

Sister still has questions about Smedley's death - Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) - October 6, 2016

October 6, 2016 | Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) | Abby Tonsing 812-331-4245 | atonsing@heraldt.com

It's been more than a year since a fisherman discovered the body of **Joseph Smedley** in Griffy Lake near the Headley Road bridge.

Smedley's sister and dozens of supporters gathered Wednesday evening at the Grand Hall of the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center to show that he has not been forgotten and that his life mattered.

Joseph Smedley, a 20-year-old from Indianapolis, was last reportedly seen by his roommates the night of Sept. 27, 2015. He was an Indiana University sophomore studying biochemistry, but had not enrolled to take any classes that fall.

His sister, Vivianne **Smedley**, reported him missing to Indiana University police after receiving a text message saying he planned to leave the country.

His body was found the evening of Oct. 2, and the Monroe County Coroner's Office later ruled his death a suicide by drowning.

Indiana University police, Bloomington police and the Monroe County Coroner's Office have said no foul play was suspected in his disappearance and death. Vivianne **Smedley** is not convinced.

Strained family relationships and state statutes delineating legal next-of-kin in death investigations have made it difficult for **Smedley's** sister to obtain police and coroner's office documents to start her own investigation.

"I'm doing this because **Joseph** deserves better. **Joseph** deserves justice," she said of her continued work.

Speakers and poets at Wednesday evening's event addressed institutional structures of racism and the dichotomy of hypervisibility and invisibility of the black community.

"Our Blackness marks us and draws attention to us in certain ways but it also leaves us, our pain and our struggles invisible to many," co-organizer Andrea Sterling explained on an invitation to the event.

"**Joseph Smedley** is not an isolated incident," Sterling said Wednesday. She said people need to understand the connections between acts of injustice and violence the black community experiences at present and has experienced historically.

A black man's anger is hypervisible. "But our pain is invisible," she said.

That invisibility is the reason IU students receive instant notifications about gas line work on campus and broken windows in burglaries, but wait days before receiving an announcement from the university about a missing black student, said Sterling, the president of IU's Black Graduate Student Association.

"In order for us to not render someone else invisible, we have to recognize someone as sentient and human," said visiting lecturer Maria Hamilton Abegunde, who led a brief healing ceremony for the audience.

For more information, visit the Justice for **Joseph** Facebook page.

Vivianne **Smedley** is also seeking donations for a private investigator and other resources.

For more information, go to her crowdfunding site at <https://www.gofundme.com/69f9ahuk>.

Police statement on investigation

The Bloomington Police Department issued this press statement about the **Joseph Smedley** death investigation in early 2016:

"On Dec. 3, 2015, the Bloomington Police Department and the Monroe County Coroner shared the findings of the investigation with **Joseph Smedley**'s father who was determined to be the appropriate next-of-kin and established point of contact for the immediate family. BPD made the commitment to keep working with **Joseph**'s father in an effort to answer additional questions they might have regarding the circumstances surrounding his death. That commitment has, in fact, continued with the most recent contact having occurred on January 11, 2016.

"The Monroe County Coroner has ruled the death of **Joseph Smedley** to be a suicide by drowning. Rulings of cause and manner of death are the responsibility of coroners and not that of law enforcement. While those conclusions can be determined through joint investigations between law enforcement and the coroner, the Bloomington Police Department has not been asked to provide any further investigative assistance at this time."

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