

San Francisco Chronicle

Runner killed in hit-run is mourned 'A beautiful lady whose life was stolen from her'

Suzanne Herel, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Ashlyn Dyer of San Francisco had planned to compete in the Los Angeles Marathon this weekend.

Instead, family and friends will hold a memorial service for her Saturday, and a contingent of runners will wear ribbons of orange -- her favorite color -- the following day in the race that she won't run.

Dyer, 27, was a college volleyball star and a dedicated runner. It was her passion for being outdoors that placed her in the path of a hit-and-run driver March 2 as she ran through the Presidio listening to her iPod.

"She was never one to be cooped up inside," said Andy Krikorian of San Francisco, who had known Dyer since their years at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach (Los Angeles County). "She was always looking to go do something."

Early on March 2, Dyer was running south along Washington Boulevard near Kobbe Avenue, an area popular with cyclists and joggers but only sparsely traveled by cars, said Sgt. Robert Jansing, a detective with the U.S. Park Police.

Sometime between 6:45 and 7 a.m., police say, a car sped southbound around a curve on Washington and struck Dyer,



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catapulting her over a fence and into a ditch. She lay there, face-down and unconscious, until a park worker found her around 7 a.m.

Although she was listening to her iPod, police believe she heard the car and turned around before she was hit. That's because even though the car approached from behind, she was struck on her right side, as if she had been facing the vehicle.

Police estimated that the driver was going faster than the 25 mph speed limit and said there were no skid marks or other evidence that the car had braked.

"Whoever did this knew it," Jansing said. He noted that one of Dyer's shoes flew off and landed 60 feet away. "For a force like that, the driver had to know what happened."

Dyer carried no identification, and for several hours no one knew who she was. Police finally used the registration information from the iPod she kept in an orange case to identify her.

Had she been helped promptly, she probably would have recovered, doctors at San Francisco General Hospital told Dyer's parents. As it was, her brain went without oxygen for more than 10 minutes, which led to swelling and irreparable damage.

Her parents, Bruce and Marsha Dyer of Phoenix, were told that if she did survive, she would remain in a vegetative state. They agreed to stop treatment, and the youngest of their three daughters was pronounced dead at 4:23 p.m. Sunday.

"Doctors were able to harvest all healthy organs, which will provide the gift of life to many," her parents wrote on a Web site they started to keep her friends up to date.

Dyer's final contribution to the vitality of others was of some solace for her family and friends, said Joe Harper, Dyer's friend since the second grade.

"Her parents feel very good that her heart is going to someone and that she will save the lives of a few," Harper said. The Dyers did not respond to a request for an interview.

Brian Wilhite, who described himself as Dyer's former fiance, attended a news conference at the U.S. Park Police office Monday wearing an orange ribbon in his lapel.

"Someone running or riding must have seen something," he said. "If we can just remind the public to jog their memory, maybe someone will remember something. She was a beautiful lady with a beautiful heart and soul. She was a beautiful lady whose life was stolen from her."

Dyer's death was the first hit-and-run fatality in the Presidio since the former Army base became a national park in 1994. The stretch of road where she was hit is lined by Monterey pines and cypress trees but has no sidewalks. The Pacific Ocean sparkles in the

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distance, and a nearby memorial honors 413 West Coast veterans lost in World War II.

On Monday, a bouquet of yellow daisies and a small plastic cross were tied to a traffic sign near where Dyer was found. An attached message read, "Ashlyn, you are in our prayers. We love you."

After graduating from Mira Costa High School, Dyer attended University of Southern California, where she studied broadcast journalism, Harper said.

"She was an unbelievable athlete," he said. "She ran three marathons in a period of three months."

Dyer moved to San Francisco about four years ago, where she rented an apartment with three friends in Laurel Village, about 2 miles from where she was struck, Harper said. She was a buyer for Red Envelope, a local Internet retailer that markets unusual and personalized gifts.

"She was very good at it. She always seemed to have an eye for that sort of thing," Krikorian said.

He described his friend as a hard worker, smart and talented, a woman who enjoyed writing and reading. In her free time, she volunteered at the San Francisco Ballet, Harper said.

"She was really taking advantage of the city, which a lot of people don't do," Krikorian said.

Police have made no arrests but said Monday they were testing debris found at the site that could have come from the hit-and-run car. In any event, they added, the car is sure to be conspicuous by the front-end damage that the impact caused. Anyone with information about the accident is asked to call Jansing at (415) 561-5144.

A memorial service is scheduled Saturday at Mira Costa High School. Dyer's family has established the Ashlyn Dyer Fund for Neurological Research through the Marin Community Foundation. Information about the fund can be found at www.marincf.org/page28529.cfm

Chronicle staff writer Steve Rubenstein contributed to this report. E-mail Suzanne Herel at sherel@sfchronicle.com.

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