.

On March 3 2022, a jury found Hankison not guilty on all three counts of wanton endangerment laid against him by the state in 2020. Protesters took to the streets again that night.

In August 2022, Jaynes, Goodlett, and Meany were charged by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) with submitting false information in the search warrant request, and then working with other officers to create a “false cover story in an attempt to escape responsibility for their roles in preparing the warrant affidavit that contained false information.” Jaynes was fired in 2021, and Goodlett and Meany were fired after the federal charges were laid against them. Goodlett confessed to the charge and plead guilty later that month. Jaynes and Meany both plead not guilty and are scheduled to be tried together in 2023.

In loving memory of Breonna Taylor.

Sources:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54210448>

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/clarissajanlim/obituary-breonna-taylor-louisville-kentucky-protests>

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/04/us/breonna-taylor-federal-charges>

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/19/us/breonna-taylor-officer-meany-fired>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/crime/2020/07/09/lmpd-interviews-breonna-taylors-home-soft-target/5404702002/>

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/breonna-taylor-killing-a-timeline-of-the-police-raid-and-its-aftermath-1.5804794>

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/breonna-taylor-shooting-2-timeline-171048562.html>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/9187109/breonna-taylor-louisville-police/>

<https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2022/08/former-police-detective-charged-in-breonna-taylors-death-to-plead-guilty.html>

<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/04/869930040/as-the-nation-chants-her-name-breonna-taylors-family-grieves-a-life-robbed>

<https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/12420734/Breonna-Taylor>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/14/breonna-taylor-what-know-louisville-emt-killed-police/5189743002/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/15/minute-minute-account-breonna-taylor-fatal-shooting-louisville-police/5196867002/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/06/30/fact-check-police-had-no-knock-warrant-breonna-taylor-apartment/3235029001/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/local/breonna-taylor/2020/10/28/anonymous-grand-jurors-in-breonna-taylor-case-speak-on-cbs/3752167001/>

<https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2020/08/breonna-taylor>

https://www.wdrb.com/in-depth/trials-for-2-former-lmpd-officers-charged-in-breonna-taylor-raid-delayed-until-next-year/article_c5dc35f4-3f5a-11ed-9897-cf0dc00e6528.html

<https://wfpl.org/judge-who-signed-breonna-taylor-search-warrant-facing-rare-competition/>