

Writing the Investigative Story

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If circumstances allow, write a story, not an exposé

Create suspense. Use dialogue. Shift perspective. Circle and loop. Experiment with Chekhov's gun. Heed Elmore Leonard's 10 Rules of Writing, particularly No. 10: "Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip." If you're bored writing it, others will be bored reading it.

Beware of bullets

They're more like tranquilizer darts, likely to put readers to sleep. Also beware of the investigative-series formula: overview; case study; the fix. Elmore Leonard, No. 10, applies here as well: Leave out any parts that readers will want to skip. If you lose readers on Monday, they're unlikely to return on Tuesday.

Pronouns can be good for you

Lose your fear of first- and second-person pronouns (I'm talking to you). Sometimes you become part of the story – or your newspaper does. If that happens, shoot straight. Say "we." Pronouns are direct; to newspaper readers weary of institutional voice, they can be engaging and honest.

Choose wisely

As a reporter, you have a choice. You can describe a debate, or you can inform it. Inform it.

If you reach a bold conclusion, state it boldly

Don't tiptoe. At the same time, remember: You must earn the right, through your reporting, to speak with such authority.

Long live the nerd box

Some readers want to know how you did what you did – what databases you merged, which documents you consulted, how many queries you ran. Most don't. Put your sourcing and how-we-did-it elements in a nerd box, displayed prominently. A nerd box provides authority and transparency without getting in the story's way.

Behind every dot on the map (or row on the Excel sheet), there's a person

Don't let readers forget that.

Report for story

Gather transcripts. (Remember: Dialogue). Gather video and audio. (Everyone's recording everything these days, or so it seems.) Think in scenes – and what you'll need to make those scenes pop.

Too few dimensions can make you a cartoon

If you're serious about writing, don't limit yourself to investigative stories. Experiment. Write profiles, essays, hard-edged features, long-form narratives. This can help you avoid the trap of casting people in simplistic roles: victim, villain, whatever.

And ... a quick interviewing tip

Ask short questions. Then be quiet and listen.

Two cops, an ax and many questions on Bainbridge

Originally published Feb. 26, 2012

By Jonathan Martin and Ken Armstrong

There's really no saying what Doug Ostling was thinking once he hung up the phone. His parents say he was impulsive. An idea came to him, he acted and moved on. It may not have even occurred to him that calling 911 and yelling — "What are you!" "What is that!" "Are you intelligent?" — would bring the police to his home.

Ostling, 43, lived on Bainbridge Island with his parents, in a studio apartment above the garage. His room — oak floor, cedar walls, a low, pitched ceiling — was cluttered with a half-dozen computers and books stacked high, on the verge of toppling. "Celestial Navigation in the GPS Age." "Ordinary Differential Equations." "The Radar Book."

He had a double-bitted ax, to cut kindling for his wood-burning stove; a rocking chair; and by his bed a row of science-fiction titles by Isaac Asimov.

On the night of Oct. 26, 2010, two Bainbridge Island police officers set out to check on whoever had called 911. The caller, the dispatcher said, might be in a state of "excited delirium," or psychiatric distress.

The department's General Orders Manual gave instructions on dealing with someone who's mentally disturbed: move slowly; minimize noise; take time to assess, gathering information from the person's family; avoid physical contact; don't threaten or agitate. One of the officers, Dave Portrey, would later tell a lawyer he was unfamiliar with that section of the manual.

And Portrey didn't know what "excited delirium" was. Asked later to define it, he said: "Where a person was — I believe it's attracted to a — shiny objects."

The second officer, Jeff Benkert, had been with the department for three years. He came from the Los Angeles Police Department, where he would have been fired if he hadn't quit. It's not like he kept that a secret. While applying to Bainbridge he'd disclosed those findings of dishonesty and neglect of duty.

Portrey arrived first at the Ostling home, tucked in the woods at the end of a long gravel drive. By 8:54 p.m., Benkert had joined him.

What happened in the next 4 minutes and 50 seconds — and in the hours after that, and in the fallout that continues to this day — has generated doubts about the Bainbridge Island Police Department's competence and culture, particularly since the missteps of that night do not stand alone.

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Maurice Clemmons freed with help from bail system, lawyer's connections

By Jonathan Martin and Ken Armstrong
Seattle Times staff reporters

Published Oct. 19, 2010

Maurice Clemmons needed help — and to his mind, that meant finding someone with connections, a "heavyweight," the kind of guy who knows everyone and everyone knows him.

