Fiancée: Man shot dead by police was running away

Family members defend man shot, killed by police

A 26-year-old Enfield man was attempting to avoid being arrested on an outstanding warrant when he was shot by a state trooper in a field, according to his fiancee, who was a passenger in the car that police had tried to stop along Route 4 in Canaan on Saturday night.

In an interview Wednesday, Saeti Tobin said she and Jesse Champney had set out on Saturday to go to a convenience store in Canaan and return a car they had borrowed.

Before they could do so, the pair noticed they were being followed by police, so Champney turned onto Switch Road. But when he did, the car plowed into a snow-covered field, Tobin said. Champney told her to run and he himself fled toward the woods, she said.

“He was never trying to advance on anyone, he was trying to get away,” said the 23-

Saeti Tobin of Grafton looks at a photo Wednesday of her fiance, Jesse Champney, who was fatally shot by a state trooper in Canaan on Saturday.

CHARLES HATCHER
Valley News

The Champney brothers, who were born a little over a year apart, had a of a few other nonviolent crimes, including theft in 2012, for which he served prison time, Tobin said. Prison changed him, and although he took some college courses while there, he left addicted to opiates, Tobin said. He had, however, recently turned his life around and had been in a Suboxone program – medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction – for the last few months, she said.

“He was a tough kid because he was made to

A memorial to Champney was set up in the field

took place about 6:30 p.m., when it was dark, and Tobin stayed with the vehicle after Champney fled, placing her some distance from where the shooting occurred.

She said she believes Champney was not armed at the time. (Champney’s brother, Josh, who also was present for the interview at a home in Danbury, said Jesse Champney sometimes carried a pocketknife.) The state Attorney General’s Office hasn’t said what led up to the person. He wasn’t doing anything wrong. He wasn’t committing some massive crime and he didn’t deserve that,” she said.

Josh Champney recalled his brother as a man with a big heart who would be the first to help those in need.

“He would give his shirt to anybody,” Josh Champney said.

The Champney brothers, who were born a little over a year apart, had a

“He had a really big heart,” Carmen Champney said. “He always tried to make people laugh, and when he was around he was always cheerful. Even if he was having a hard time, he would still try and make you laugh.”

A year-old Tobin, who also has had run-ins with police. “There was no high-speed chase, there were no drugs involved, there were no weapons involved, there was no stolen car, and there was no serious crime committed.”

“She was scared and wanted to be with his family for the holidays,” she said. “That’s it.”

A memorial to Champney was set up in the field

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where the car came to rest, and several friends and relatives stopped by on Wednesday to pay their respects.

The New Hampshire Attorney General’s Office has confirmed that Champney was shot four times, and on Wednesday it identified New Hampshire State Trooper Christopher O’Toole as the officer who fired the fatal round. Authorities also said Canaan police Officer Samuel Provenza was at the scene during the incident. He did not discharge his firearm, according to a news release.

Tobin was more specific about the circumstances surrounding the stop than she was about the shooting itself. The incident shooting, but Associate Attorney General Jane Young said Wednesday night that the investigation remains open and active. O’Toole has been interviewed, she confirmed.

Tobin and Josh Champney both asserted that Provenza had it out for Jesse Champney. They said they feel he was targeted.

Reached by email on Wednesday night, Provenza referred all comment to the New Hampshire Attorney General’s Office.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the shooting, Champney didn’t deserve to be shot, Tobin said.

“It needs to be known that Jesse wasn’t a bad tough childhood. Their father, Jody Champney, died by suicide at age 34, and they grew up poor, though Josh Champney contends they tried to make the best of both situations.

Both Tobin and Josh Champney acknowledged that Jesse Champney had his runins with the law.

In May 2016, Champney was arrested in Lebanon on a felony charge of possession of heroin with intent to sell and resisting arrest. He failed to appear for a court date in that case, which prompted the warrant to be issued for his arrest.

Champney also was convicted

be that way,” Tobin said. “But he was the biggest sweetheart.”

Tobin, too, has had encounters with police, including as recently as April, when she was arrested in Canaan on charges of possession of cocaine — subsequent offense and transporting drugs in a motor vehicle. It wasn’t immediately known how that case was adjudicated, or if it is still pending.

A Champney cousin, Carmen Champney, also spoke highly of Jesse Champney, who worked as a handyman and was known for his tattoo art.

A memorial for Jesse Champney is seen Wednesday in Canaan. Champney was fatally shot nearby by New Hampshire State Police Trooper Christopher O’Toole on Saturday night.

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