

## sherringtoncol\_19spo.ART0

### Uncommon bond High school coach stands by former player in spite of horrific act

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Byline: KEVIN SHERRINGTON

On Dec. 29, 2002, a Sunday, Fort Bend County deputies responded to calls about a man in blood-stained clothes, carrying a knife, walking a neighborhood west of Houston.

When officers approached, the man told them that he'd killed someone.

He said he killed his mother.

Jeff Dixon was at home with his family, putting away what was left of Christmas, when the story came on the local news. For Dixon, the horror was personal.

Anansi Flaherty had been a second-string fullback on Katy's 2000 state champion football team. Dixon coached the running backs. Troubled and separated from family, Anansi nevertheless had been one of Dixon's favorites; a happy, handsome kid who needed guidance like any teenager.

And now here Anansi was in jail, charged with first-degree murder and an unthinkable act.

Days went by, then weeks, and the coach couldn't get it out of his head.

"Here's a young man, 19 years old," Dixon said. "He did a horrible crime, and he's by himself."

Coaches forge relationships with players. Or at least the good ones do. They don't just ask more than any teacher may feel a right to. They demand it. No man or woman with a conscience can reach so deep into another without it becoming personal.

Even when he's no longer in your charge, and he's left behind the structured environment you helped create, he's still your player.

And you're still his coach.

Or that's how Jeff Dixon finally made peace with his decision, anyway.

"I was not wanting to get Anansi out of anything," he says. "If nothing else, I just wanted to see if he was all right.

"I had a burden on my heart to go visit him."

Over the next year, Dixon visited Anansi in jail at least once a week. He wrote letters and read them. He encouraged other Katy coaches to write. He talked to lawyers. He followed Anansi's guilty plea and subsequent migration through the state prison system from one unit to the next. In the five years since that awful day, he's prayed with him, cried with him, listened to him. He's raised money so Anansi could buy what the state won't provide. He's given him toothpaste and deodorant and boots and hope.

"It's a spiritual thing," is how Anansi puts it from behind the glass and steel of Huntsville's Estelle Unit. "Even though he's white and I'm black, there's no color between us.

"He's been down with me since Day One."

Seven years it's been. A lifetime to go.

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Jeff Dixon just finished his third season as head coach at Alvarado, a 4A school south of Fort Worth. Winning is difficult in a district that includes Everman, which made the state semifinals last month, and Stephenville, long a power. The company Alvarado keeps helps to explain a 10-21 record over the last three years.

Dixon wasn't used to losing. His first job out of Howard Payne was as an assistant under Bob Ledbetter at Southlake Carroll, where he coached on its 1988 state championship team. He also worked for Mike Johnston at Katy, Dixon's alma mater, when it won state titles in '00 and '03.

Working for the likes of Ledbetter and Johnston, Dixon's education in the business soon exceeded what he'd expected.

"When I first got into coaching, it was for the love of the game," he says. "I loved the competition, and I had good role models. But after I'd been in it for awhile, I realized it was not for the money and not for the winning.

"Bob Ledbetter told me one time, even when you go 16-0, it isn't all about the wins and losses. It's about the kids you coach and teach."

Once his career path led him back to Katy, Dixon made the back-up fullback his first case.

Anansi - Uh-NON-cy, named after the clever spider from African and West Indies folk tales - was 5-8 and 215 pounds with decent ability and a host of problems. Before he enrolled in Katy at 16, he'd spent time in a juvenile detention center. Before that, he'd lived with any relative his mother could find to handle him. His father lives in California. Anansi has only talked to him once.

When Anansi got out of juvy, his mother and stepfather put him up in an apartment in Katy, just west of Houston.

"They probably figured maybe I'd stay out of trouble out there," Anansi says.

For 2 1/2 years, Anansi lived alone in the apartment behind the high school. Summers and holidays, he went back to Houston. The rest of the time, he essentially was on his own.

Dixon and Anansi didn't talk much about the arrangement. When the coach would ask Anansi's mother, Vanessa Sweetman, she'd say it was temporary while they built a house in Katy.

But no house ever was built. Coaches would stop by the apartment to check on Anansi. Occasionally, they'd buy him groceries.

"If it hadn't been for football and athletics, he'd have been in a lot of trouble," Dixon says. "I can't even imagine being by yourself like that."

Dixon and his wife, Mandy, also a teacher, tried to give Anansi some working concept of family life. Once a week, they'd have all the running backs over to the house for dinner. Anansi got to know Dixon's children, Tyler and Maggie.

Every day after school, Anansi sat on the other side of Dixon's desk and finished his homework. Dixon taught math, and Anansi needed tutoring.

"If it wasn't for Coach," Anansi says, "I wouldn't have graduated."

Dixon didn't go out of his way to help with Anansi's studies because Katy's football team needed him. He hardly played at all as a junior on the state championship team, not that it mattered to Anansi.

"It was still fun," he says. "I was more than happy to be a specialty back, a short-yardage back, on that team."

