

GRAY Janis

Belleville native with Richmond RCMP *Intell Aug 18/93 p. 1*

'I just didn't want to give up looking'

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Janis Gray to receive bravery commendation

By Jennifer Bell

The Intelligencer

Janis Gray had only thoughts of rescue as she plunged into the cold Fraser River in British Columbia after a car with two young families hurtled into the water.

But although the 27-year-old Richmond RCMP Constable — a Belleville native — dove again and again in her search for the car, she wasn't able to locate the vehicle.

It was a tragedy for the Richmond area families — a woman and three young children drowned — and a heartfelt loss for Gray, who completes seven years with the Mounties in January.

"I just didn't want to give up looking," she says of the June 21 rescue attempt. "It's very hard when you respond to an emergency and you can't save people. You don't ever get used to that."

But Gray — who's been with the Vancouver-area suburban detachment of the RCMP for a year — will be honored by the province's lieutenant-governor this fall for her bravery in the line of duty, says father Bernie, a Belleville salesman and former owner of Uniglobe Travel.

She'll receive the Royal Life-saving Society of Canada's Honor and Bravery Medal Nov. 28 for her efforts to locate the vehicle.

Gray was the first officer on the scene that June day — arriving within seven minutes — after police received the report that a Volkswagen Jetta had driven over an embankment and into the Fraser River, with two adults and four young children inside. One woman and child escaped from the vehicle before it sank.

She searched the murky water for more than 10 minutes, refusing to give up even after another officer told her it was futile. She pressed on until the river's cold numbed her body.

Coast guard officials and fire department divers finally located the vehicle nearly an hour after the accident.

Gray, when reached at her Richmond, B.C. home this week, says she was "kind of embarrassed about the whole thing."

"I'm really upset that I wasn't able to get the family out. It really is hard not to think about that."

Richmond RCMP detachment Staff Sgt. Bill Vande Braak was on duty the day Gray responded to the emergency call.

"She certainly went over and above what was required of her," he commented. "It was a very brave thing to do."

Vande Braak says Gray may also receive an internal award for her efforts.

Details of the rescue attempt have been forwarded for consid-

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