

Bullet ends troubled life Series: AROUND TAMPA BAY

[CITY Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.
Author: SUSAN CLARY
Date: Jul 10, 1995
Start Page: 3.B
Section: TAMPA BAY AND STATE
Text Word Count: 605

Document Text

Michael Stephen Gallagher had been in and out of jail for years. Since he was a teenager, his family says, he had been on drugs and unable to control a terrible anger that drove him to crime.

But after his release from prison a year ago, family members said he turned his life around. His father helped him start a successful lawn business, and he fell in love.

They can't understand what made Gallagher, 32, snap early Sunday and begin a series of crimes that ended when a Tampa police officer shot him dead after he lunged at the officer with a pipe.

"He was a super guy and everybody that met him liked him," said Gallagher's father, Thomas Gallagher, 54. "There was just some little devil up in his brain."

Authorities say the series of events began about 2 a.m. at the Southend Saloon and Grill, 5206 S MacDill Ave., when Gallagher followed a woman into the bathroom. Lt. Robert Pennington said Gallagher held a knife to her throat and threatened to rape her.

When a friend of the woman entered the bathroom to check on her, Gallagher ran from the bar, Pennington said. Police later found his truck in the bar parking lot.

A short time later, Gallagher broke into a home on Villa Rosa Avenue in South Tampa, where he did lawn work. He confronted a woman at the house and robbed her, Pennington said.

About 3 a.m., Gallagher tried to break into several units at the Chesapeake Apartments, 4711 S Himes Ave., Pennington said. Residents called 911 to report a man banging on doors.

Police arrived, and Officer Troy A. Neal, 27, saw Gallagher and began to chase him. Neal slipped on the wet grass and landed on his back, Pennington said. As he lay on the ground, Gallagher lunged at him with a 4-foot PVC pipe he had broken from the apartment's sprinkler system, Pennington said. Neal fired three shots from his 9mm handgun, striking Gallagher in the chest. Gallagher died at the scene.

Sunday morning's shooting was the second time Neal has shot and killed a suspect. On Feb. 27, 1992, he killed an armed, escaped felon in a Tampa nightclub.

The Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office ruled that shooting justified.

Like that man, Gallagher had a long prison record. Since 1985, he has been charged with attempted armed robbery and kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, battery on a law enforcement officer and attempted burglary, among other crimes.

In 1990, Gallagher was charged with attempted sexual battery, battery on a law enforcement officer and several charges of violation of probation. He served four years of a 10-year prison sentence and was released from jail 11 months ago, officials said.

Thomas Gallagher said that since his son was released from prison, he had been on medication for his sex drive, had seen a therapist, gone to anger management classes and joined Alcoholics Anonymous.

But in the four years he was in prison, "he didn't get any psychological help, and then they turned him out," Gallagher said. "If you are going to turn them out, get them some help. He just didn't get it."

Thomas Gallagher sent his son to Straight Inc., a drug treatment program, and several private hospitals, but nothing helped.

Recently, Gallagher seemed to be getting better. But two weeks ago he began to drink again after he and his girlfriend broke up, his father said.

"He had improved a lot over the last year," Gallagher said. "I guess he was a real menace to society, and now he ain't."

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO; Caption: MICHAEL STEPHEN GALLAGHER

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Officer fatally shoots man

[TAMPA Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.

Author: SUSAN CLARY

Date: Jul 10, 1995

Start Page: 1.B

Section: TAMPA TODAY

Text Word Count: 721

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Michael Stephen Gallagher had been in and out of jail for years. Since he was a teenager, his family says, he had been on drugs and unable to control a terrible anger that drove him to crime.

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When a friend of the woman entered the bathroom to check on her, Gallagher ran from the bar, Pennington said. Police later found his truck in the bar parking lot.

A short time later, Gallagher broke into a home on Villa Rosa Avenue in south Tampa, where he did lawn work. He confronted a woman at the house and robbed her, Pennington said.

Neighbors and Thomas Gallagher said the woman works as a bartender at the Pirate's Cove Bar & Grill, 5200 W Tyson Ave. Gallagher frequented the bar and knew the woman, his father said.

The woman was not at home later Sunday; neighbors said she had gone to stay with friends.

About 3 a.m., Gallagher tried to break into apartments at the Chesapeake Apartments, 4711 S Himes Ave., Pennington said. Several residents called 911 to report a man banging on doors.

Police arrived, and Officer Troy A. Neal, 27, saw Gallagher and began to chase him. As Gallagher turned to face Neal, the officer slipped on the wet grass and landed on his back, Pennington said.

As Neal lay on the ground, Gallagher lunged at him with a 4-foot PVC pipe he had broken from the apartment's sprinkler system, Pennington said. Neal fired three shots from his police-issued 9mm handgun, striking Gallagher in the chest. Gallagher died at the scene.