Anansi's mother came to see him play a few times. His senior year, she gave Dixon a restaurant gift card and thanked him for his help.

Dixon is sure that Anansi's mother cared for her son, a judgment only he and a handful of others could make. Maybe he's right. Maybe she simply didn't know what else to do with him.

Anansi had problems. If you listen to his side of the story, he'll tell you that he started drinking at 10 and smoking angel dust at 12 or 13. He was a member of a gang. Busted for assaults. Sold marijuana. When he went away to Texas A&M-Kingsville, where he walked on the football team, it only got worse. He got high every day.

His story is that he went home for Christmas the fall of his freshman year and stayed stoned. Three days before New Year's, his 9-year-old cousin told him that she'd been molested. Anansi blamed his mother for not stopping it. In a fog of drugs and anger, he simply snapped.

But that's not what Dixon or the lawyers say. Anansi was diagnosed with mental problems. He'd gone off his meds. He heard voices.

Listening to him from the other side of the glass, you hardly know what to think. He looks and sounds like the kid Dixon describes: polite, smiling, upbeat, a young man of potential.

Only when he talks about what happened five years ago last month does his mood change, and he takes a deep breath.

"I went into the room . . .," he says, and stops, gathering himself. Outside the visitation room, steel doors clang and rattle. Anansi sits back and tries again. "I just remember glimpses of it. There isn't a day goes by that I don't think about it. Nothing anybody can do to me would be any worse than living with what I saw.

"I was looking at my mom, and it was like I watched her soul leave her body. I saw her life leave her.

"I was 19. I lost my mother by my own hands, and now I'm in prison."

His lawyer believes he probably saved his life by pleading out. He got 40 years instead. He's done the math.

When will you be eligible for parole?

"Twenty twenty-two."

How old will you be?

"Thirty-nine."

Every day, he gets up early, says his prayers and goes to work in the kitchen. He spends as little time as possible in his cell. When not working, he's in the day room. He works out. Watches TV. Reads philosophy, religion, poetry. He'd like a typewriter, maybe, so he can write



his memoirs.

He says some of the older prisoners, the guys who will never get out, look after him.

And, of course, his old coach, too.

"I believe that Coach Dixon is a sign that God still has a hand on me," he says.

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Dixon keeps every one of the letters. Anansi is 24 now, separated from their shared past by years and a couple hundred miles and a double-row of razor wire, but the letters all start the same.

Dear coach

In a cramped, single-spaced scrawl, Anansi thanks Dixon for the latest items sent. He writes about his workouts, money, happiness, love and what it's like living, as he once put it, "in the belly of the fish."

A couple of years ago, Anansi, feeling philosophical, came as close to explaining himself as he probably could:

A lot of the time when we do not understand someone or something we as humans tend to lash out or even get scared of what we can't comprehend. I'm living proof . . .

In his Alvarado office, where, even with the door closed, you can hear the clang of steel weights and the shouts of kids, Dixon looks at the letter, then at the floor.

"I don't write him like I should," he says, softly. "I've got more family now, and the job's demanding, but that's no excuse."

He looks up. "Last Christmas, we sent him some money to buy a new pair of shoes. He called me. He was so grateful. He told me about his Thanksgiving meal. He said, how could he complain? He's got three meals and a place to sleep.

"He's just so thankful for what he has. That's hard for me to understand."

How does anyone comprehend the story of Anansi Flaherty? Dixon makes no attempt to justify it. But instead of asking what happened, he opts for, "What now?"

He hasn't seen Anansi in a couple of years, so he's thinking he needs to get down to Huntsville. He might even take his son, Tyler, who's 15 now. He says it would do Anansi good to see how much his son has grown.

He thinks it would do Tyler good, too, to see what it's like in the belly of the fish.

"It's tragic, what happened to Anansi," Dixon says. "I believe God placed him in our path. I'm glad I was able to be there for him.

"I'm glad I still am."

**Caption:** PHOTO(S): 1. (Courtesy Jeff Dixon) As running backs coach at Katy, Dixon looked out for the troubled Flaherty. 2. (KYE R. LEE/Staff Photographer) Anansi Flaherty is serving a 40-year sentence in Huntsville's Estelle Unit for murdering his mother in 2002. The 24-year-old former Katy fullback continues to get support from one-time Katy assistant Jeff Dixon, who is now the head coach at Alvarado. 3. (MILTON HINNANT/Staff Photographer) Jeff Dixon, who just finished his third season at Alvarado, keeps the letters he receives from Anansi Flaherty as well as photos from their time together at Katy.