In the summer of 2009, Clemmons was being held in the Pierce County Jail on eight felony charges. His home state of Arkansas had issued a no-bail fugitive warrant, meaning he couldn't get out no matter how much money he could raise.

So on July 3, 2009 — a Friday, just before 1 p.m. — Clemmons made a call to Stephen Morley, his old lawyer in Arkansas.

Morley told Clemmons how sorry he was to hear about Clemmons' arrest.

"Gosh, dog," Morley said.

"It ain't bad as you think, man," Clemmons said.

Clemmons explained: His wife, Nicole, caught him cheating. To punish him, she made up a story about how he had raped her 12-year-old daughter. Nicole was willing to recant now. But he'd already been charged with child rape — and was being held in Washington on \$150,000 bond for that charge, plus \$40,000 bond for other charges, plus the no-bail hold out of Arkansas, where he was still on parole.

Clemmons' account skirted how there was more evidence than Nicole's word to support the child-rape charge. But Morley didn't dig. He sympathized. He said everyone makes mistakes. People like Nicole have to learn to forgive.

"God damn it," Morley said. "One-hundred-fifty-thousand dollar bond, all this heartache and bull — , all for a [expletive] lie."

Clemmons told Morley he was in danger of losing his houses and landscaping business, all because of some adultery.

"You feel me?"

"I do, buddy," Morley said. "I've suffered a lot from [screwing] around on my ex-wife, and, you know, it cost me a bunch of money, but not like this."

Morley's cheating had indeed cost him. A onetime traffic judge in North Little Rock, Morley had resigned from the bench in 1997 in the face of 26 disciplinary charges. Adultery accounted for two of the allegations: He was accused of cheating on one wife, getting a divorce, marrying the mistress, then cheating on her.

Morley was also accused of punching both wives in the stomach while they were pregnant. And of threatening to kill a process server ("I will hunt you down"). And of smoking marijuana; sniffing cocaine; filing a fraudulent insurance claim; forging a signature; and lying to police. That's a partial list. After threatening to kill the process server, Morley stuck his tongue out at him, according to the charging documents.

After leaving the bench, Morley had prospered in private practice. He represented dozens of liquor retailers in permit disputes and was elected secretary/treasurer of the Arkansas Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

He worked out of a low-slung complex of brown buildings in North Little Rock, a few blocks north of the muddy, slow-moving Arkansas River. An Arkansas Razorbacks rug decorated his office, along with a fish tank. On his desk Morley displayed two buck knives.

Clemmons and Morley had a history. In 2004 Morley had convinced a judge to throw out a couple of aggravated robbery charges against Clemmons, arguing that authorities had taken too long to serve the arrest warrant.

Now, five years later, Morley offered Clemmons hope once again, this time on getting the Arkansas fugitive warrant rescinded.

"I've got a real, real, real good connection out at the Governor's Office," Morley told Clemmons. "So, you know, I feel like we can get a fair disposition real quick on this. Real quick."

"You can't just make it disappear?"

"I think I can, that's what I'm saying."

Clemmons told Morley he wanted out: "Today." Morley told Clemmons to shoot him \$5,000. Clemmons said he'd make it \$20,000 and send a postdated check.

"That's OK with me," Morley said.

"It's not going to happen over the weekend, though," Morley told Clemmons. "I mean, she's up in Fort Smith, and maybe over in Oklahoma at the casinos. So ..."

"So what you think?" Clemmons said. "The early part of next week or what?"

"I do. I mean that sincerely."

"So you just gonna make it disappear where I can bond out?"

"Yup."

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Convicted of assault and accused of rape, star player received raft of second chances

Originally published Jan. 27, 2008

By Ken Armstrong and Nick Perry
Seattle Times staff reporters

Rick Neuheisel, head coach of the University of Washington's football team, was playing golf when a cart came rolling up and someone handed him a phone.

The UW's sports-information director was on the other end: One of the team's best players had just been arrested, on suspicion of rape.

Before 7 that morning — Thursday, July 27, 2000 — Seattle police detectives, accompanied by a SWAT team, had served a search warrant at the home of Jerramy Stevens and taken him away.

The UW football team was used to run-ins with the law. It even had a system, of sorts, for dealing with them. Randy Hart, the defensive-line coach, had police contacts who would tell him when players were in trouble. Other coaches had names of attorneys players could contact.