Neal, who has been with the Tampa Police Department since 1989, was placed on routine paid administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation by the police department and the State Attorney's Office.

Gallagher had a long prison record. Since 1985, he has been charged with attempted armed robbery and kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, battery on a law enforcement officer and attempted burglary, among other crimes. The disposition of those cases was not available Sunday.

In 1990, Gallagher was charged with attempted sexual battery, battery on a law enforcement officer and several charges of violation of probation. He served four years of a 10-year prison sentence and was released from jail 11 months ago, officials said.

Thomas Gallagher said that since his son was released from prison, he had been on medication for his sex drive, seen a therapist, gone to anger management classes and joined Alcoholics Anonymous. But in the four years he was in prison, his son did not receive any help.

"He didn't get any psychological help, and then they turned him out," Gallagher said. "If you are going to turn them out, get them some help. He just didn't get it."

Michael Gallagher grew up in Tampa, his father said. He went to Monroe Junior High and Robinson High School. He began experimenting with drugs when he was 12. Thomas Gallagher sent his son to Straight Inc., a drug treatment program, and several private hospitals, but nothing helped.

Recently, Gallagher seemed to be getting better. But two weeks ago he began to drink again after he and his girlfriend broke up, his father said.

"He always had those (bad) thoughts, but he was going to therapy and talking to people and sort of had it under control. He had improved a lot over the last year," Gallagher said. "I guess he was a real menace to society, and now he ain't."

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO; Caption: Michael Stephen Gallagher

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GOP seeks his checks, balances

[CITY Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.

Author: CURTIS KRUEGER

Date: Apr 10, 1995

Start Page: 1.B.1.B

Section: TAMPA BAY AND STATE; TAMPA TODAY

Text Word Count: 1414

Document Text

An army of tuxedoed waiters marched into Tampa's exclusive Centre Club on Wednesday, eager to please the guests who paid \$1,000 each for dinner.

They poured chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon and served a gourmet salad, an intermezzo of lemon sorbet, a trio of beef, chicken and prawns, and a fruit cornucopia.

But no waiter visited more tables than the man who may be the most powerful political fund-raiser in the Tampa Bay area.

Melvin F. Sembler glided across the room, greeted virtually everyone, and drew a few people aside to meet the guest of honor: former Tennessee governor and Republican presidential candidate Lamar Alexander.

By the end of the night, Alexander had played Chattanooga Choo Choo on the piano and explained his plan for revitalizing America.

And Sembler had increased Alexander's campaign account by more than \$100,000.

Sembler, a St. Petersburg-area developer, is an expert in the art of asking people for money.

Sembler raised money for George Bush in his 1980 and 1988 presidential campaigns, and as of 1988 contributed more than \$100,000 of his own money to Bush and Republican causes. He later was nominated by Bush to be ambassador to Australia.

He also served until recently as Florida Republican finance chairman, helping to raise a record \$11-million for the state party last year. Since 1989, he and his wife, Betty, have contributed another \$89,000 of his own money to Republican candidates and causes.

"He's a very effective fund-raiser," said former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher of Houston. "He's willing to pick up the phone and call people and ask them. That's the most important ingredient in fund-raising."

Now Sembler is national fund-raising co-chairman for the Alexander campaign.

His role is crucial. Experts say a winning GOP presidential bid could cost \$20-million. That's 200 events this year alone, according to party wisdom.

At this stage, the presidential candidates are locomotives and the fuel is money. Few people shovel it in as well as Sembler. A sought-after man

The best evidence of that is the way Republican presidential candidates went after Sembler this year.

Sembler made it known early on he would serve as national fund-raising chairman for Dick Cheney, the former U.S. defense secretary.

Cheney called Sembler one day this winter to say he was dropping out. Within an hour, Alexander called to recruit Sembler.

That day, Sembler also heard from Republican presidential hopefuls Phil Gramm and Arlen Specter. Aides to Bob Dole and Dan Quayle called in the next few days.

"You would have thought he was a 7-foot-3 basketball player who could jump over the backboard," Alexander said this

month.

Sembler flew to Washington for long meetings with Gramm and Dole. But Alexander had an edge with the Sembler family.

"I was born and raised in west Tennessee," Betty Sembler said. "That kind of does it."

Sought-after as he is, Sembler has been in the political fund-raising business for a relatively short time. A native of St. Joseph, Mich., he came to St. Petersburg in 1968 and made his mark as a developer. The Sembler Co., which Sembler founded, has developed and/or managed dozens of shopping centers, including Dolphin Village in St. Pete Beach, Bayside Bridge Plaza in Clearwater, Publix at Brooker Creek in East Lake and Highland Square in Inverness.

