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Shanae's mother claims she was tortured

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Accused by police of "having the blood" of her murdered daughter on her hands, Allison Muir claims that police tortured her by tying her arms and legs to a chair to try to make her confess.

Then, she alleges, one of them - she does not know who - wrapped a thin rubber sheet (later replaced by a blue plastic bag) around her face and held it in place behind her head.

The main interrogator ("M") whom Muir claims called her a "F***ing bitch" during the interview, then said: "Allison, Allison, any time you want to start talking, I will take this off your face."

Muir, 41, held her breath for as long as she could "and when I let my breath out, the rubber sheeting went into my nose and mouth".

Whenever she battled to breath, the sheeting was briefly removed, she said.

"I was able to gulp a lot of air, then it was placed back. This was done three or four times. I just kept thinking that if they want to kill me, they still won't have the person responsible for my daughter's death."

Her five-year-old daughter, Shanae, disappeared from home on July 9 and a massive search and rescue operation was mounted before her decomposing body was found less than a kilometre from her Warner Beach home on July 27.

Director Johan Booysen, the head of the serious and violent crime unit, said on Sunday that he did not approve of such tactics and did not believe his detectives would use them.

In the event that the allegations proved correct, "strong action" would be taken.

Muir made her claims in an eight-page statement to Amanzimtoti police after what she said in an interview this weekend was a "nightmarish" experience at the serious and violent crimes unit at Cato Manor.

"I was scared, but I didn't show it and that irritated them," she told the Daily News. When asked what she had been tied up with, she said it was "rubber tubing".

However, she did break down when shown the horror pictures of what was left of her daughter, who had acid poured onto her face.

First detectives showed her a black-and-white photocopied photograph, then they put a diskette into a computer and showed her a coloured photograph of Shanae's remains.

"Those pictures are branded into my brain forever," said Muir.

Muir's angry mother, Margaret Chaplin, has now officially complained to senior police officers about the alleged "abuse of authority" and the use of torture on her daughter.

After the police watchdog body, the Independent Complaints Directorate, was called in, investigators raided the offices of the serious and violent crimes unit on Friday. However, they were unable to find evidence of assault and torture.

Muir has opened a case of assault and crimen injuria at Amanzimtoti Police station, and lodged a statement, detailing what she says took place on August 17. She laid a complaint the next day and wrote out her own statement the day after that.

The Daily News called at Muir's home shortly after she returned home on August 17, but was told that the family wanted to follow the correct procedures, before giving details.

Muir said she was taken to Cato Manor as the police wanted to go over her previous statements.

"M (the name of the main investigator) straight away starting calling me a F***ing bitch and a no-good mother and said that I had killed my daughter, which I vigorously denied.

"He then went on to say that all the evidence they had so far pointed to me," she claimed.

He said that the pair of Shanae's panties found in the family's garden must have been planted by Muir as they had not been there the day she disappeared. There was no evidence of dew on them when they were found by sniffer dogs. "M was still shouting at me, telling me that I had killed my little girl and that I had the blood of her on my hands, which I denied."

Another detective said that maybe what had happened to Shanae had been an accident, "maybe she had fallen and got knocked out and maybe I was too scared to tell anyone and I had hidden the body". Muir denied everything.

M wanted to know why certain facts in her statements, particularly the timings, were different. Muir alleges M told her to take her jersey off and put it on her head.

"Then somebody tied my hands to the arms of the chair and somebody tied my legs to the chair.

"The jersey was then removed from my head and a thin rubber sheet was placed over and around my face and held at the back of my head."

In the wake of Muir's claims and the search of the police offices, the Directorate of Public Prosecution will decide whether or not to prosecute.

Booysen said he found it "odd" that Muir had not acted like a normal person and immediately gone to a police station to lay a complaint.

He also found it strange that her claims came after being called in to clear up certain discrepancies in her statements.

Detectives had particularly wanted to ask about her movements on the night Shanae had disappeared.

Meanwhile, the murder investigation is continuing and Booysen has now called for all the forensic reports to be "expedited", he said.

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