

## Podcast 4 - Whitpain Township - Was It Murder or Suicide of Donte Perez Jones = The Mysterious Death of Donte Perez Jones

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Welcome back. Today, we are diving into a case that, well, right from the start, it presented two very, very different stories. We're looking at the death of Dante Perez-Jones.

Yeah, it's a complex one. And for this deep dive, we're drawing from quite a few places. We've got news articles, you know, from the time and follow-ups.

Right. We also have statements the family shared directly. You see these on TikTok, GoFundMe, those kinds of platforms.

And of course, the official press releases from the police. Okay, so let's set the scene. It's Wentz Run Park, Bluebell, Pennsylvania, morning of June 17th, 2022.

And the absolute core issue that jumps out from all these sources is this conflict. Authorities, at least initially, seem to suggest suicide. But Dante's family, they were adamant from day one saying, no, something else happened here, foul play.

Exactly. So our goal today is really to, you know, unpack all that source material for you, lay out the key facts as presented in these different accounts. Understand the viewpoints.

Right. See where they clash, what specific details cause that friction, and what questions are sort of left hanging when you put it all together. Okay.

So maybe the best place to start is with Dante himself. Who was he? What do these sources tell us about him? Well, the picture we get is of Dante Perez-Jones, a 35-year-old man. He was a U.S. Army veteran and a father to three kids.

Lived in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Yes. Which, and this becomes important later.

Right. Is about an hour's drive from where he was found in Bluebell. An hour.

Okay. He was also educated, went to Shippensburg University, undergrad and grad degrees. Okay.

And the sources mentioned he'd gotten back from active duty maybe two years before this happened. He was working for Piedmont Airlines. And had plans, right? Something about a CDL.

Yeah, exactly. He was apparently planning to take his CDL exam, wanted to get into trucking. So, you know, looking towards the future.

And how did his family describe him? That often tells you a lot. Oh, definitely. Across the board

in the family statements, you hear descriptions like loving, kind, giving.

A gentle giant is a phrase that comes up. Someone who loved life, loved his family. There was also that really striking comment his mother, Latina Dean, shared in some sources.

Something Dante apparently said to her. Yes, that's mentioned several times. She recalled him saying, Mom, if anybody says I commit suicide, they're lying.

Don't believe them. Wow. Okay.

So you can immediately see why that would frame the family's perspective when they heard the initial news? Absolutely. It's like foundational to their immediate disbelief and suspicion. Which brings us to the actual discovery.

So June 17th morning, how was he found? What did the sources say? Around 7.45 a.m., a passerby found him there in Wentz Run Park. The descriptions vary slightly, but generally leaning against playground equipment. Some sources are more specific, saying hanging from monkey bars.

Using a military poncho. Yes, a military rain poncho was involved, according to those accounts. Okay.

So police, paramedics arrive. He's unresponsive. Coroner gets called.

Standard procedure so far. Right. And the Whitpain Township Police Department, the WPD, they cordoned off a pretty large area, did a grid search.

And their initial finding, or at least what they stated initially. According to their early statements reported in the news, they found nothing suspicious related to his death in that first search. Nothing suspicious.

And that's really where the two stories just collide. Because the family's account of what they were told and what they saw is completely different. Totally different.

You hear from his mother, Latina Dean, his brother, Derek Brown. They say police told the mother essentially it was suicide, case closed, no autopsy needed. Which is just, wow.

And the family immediately pushed back. Right. Based on specific things they knew or observed, what were those key points for them? Yeah, several things immediately jumped out at them.

First, the logistics of the hanging itself. How could a man described as six foot five hang himself from monkey bars with a poncho? If his feet were still on the ground. Exactly.

They said his feet and his foot flops were reportedly touching the ground. For the family, that just didn't make physical sense for a suicide by hanging. And his brother mentioned seeing

things on Dante's body, physical marks.

Yes, that's reported, too. He describes seeing what looked like bruises, maybe defensive wounds on his neck, arms, shoulders, ribs, buttocks, even his groin. Again, details the family felt pointed away from the simple suicide narrative they say they were given.

Then there was the wallet. Right. Practical detail, but significant.

They said only his ID card and keys were found at the scene. His wallet containing cash, cards, whatever else was missing. And the location itself.

You mentioned he lived an hour away. Yeah, Delaware County. His mother stated he had zero ties to Bluebell or Whitpain Township.

No friends, no family there. No reason she knew of for him to be there. So the question becomes, why drive an hour, supposedly around midnight? To this specific park.

And apparently, according to family sources, ended through a back way where they claimed there were no security cameras. It raises a lot of questions. It really does.

And the family also brought up the context, the timing. The Juneteenth weekend aspect. Yes.

Being found in what they described as a predominantly white neighborhood on that specific weekend, they used words like suspicious. Some family members explicitly called it a modern day lynching, connecting it to deep historical fears and realities. So heavy context there.

And they also had specific complaints about how the authorities handled things. Beyond just the initial conclusion. Oh, definitely.

They claimed they weren't allowed to see or identify his body for more than 48 hours. 48 hours. Yeah.