In 1979, frustrated with the Carter administration and what he and his wife saw as its weak anti-drug stance, Sembler hosted a fund-raiser for George Bush. Ask, and he shall receive

Florida Republican chairman Tom Slade said he has been in the room when Sembler asked someone for \$100,000 - and got it.

"He's absolutely without fear," Slade said. "He will ask you for more money than you ever thought you might be going to give."

How does he do it? Fellow Republicans say Sembler succeeds because he has a vast network of contacts and knows how to get new people involved. He truly believes in the people and causes he supports, his fans say, and devotes tremendous energy to them.

His ability to inspire others to raise money was evident Wednesday night.

Cathy Hogan never had raised money for a politician before. But she and her husband, Gerald, who is president of Home Shopping Network, knew Alexander from Tennessee and were impressed.

Sembler encouraged her to sell tickets to the dinner, predicting she would sell 10 easily. She was a little amazed at the price, \$1,000 per plate.

But she started asking friends. Although many weren't too aware of Alexander, she sold 13 tickets.

Sembler is careful to encourage the people he enlists in his fund-raising battles. At the dinner, he singled out and praised Carol Funk of Tampa, an interior designer who with her husband, Charlie, sold 41 tickets.

Carol Funk said she was so enthusiastic about Alexander that she was able to sell tickets even though many people had not yet decided whom to support for president.

"They'd say, 'Lamar who?' I'd say, 'He's running for president.' They'd say, 'President of what?' " Believes in his causes

The enthusiasm that Hogan and Funk saw are Sembler trademarks, his friends say.

"Mel's involvement in politics is for very noble reasons, and people know that," said former GOP gubernatorial candidate Jeb Bush.

"I've never known him when he's been negative or down," said Al Hoffman of Tampa, Florida fund-raising chairman for Gramm. For Sembler, "this isn't some sort of drudgery," said Phil Handy, a Winter Park businessman and Republican activist now working with Alexander.

"He's very enthusiastic and hard-charging all the way," said Dan Doyle, chief executive officer of Danka Industries in St. Petersburg. Doyle adds: "He believes in his causes."

As fund-raising chairman for the Florida Republican Party last year, Sembler's pitch went like this: Contributors could make a real change in Florida by putting the GOP in control.

It struck a chord with Doyle - who handed over \$50,000 of his own money. "Quite frankly, I wasn't satisfied with the way the country was running at that time," Doyle said.

Sembler shows his supporters that he believes in their causes, too. When Doyle later called him for a contribution to the Florida Orchestra, Sembler not only contributed but found other donors.

"If keeping the symphony in St. Petersburg was important to Dan Doyle," Sembler said, "then it's got to be important to me." What donors get

What do contributors expect for their money?

"I can't promise you a result," GOP Chairman Slade said he tells contributors. "I can more than likely promise you

access, so that you can make your pitch to the appropriate people."

Sembler sounds a different note. "I've never had anybody who gives me a major contribution ask for a darn thing except good government." Still, he admits, "most people don't believe that. And everybody thinks there's something dirty about fund-raising."

In fact, Sembler came under criticism in 1989 when Bush nominated Sembler and fellow St. Petersburg developer Joseph Zappala for ambassadorships, although neither had diplomatic experience.

Democrats said the men were nominated because of their campaign work. They even were lampooned in "Doodlesbury."

Sembler, who served as ambassador to Australia until 1993, remains bitter about the nomination process, and said he feels sorry for others - Democrats or Republicans - who have endured it.

It wasn't the only time he has been accused of using political connections to get what he wants.

A state audit released in 1993 indicated that Sembler might have tried to pressure the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services to renew a license for Straight Inc., a controversial drug treatment center that Mel and Betty Sembler founded.

Commenting on that memo for the first time last week, Sembler said, "I don't recall pressuring (then-HRS Secretary) Greg Coler, but I have no problems with that. Why shouldn't we have the best drug treatment program in the United States functioning in our state?"

Straight closed its national offices, in St. Petersburg, upon Sembler's return from Australia. Looking ahead

Now Sembler is focused on 1996 and Alexander.

Sembler said he firmly believes Alexander will win. But he is prepared for the alternative. He has pledged to work for whomever wins the Republican nomination.

That makes some people happy. Said Sembler: "Phil Gramm says, 'I don't want you to work too hard in the primary, because I'm going to need you in the general.'" - Times researcher Kitty Bennett contributed to this story.

[Illustration]

COLOR PHOTO, KATHLEEN CABBLE; Caption: St. Petersburg-area developer and Republican fund-raiser Mel Sembler talks on the telephone.

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