

Friends, family remember student Jana Mackey

The KU graduate was remembered as being beautiful, intelligent and an activist before she was murdered last week.

By [Rustin Dodd](#) ([Contact](#))

Monday, July 7, 2008

Days after University of Kansas student Jana Mackey was found dead inside a Lawrence home, friends and relatives were still gathered together, grieving the loss of the second-year KU law student and reflecting on a tumultuous and tragic weekend.

Thursday, Mackey, 25, was found dead inside the home of 46-year-old Adolfo Garcia-Nunez at 409 Michigan St. Garcia-Nunez, her alleged killer, fled the state and was taken into custody on Friday in Elizabeth, N.J. He was found dead inside his jail cell on Saturday, the result of an apparent suicide. Lawrence Police confirmed Garcia-Nunez's death on Saturday. As of Monday, law officials had not released Mackey's cause of death.

Friends of Mackey confirmed that Mackey and Garcia-Nunez had been dating for the past year until Mackey ended the relationship three weeks ago.



Memorial services for Jana Mackey

2 p.m., Wednesday at Liberty Hall, 644 Massachusetts St.*

*Friends and family will gather to celebrate Mackey's life on Wednesday night at The Replay Lounge, 946 Massachusetts St.

KU Counseling and Psychological Services

Counselors will be available to meet with law school students, faculty and staff at Green Hall, according to a release from KU Law School.

Kelli Brandt, 2005 graduate and one of Mackey's closest friends, said family and friends spent the weekend collecting old photos and telling stories about Mackey's life. Brandt and Mackey met eight years ago while both were living in Hashinger Hall.

"Jana was the total package," Brandt said. "Beautiful, intelligent — she glowed."

A native of Hays, Mackey earned her undergraduate degree in Women's Studies. Brandt said she started out in music and theater, but as a sophomore, Mackey enrolled in a women's studies course.

"That course changed her life," Brandt said. "It gave her a purpose."

An advocate for women's rights, Brandt said Mackey lobbied for the National Organization for Women and ProKanDo, a pro-choice political action committee in Kansas.

"She was the type of person who went into law not for the money, but for the people," Brandt said. "All she wanted to do was serve."

Mackey was enrolled this summer in the Paul E. Wilson Defender Project, representing state and federal prisoners in appellate and post-conviction litigation in state and federal courts. “Jana was well-loved by all of us,” said Gail Agrawal, KU law school dean, in a statement. “She was a smart, engaging woman whose warm personality and quick smile endeared her to all who knew her.”

Massachusetts Street was mostly empty on Sunday evening, as a few walkers passed empty shops. This was a street that Mackey explored often. Friends described Mackey as a “real community girl.” If Mackey wasn’t at the law school, she was likely on the porch at Free State Brewery, hanging out at Henry’s, or watching live music at the Replay Lounge. “She was so comfortable in her own skin,” Brandt said. “All she wanted to do was bring everyone together.”

Brandt said Mackey met Garcia-Nunez in Spring 2007 while dancing. Garcia-Nunez, an artist, painted a portrait for Mackey. The couple started dating and often went salsa dancing.

But as Brandt acknowledged, Garcia-Nunez had a “dark side.”

According to records from the Kansas Department of Corrections, Garcia-Nunez was convicted of aggravated assault and aggravated battery in 2004. Garcia-Nunez spent time in jail before being granted parole in August 2006.

Brandt said Mackey was aware of Garcia-Nunez’s past, but according to Brandt, Garcia-Nunez was able to rationalize his criminal background.

Brandt described a Garcia-Nunez who cooked “wonderful food” and was friendly to Mackey’s friends.

“Only rarely did we see the other side,” Brandt said.

But Brandt said Mackey decided to end the relationship three weeks ago when Garcia-Nunez began acting irrationally. Brandt said she asked Mackey if she thought Garcia-Nunez would ever hurt her. Brandt said her friend told her, “Absolutely not.”

But friends started to worry when Mackey went missing last week and her car was discovered abandoned on the evening of Thursday at Lawrence Memorial Hospital. Their worst fears came true when Mackey’s body was found inside Garcia-Nunez’s home late Thursday night.

Brandt said she and Mackey had sat together on Mackey’s porch on a recent Sunday.

“She felt like she had a new lease on life,” Brandt said. “She was in a really good place in her life. She was the strongest, most elegant, graceful woman,” Brandt said.

Family and friends will gather again at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday at Liberty Hall to celebrate Mackey’s life. Another celebration at the Replay Lounge will follow Wednesday evening. Brandt said the entire community was welcome at both. Counselors from the University’s Counseling and Psychological Services will be available.

— *Edited by Matt Hircshfeld*