One lawyer stood out: Mike Hunsinger, a UW alumnus and longtime fan. In time, Hunsinger would represent at least 14 members of the 2000 football team — players accused of hit-and-run, animal cruelty, punching a security guard, DUI, taking part in an attack on a fraternity, sexual assault, punching windows out of cars, domestic violence, assaulting a parking attendant. He'd charge the players a few hundred bucks and let them pay over time.

Neuheisel got in touch with Barbara Hedges, the university's athletic director, to see what she wanted to do.

At 1:30 p.m., less than seven hours after Stevens' arrest, a fax arrived at the Seattle Police Department's sexual-assault unit. It was addressed to Maryann Parker, the lead detective, who had been investigating the case for seven weeks.

The fax came from Hunsinger's office. We're representing Jerramy Stevens, the message said. Please call us immediately.

The month before, just after 3 a.m. on June 4, a UW student called 911 to report a possible rape in progress.

Walking back to his dorm, he'd passed a row of fraternities and sororities and seen two people against a building. A woman, wearing only a bra and maybe underwear, leaned against a wall, arms to her side. A tall man faced her, his back to the passer-by.

The situation didn't look right, the student told police. The woman looked right at him but did nothing to cover up. She looked drugged or drunk: "Half passed out ... eyes glazed ... no one home."

"The male was controlling things," the witness said. "It wasn't a two-person interlude."

When the man turned and caught sight of the passer-by, he moved the woman behind a bush.

Seattle police responded but couldn't find the two.

Nine hours later, around noon, a 19-year-old freshman woke up at the Pi Beta Phi sorority. She had a headache, stomach pain, sore ribs, scratched legs. She could barely move. Her bra and tube top were around her waist and covered in dirt. Her underwear was missing.

"What happened to me?" she asked her roommate.

About the same time, Jerramy Stevens emerged from his room. He lived with several teammates in a house north of campus. He pulled a pair of women's underpants out of his jeans pocket and, according to a police report, told a roommate, "Look what I have."

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YOUR COURTS, THEIR SECRETS

The cases your judges are hiding from you

By Ken Armstrong, Justin Mayo and Steve Miletich
Seattle Times staff reporters

This story was originally published March 5, 2006.

Four years ago, a lawsuit was filed in King County Superior Court, alleging that a medical device was unsafe. A woman using it wound up in a coma. You'd probably like to know: What's the device? Does anyone in my family use it? Unsafe how?

But you can't know. You're not allowed to know. Medtronic, the multibillion-dollar company that makes the device, asked a judge to conceal the whole file from public view — and the judge said OK.

Twelve years ago, an Eastside family sued KinderCare, one of the country's largest child-care companies, saying it was responsible for the sexual abuse of a child. You'd like to know: Who was accused of sexual abuse? How was KinderCare involved? Were police notified?

But you can't know. That file, too, is sealed — hidden away by a court commissioner who has sealed dozens of cases, stamping his name on one secrecy order after another.

Document after document, file after file, has been sealed — and sealed improperly — by the judges and court commissioners of King County Superior Court. A wrongful-death lawsuit against Virginia Mason Medical Center? Sealed. A lawsuit accusing a King County judge of legal malpractice? Sealed. A lawsuit blaming the state's social-services agency for the rape of a 13-year-old girl? Sealed.

Since 1990, at least 420 civil suits have been sealed in their entirety, The Seattle Times found. That means everything — from the complaint, which says who's accused of what, to the judgment, which says how the case wound up — has been concealed, locked behind electronic passwords or number-coded keypads that restrict access to computer records and shelved files.

These sealed records hold secrets of potential dangers in our medicine cabinets and refrigerators; of molesters in our day-care centers, schools and churches; of unethical lawyers, negligent doctors, dangerous dentists; of missteps by local and state agencies; of misconduct by publicly traded companies into which people sink their savings.

The Washington Constitution says: "Justice in all cases shall be administered openly." To this, many King County judges have effectively added: "unless the parties don't want it to be."

The judges have displayed an ignorance of, or indifference to, the legal requirements for sealing court records. They have routinely sealed files while 1) offering little or no explanation, 2) applying the wrong legal standard, and 3) failing to acknowledge, much less weigh, the public interest in open court proceedings.

At least 97 percent of their sealing orders disregard rules set down by the Washington Supreme Court in the 1980s.

The state's highest court says court records should be sealed only in rare circumstances. Its message is: **Your** taxes pay for the courts. **You're** entitled to know what goes on there. **You** elect the judges. **You** need to know how they do their job. The public cannot evaluate its court system — nor hold judges accountable — if the courthouse curtains are drawn.

