

Dave,

I'll be damned if Pratt wasn't right. There was a girl back in the seventies. Took a while to find it, but here it is from the archive of the *Republican*. The girl's name was Mearly Johnson and it was in the summer of 1976. See below. File photo of the girl at the end.

Bill

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By Brian Mayfair

Family struggles to understand girl's death

Margaret Johnson still feels numb. Her husband Earl can't talk about it.

The Johnson's thought they'd be celebrating their daughter Mearly's graduation from Tafton Central High in two weeks. Instead, they buried her Saturday.

Her death still puzzles her family and just about everyone else who knew her.

Mearly came home from a Friday evening with friends a few weeks ago visibly shaken by something she refused to talk about. It was the beginning of a rapid spiral downward fueled by bad dreams, hallucinations, and depression that culminated in suicide last week.

While teen suicide isn't rare, Johnson's case is unusual enough to leave doctor's puzzled. While her family and doctor say Mearly had a history of depression, it had been under control for a number of years. She had never been known to have nightmares or hallucinations.

"There was nothing in her case history or her circumstances that suggested this kind of disturbance or the outcome," said Dr. Richard Hopkins, Mearly's physician and a long-time friend of the Johnson family.

Margaret became even more puzzled when she learned from Mearly's friends that the thing that had upset her daughter that Friday evening was an encounter with a Ouiji board.

"Those things are just toys, I always thought," she said. "I never put any stock in folks saying they were dangerous."

Barbara Hall was with Mearly on that night. She says her friend became upset when they asked the game who Mearly was going to marry.

"It pointed to the J, then the W. Then we stopped because Mearly was having some kind of attack."

Witnesses say that Johnson screamed, then rolled into a ball and began crying. She stayed that way for several minutes and did not respond to questions.

Eventually she sat back up and said she had been chased through the woods by a man who was trying to kill her.

Over the ensuing weeks, Mearly experienced the same vision both waking and asleep. "It was awful," her mother said. "She would wake up screaming.

It would take an hour to calm her down."

Mearly's hallucinations were so intense that Hopkins suspected that someone may have slipped her LSD, but drug tests came back negative, a result later confirmed by her autopsy.

Doctor's also examined Mearly's brain to see if it would reveal the source of her troubles, but found nothing.

"We thought maybe a tumor, but there was nothing. The cause of her hallucinations is a total mystery," said Hopkins.

"It was a frustrating case from the beginning, and the horrible end just makes it more distressing. I know we can't bring Mearly back, but I'd like at least to get her folks some answers."

Margaret Johnson agrees. "My baby suffered a lot. We'd like to know why. Maybe we could stop it from happening to someone else."

File photo, Mearly Johnson, courtesy of Tafton Photo Elite.