And like we said, they were initially told no autopsy would happen because it was ruled a suicide, even though they wanted one. And the cameras? There were claims from family members that surveillance cameras that might have captured something near the scene were conveniently moved or weren't recording or weren't monitored. Those specific allegations are in the family's accounts.

And then the park itself. Reopening so quickly. Yeah.

That also really bothered the family. Sources mentioned the park was reopened and apparently there was even some kind of scheduled event held there just hours after Dante's body was discovered that morning. That felt disrespectful and rushed to them.

OK, so that's a very strong, detailed narrative from the family, full of suspicion and specific points of concern. How did the police officially respond to all this once the family story started

getting public attention? Well, Whitping Township Police Department put out a formal statement a few days later, June 21st, 2022. And it directly addressed some of these claims that were circulating.

What did they say? Did they acknowledge the family's concerns? They specifically denied telling the family the case was closed. They also denied saying it had been officially ruled a suicide at that early stage. OK, so a direct contradiction on those key points.

Yes. The police statement emphasized the investigation was still active, ongoing, and they were taking it seriously. And importantly, they confirmed an autopsy was actually performed by the Montgomery County Coroner's Office.

Ah, so an autopsy did happen, contrary to what the family says they were initially told. Correct. Though the police statement also noted the official cause and manner of death were still pending toxicology results, which they said could take weeks.

OK. There was also something mentioned in the sources about the police chief calling the mother later. Yeah, according to the family's account, police chief Kenneth Lawson did call Dante's mother later on to apologize for how the case was handled.

The exact nature of that apology, what specifically it covered, isn't fully detailed in the sources we reviewed, but the call itself is mentioned by the family. Gotcha. But even with that apology and confirming the investigation was ongoing and an autopsy happened, what was the police's stance on foul play at that point? Well, this is key.

Even while saying the investigation was open, that same June 21st police statement also said that based on the facts and evidence they had at that moment, they did not suspect foul play. They used the phrase, the incident appears to be a suicide. So still leaning heavily towards suicide publicly, despite keeping the investigation technically open.

Right. Which you can imagine didn't sit well with the family. No, clearly not.

And the sources show they didn't just sit back. They really mobilized. Absolutely.

That's a huge part of the story here. They took to social media in a big way. You saw hashtags like hashtag justice for Donna Perez Jones, hashtag we want answers.

They shared videos, updates, their interactions with officials on TikTok, GoFundMe, really trying to get their side out there. They didn't stop there either, did they? They reached out institutionally. No, they contacted government officials, NAACP representatives, state reps.

They were pushing from multiple angles, trying to get more eyes on the case, more pressure for what they considered a real investigation. And the GoFundMe, that had a specific purpose. Yes.

The description explicitly stated the funds were needed for an independent autopsy. They

wanted their own medical examination done. Separate from the county coroners.

Exactly. And also to hire legal counsel to help them navigate this whole process and fight for the answers they were seeking. And they planned public actions too.

Sources mentioned a planned peaceful gathering at Wenshrum Park itself, likely to raise awareness and keep the pressure on. So their goal stated pretty clearly in these sources was just challenge that initial narrative. Change it from suicide to what they believed happened.

Yeah. Find the truth. Get justice for Dante, as they saw it.

Okay. So when we step back and look at all these pieces, the police statements, the news coverage filtering that, and then the very direct, passionate accounts from the family, what does this whole situation sort of reveal about how these things unfold? How information works or doesn't work in cases like this? Well, it's a stark example, isn't it? Of how quickly you can have two completely different realities emerge. You've got the official assessment based on their procedures and initial evidence gathering.

And then you have the family's reality grounded in their knowledge of the person, their own observations at the scene, and deep-seated mistrust fueled by specific details that just don't add up for them. It really makes you, as someone following this, think about communication, right? How crucial is that initial interaction between law enforcement and a grieving family? How does that set the tone for everything that follows? Absolutely. And it raises questions about transparency.

What information is shared? When? And how? And what recourse does a family have when they fundamentally disagree with the official findings? Where do they turn? Like seeking that independent autopsy. Exactly. That's a concrete step they took.

But it also highlights the challenge, needing resources, needing public attention to make that happen. And you can't ignore the context the family brought up either. The racial dynamics, the Juneteenth timing, that adds another whole layer of complexity and potential distrust based on historical context.

Right. It shows how a specific incident can quickly become intertwined with much broader social issues and sensitivities, shaping how it's perceived and discussed. So, wrapping up our look at these sources, we're left with this fundamental tension.

The official line, leaning towards suicide but keeping the investigation open. And the family's unwavering conviction. It was murder, possibly involving a cover-up, based on a list of very specific, troubling details they've highlighted.

Yeah, the sources we have show the police investigation was, at that point, still technically ongoing, pending final results like toxicology. But the family wasn't waiting. They were actively pursuing their own path, using public platforms, seeking independent experts, demanding

answers.

It really leaves you thinking, doesn't it? What does a case like Dante Perez-Jones' tell us about the different ways people search for truth when the official story feels wrong? And maybe, what's the real power of public awareness and independent investigation when those official narratives face serious questions?

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