Judges and commissioners have sealed at least 46 cases where a public institution is a party. Is some public agency slipping up? Some public employee? Are taxpayer dollars at risk? Good questions all, but **you** can't have the answers. Local school districts, the University of Washington, the state Department of Social and Health Services — all have had files sealed.

Judges and commissioners have sealed at least 58 cases where a fellow lawyer is a party, usually as a defendant. Leading firms, prominent lawyers, judges — all have had files about them sealed.

The courts have sealed cases where the person being sued was a licensed professional — for example, a doctor, psychologist or counselor — who was subsequently disciplined by the state. Those lawsuits might have served as a warning, had they not been concealed from the public.

And the courts have sealed one case after another at the request of the rich and influential, including leaders in real estate, advertising, banking, medicine, software development, the Internet, general business and sports.

The 420 cases that **we** found represent but a sliver of all the sealed records in our courthouses. That number applies only to civil suits in one court: King County Superior. **We** excluded other types of cases, such as divorce, adoption, paternity or child-custody matters. The 420 also accounts only for cases sealed in their entirety. Many others are sealed in part. **We** stopped counting those at 1,000.

Two years ago, the Washington Supreme Court wrote: "The open operation of **our** courts is of utmost public importance. Justice must be conducted openly to foster the public's understanding and trust in **our** judicial system and to give judges the check of public scrutiny. Secrecy fosters mistrust."

The court wrote that while unanimously reversing a King County judge who had improperly sealed court records in a business lawsuit. And this was a case where the judge sealed part of the file, not the whole thing.

The same judge, Sharon Armstrong, has sealed the entire file in at least 11 cases since 1990. A lawsuit involving a pedophile priest? Sealed. A lawsuit against Metro for hitting a pedestrian in a crosswalk? Sealed. She has also sealed two lawsuits against the state Department of Social and Health Services, and three against lawyers or law firms.

In months to come, The Seattle Times plans to get files unsealed and questions answered. The court's leadership crafted a plan that would have opened files with minimal delay, but other judges rebelled, saying the newspaper should be required to file a formal motion in each case that was improperly sealed.

We're going to be filing lots of motions.

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HEADLINE: The empty promise of an equal defense
Part 1: A case study in incompetence / For some, free counsel
comes at a high cost

BYLINE: Ken Armstrong, Florangela Davila and Justin Mayo;
Seattle Times staff reporters

BODY:

"Mr. Romero, how old are you?"

"54, I believe."

(Lawyer disciplinary hearing, November 2002)

Some lawyers command a courtroom. Guillermo Romero shuffles around it, head down and voice low, shrinking as an unprepared student avoiding the professor's eye.

For more than eight years, he worked as a public defender in Central Washington's Grant County. To as many as 1,000 clients — poor, desperate, often despised — he was all that stood between an accusation and prison.

He was supposed to punch holes in weak cases, to intercept police and prosecutors when they ran afoul, to investigate and analyze and advocate.

But legal basics eluded him. In a rape case, he once filed a motion seeking "D and A testing." What he meant was DNA.

He gave lousy advice, according to disciplinary officials. You can't appeal, he told one client, when the client certainly could. You can leave the country before trial, he told another, when the client certainly could not.

He allowed the state to take liberties. He didn't object when a prosecutor compared his client to Hitler. He didn't object when the same prosecutor argued that everyone who goes to rock concerts uses drugs. He didn't object when police transcribed the tape-recorded statement of a teenage murder suspect and inserted damning words the boy never uttered.

Romero couldn't object, because he had never bothered to listen to his client's taped confession.

The last time Romero won a trial in Grant County Superior Court was in 1997, according to court documents. His record since then is zero and 23.

Twice, reviewing courts ruled that he was so incompetent, the adversarial system had collapsed.

Four decades ago, in the celebrated case of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the U.S. Supreme Court promised to turn a noble ideal into more than just words. By ruling that defendants too poor to hire their own attorney must be provided one at public expense, the court

Documents:

Transcript: Disciplinary hearing before the
Washington State Bar Association

Analysis of computerized court data, along
with hand-checking of individual files

A motion for a continuance in a criminal
case file

State Bar disciplinary records

Appellate rulings; trial transcripts;
deposition transcripts

Analysis of computerized court data, along
with hand-checking of individual files

Appellate rulings

reaffirmed that all people accused of crime must stand equal before the law.

Grant County is Gideon's lie.

It is a lie repeated across Washington and America, in systems that try to control costs – sometimes at the expense of justice.

