

# Parents of man slain by LAPD say his mental illness was well known

*By Ruben Vives, Kate Mather, Richard Winton*

The parents of a 25-year-old man fatally shot by Los Angeles police Monday said they were confused by the circumstances of their son's death, saying everyone in the neighborhood -- including police -- knew he was mentally ill.

On Tuesday, with activists abuzz over the incident, Tritobia Ford, 42, put down the phone. Seated on her couch, she looked down. Attorneys had been calling her South L.A. home all morning to talk about the shooting that left her eldest son, Ezell, dead.

"It's just amazing to me the ugliness that death brings," she said. "All these people are like vultures and it's sad because Ezell is gone. Ezell is gone, for nothing."

Ezell Ford was shot about 8:10 p.m. Monday on West 65th Street, during what police described as a struggle with two veteran gang officers. LAPD Cmdr. Andrew Smith said the officers were conducting an investigative stop and walking toward Ford on the sidewalk when he "whirled around and basically tackled the lead officer."

A struggle then ensued for the officer's weapon, Smith said. The officer, who was on his back, couldn't reach his regular weapon so he grabbed a back-up gun and fired, Smith said. The other officer fired too.

Ford later died of his injuries at an area hospital.

Smith cautioned that the information is preliminary.

Ford's family, however, claimed he was not resisting police at the time of the shooting. A cousin told KTLA-TV that Ford was on his back when he was shot.

His parents said they have been living in the same South L.A. neighborhood for the past 15 years. In that time, they said, neighbors and police officers in the area have come to know their son.

The Fords said everyone in the neighborhood, including police, also knew that he was diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

So when they heard about the shooting, they were confused.

"You would have thought that anybody else would have harmed him," Ezell Ford Sr. said. "The last person you would think is a police officer."

The Fords recalled a younger son who played football and basketball.

They said their son wanted become a basketball star. He would often spend time with friends and attend school functions such as dances.

“He had spunk,” his dad said.

But at 18, Ezell Ford began to drift away. He didn’t socialize and was often sad, his parents said.

Doctors later diagnosed him with depression, Ezell Ford Sr. said.

“I couldn’t understand it,” he said. “I don’t know what really triggered it.”

Most recently, he was mostly a drifter, grabbing coffee and cigarettes at a corner store and going on long walks.

Smith said police investigators are asking eyewitnesses or anyone with video footage of the incident to come forward. As did Earl Ofari Hutchinson, president of the Los Angeles Urban Policy Roundtable, who has requested a meeting with LAPD Chief Charlie Beck regarding the incident.

“One of the things we wanted to make clear to the chief was you really want to get ahead of the situation,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Fords said they await answers about what happened to their son, and how the incident escalated.

“I’m sick of this,” Tritobia Ford said. “I hate that I’m going through this.”