Two-thirds of Washington counties, including Grant, pay for public defense through contracts that typically pay a fixed amount no matter how many cases come through their courts. That can leave public defenders less time per case, and lead to adversarial breakdowns.

Warnings about such contracts have been sounded for three decades, but the state has refused to enforce public-defense standards or to help fund indigent defense at the trial level except in extraordinary cases.

Last spring, Romero quit working as a public defender; he is waiting for the Washington Supreme Court to decide whether to strip him of his law license.

But how did he land such a crucial job in the first place? And how did he keep it for so long?

BOTH SIDES OF THE LAW

Guillermo Romero keeps a small office tucked in the basement of a bank building – the rent is cheap, he says – about a block from the Grant County Courthouse in Ephrata. His walls hold pictures of Che Guevara, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi.

His passion, he says, is to help people. He pulls a ledger from his desk and points to a donation he made: Red Cross. \$100.

"And I saw another one in here that I was proud of," he says, riffling through the book. "Hold on. I've got to stroke my ego here."

He finds it: Food bank. \$100.

"That's what I do," he says. "That is what I do, my friend."

For weeks, Romero balked at being interviewed, but when he talks, he talks for 5 hours – about his history with drugs, his recovery, his assault conviction, his tax liens and debts, his love of football and kites, and how he's being picked on by the Washington State Bar Association because he's Hispanic and a bachelor.

He pulls out a letter – a bar complaint against him – and points to profane language that a client attributed to him. *Does that sound*

Documents:

Newspaper survey of Washington's 39 counties; county contracts; state study of public-defense contracts

Police records, probation records, creditor lawsuits (pulled in several counties), divorce file, tax liens, lawyer disciplinary records (including entries Romero made on his personal calendar)

Sources for this story, Chapter 1

For this series, reporters relied heavily on public records, filing 91 public-disclosure requests with 27 agencies in Washington and California. Reporters also conducted dozens of interviews of players, players' relatives, coaches, university administrators, professors, academic advisers, prosecutors, police officers, lawyers, judges and others who had dealings with the UW's 2000 football team.

Jerramy Stevens declined to be interviewed.

Today's stories relied on records from the Thurston County Sheriff's Office, Prosecuting Attorney's Office and Superior Court; depositions of Rick Neuheisel, Barbara Hedges, Keith Gilbertson and Jim Lambright, along with deposition exhibits; documents from the Washington State Executive Ethics Board; records from the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the Seattle Police Department regarding the investigation of alleged sexual assault (these included witness statements and Detective Maryann Parker's voluminous reports); records from Washington State Patrol, Medina Police Department, University of Washington Police Department, Bellevue Police Department and the Scottsdale (Ariz.) Police Department; news accounts from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Seattle Times, The Associated Press, The Olympian and The Tampa (Fla.) Tribune.

Other records include documents from the Washington State Attorney General's Office regarding a lawsuit filed against Stevens and the UW; court records from King County Superior Court and King County District Court; audiotaped hearings from Kirkland Municipal Court; and Norm Maleng's prepared news conference remarks.

26. Always Hated, Never Faded

Documents: SPD records (01-207148) and court records (SMC, 401175) on the crash into the retirement home; police and court records on speeding tickers or warnings written by the WSP and the Cheney, Clyde Hill, and Bellevue police departments; WSP records on the negligent-driving citation (13295560); Medina Police Department records on the arrest on suspicion of DUI (Incident No. 03M0178) and the accompanying court records (Kirkland Municipal Court, 29891M); audio recording of the sentencing hearing in the Medina case; court records in lawsuits filed by four women accusing UW football players of rape (KCSC, 03-2-26969-7, 03-2-35567-4, and 04-2-04660-2); depositions of Neuheisel (June 18, 2004), Hedges (April 4, 2004), Jim Lambright (August 6, 2004) and Keith Gilbertson (June 28, 2004) in lawsuits filed against the UW (KCSC, 03-2-35567-4 and 03-2-26969-7); a lawsuit filed against the UW and Medtronic, Inc., that was improperly sealed (KCSC, 02-2-16649-1); May 23, 2004, letter from Mike Hunsinger to counsel for the UW, laying out terms of the settlement for Marie's lawsuit; June 17, 2004, letter from Hunsinger to Marie's attorney, saying a check for \$300,000 is enclosed (Note: That amount covers the amount paid by both Stevens and the fraternity; we do not know how much each party paid toward that total); property records from the King County Department of Assessments (parcel No. 0293950730); court records of the lawsuit filed against Stevens by his condo association (KCSC, 04-2-19725-2); minutes of Astoria at Meydenbauer Bay Homeowners' annual meeting held March 22, 2007, discussing fines and pending lawsuit against Stevens; Bellevue police records on noise and other complaints concerning Stevens's condominium (B10705675, B10715330, BPD00649307, BPD00649607, BPD00649707, BPD08125006, BPD07695706, BPD04356806, BPD08390406, BPD03298506, case No. 07-1128); police and court records on the stops in 2006 for driving with a suspended license (WSP, C00602522, and Bellevue Police Department, BCO143378); Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department reports on the 2007 arrest on suspicion of DUI (07-07670).

State pushes drug that saves money, costs lives

Published Dec. 11, 2011

By Michael J. Berens and Ken Armstrong
Seattle Times staff reporters

Map the deaths and you see the story.

Assign a dot to each person who has died in Washington by accidentally overdosing on methadone, a commonly prescribed drug used to treat chronic pain. Since 2003, there are 2,173 of these dots. That alone is striking, a graphic illustration of an ongoing epidemic.

But it's the clusters that pop out — the concentration of dots in places with lower incomes.

Everett, whose residents earn less than the state average, has 99 dots. Bellevue, with more people and more money, has eight. Working-class Port Angeles has 40 dots. Mercer Island, upscale and more populous, has none.

For the past eight years Washington has steered people with state-subsidized health care — Medicaid patients, injured workers and state employees — to methadone, a narcotic with two notable characteristics. The drug is cheap. The drug is unpredictable.

The state highlights the former and downplays the latter, cutting its costs while refusing to own up to the consequences, according to a Seattle Times investigation that includes computerized analysis of death certificates, hospitalization records and poverty data.

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Doctors expected Angeline Burrell's surgery to be routine. But when Burrell, a 911 dispatcher for King County, had her gall bladder removed in 2004, she was left with excruciating pain, mystifying physicians.

Doctors prescribed painkillers, but the pain wouldn't go away. The more Burrell sought help, the more doctors suspected she was a pill seeker, a prescription addict scamming for drugs.

"She tried to find a doctor to believe her," says her mother, Sara Taylor. "She became depressed, and it just kept getting worse."

Co-workers pitched in, donating sick days to Burrell.

Two years passed before doctors diagnosed surgical-related nerve damage. By then, Burrell had lost her job, her house in Spanaway and her private insurance. She moved into her mother's home in Renton, destitute and on Medicaid.

Her pain made walking unbearable. She gained weight. Her eyesight dimmed. She spent long hours in bed, reading Patricia Cornwell crime novels, anguishing over her lost prospects of ever becoming a sheriff's deputy.

The Roosevelt Clinic at the University of Washington Medical Center prescribed drugs for her pain, insomnia, nausea, depression and anxiety, according to medical records Burrell's family provided to The Times.

"I was so scared about what all the pills were doing to her," Taylor says.

One of those drugs was methadone.

Federal regulators say it can be dangerous to give methadone to someone on anti-anxiety medications. Burrell was. They say methadone can disrupt breathing and heart beat, especially if a patient has a respiratory disorder. Burrell did. State guidelines warn against giving methadone to someone also receiving other long-acting painkillers. Burrell was.

In early 2008 Dr. Anna Samson doubled Burrell's methadone dose to 10 milligrams every six hours, according to her medical notes. Samson's notes also said she would be tapering Burrell off oxycodone, a more expensive painkiller that she began taking while on private insurance. But in the meantime Burrell remained on both.

Samson's notes made no mention of Burrell's sleep apnea — involuntary pauses in breathing. Methadone can compound apnea's effects; federal regulators have tied combining the two to hundreds of preventable deaths.

But Samson's notes did mention the dangers of Burrell's pharmacological mix: "I advised her that combinations of these medications can depress her respiratory rate and cause her to stop breathing."

Samson's notes were dated Feb. 13, 2008.

Two days later, Burrell was found in a nightshirt, slumped on her bed, arms dangling with open hands. She had stopped breathing, her respiratory muscles paralyzed with stunning speed.

The King County Medical Examiner's Office found methadone and three other prescription drugs in her body, consumed at normal doses. The medications had combined into a toxic cocktail. The case was ruled an unintended death.

University hospital officials reviewed Burrell's case and concluded her care was "appropriate," according to a written statement to The Times.

At age 32, Angeline Burrell became another dot on the map.