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**Outdate**  
**Source**  
**State**

# 8413 Swananoah Road, Dallas, Texas 75209

**MLS#:** 20252270 **N Active**  
**Property Type:** Residential

**8413 Swananoah Road Dallas, TX 75209-2837**  
**SubType:** Single Family

**LP:** \$2,295,000  
**OLP:** \$2,295,000

**Recent:** 03/01/2023 : **NEW**

**Next OH:** Public: Sun Mar 5, 2:00PM-4:00PM



**Also For Lease:** N  
**Subdivision:** Bluff View Estates  
**County:** Dallas  
**Country:** United States  
**Parcel ID:** [0000035176600000](#)  
**Lot:** F **Block:** J4979  
**Legal:** BLUFF VIEW ESTATES BLK J/4979 LOT F LESS S 15  
**Unexmpt Tx:** \$34,502  
**Spcl Tax Auth:** No

**Lst \$/SqFt:** \$520.53

**Lake Name:**  
**Lse MLS#:**  
**Plan Dvlpm:**  
**MultiPrcl:** No **MUD Dst:** No

**Beds:** 5 **Tot Bth:** 4 **Liv Area:** 2  
**Fireplc:** 2 **Full Bath:** 3 **Din Area:** 2 **Pool:** Yes  
**Half Bath:** 1 **Adult Community:** No

**Smart Home App/Pwd:** No

**SqFt:** 4,409/Appraiser  
**Appraiser:**  
**Yr Built:** 1951/Preowned  
**Lot Dimen:**  
**Subdivide?:** No  
**HOA:** None  
**Access Unit:** No

**Hdcp Am:** No  
**Horses?:**  
**Attached:** No  
**Acres:** 0.504  
**Garage:** Yes/2  
**Attch Gar:** Yes  
**# Carport:** 1  
**Cov Prk:** 3  
**Gar Size:** 21x20

**HOA Co:**  
**AccUnit SF:**  
**Unit Type:**

### School Information

**School Dist:** Dallas ISD  
**Elementary:** Polk

**Middle:** Medrano

**High:** Jefferson

### Rooms

Room	Dimen / Lvl	Features	Room	Dimen / Lvl	Features
Living Room	20 x 15 / 1	Fireplace	Office	15 x 11 / 1	
Dining Room	18 x 14 / 1	Fireplace	Wine Cellar	4 x 5 / 1	
Kitchen	12 x 21 / 1	Breakfast Bar, Built-in Cabinets, Butlers Pantry, Eat-in Kitchen, Farm Sink, Granite/Granite Type Countertop, Water Line to Refrigerator	Mud Room	5 x 6 / 1	Built-in Cabinets
Family Room	19 x 16 / 1		Bonus Room	12 x 13 / 1	
Primary Bedrm	15 x 23 / 2	Sitting Area in Master, Walk-in Closet(s)	Bedroom	12 x 13 / 1	
Bedroom	13 x 13 / 2		Bedroom	15 x 15 / 2	
Bedroom	14 x 17 / 2		Laundry	11 x 7 / 2	Built-in Cabinets, Floor Drain, Sink in Utility
Media Room	21 x 18 / 2				

### General Information

**Housing Type:** Single Detached  
**Style of House:** Tudor  
**Lot Size/Acres:** .5 to < 1 Acre  
**Alarm/Security:** Burglar, Security System, Security System Owned, Smoke Detector(s)  
**Soil:** Unknown  
**Heating:** Central, Natural Gas, Zoned  
**Roof:** Composition, Metal, Shingle  
**Windows:** Window Coverings  
**Construction:** Brick, Siding, Wood  
**Fireplace Type:** Decorative, Dining Room, Double Sided, Gas, Library  
**Flooring:** Carpet, Hardwood, Tile  
**Levels:** 2  
**Type of Fence:** Back Yard, Electric, Fenced, Wood, Wrought Iron  
**Cooling:** Ceiling Fan(s), Central Air, Electric, Zoned  
**Accessible Ft:**  
**Cmplx Appv For:**  
**Patio/Porch:** Covered, Deck, Front Porch, Screened, Side Porch  
**Foundation:** Pillar/Post/Pier  
**Basement:** No  
**Possession:** Negotiable  
**Special Notes:** Survey Available  
**Listing Terms:** Contact Agent

### Features



**Appliances:** Built-in Gas Range, Built-in Refrigerator, Commercial Grade Range, Commercial Grade Vent, Dishwasher, Disposal, Gas Oven, Gas Range, Gas Water Heater, Microwave, Plumbed For Gas in Kitchen, Warming Drawer  
**Laundry Feat:** Dryer - Electric Hookup, In Utility Room, W/D - Full Size W/D Area, Washer Hookup  
**Interior Feat:** Built-in Features, Cable TV Available, Cedar Closet(s), Chandelier, Decorative Lighting, Double Vanity, Dry Bar, Eat-in Kitchen, Flat Screen Wiring, Granite Counters, High Speed Internet Available, Open Floorplan, Sound System Wiring, Vaulted Ceiling(s), Walk-In Closet(s), In-Law Suite Floorplan  
**Exterior Feat:** Covered Patio/Porch, Rain Gutters, Lighting, Outdoor Grill, Outdoor Kitchen, Outdoor Shower  
**Park/Garage:** 2-Car Double Doors, Circular Driveway, Detached Carport, Driveway, Electric Gate, Garage, Garage Door Opener, Garage Faces Rear, Gated  
**Pool Features:** Cabana, Gunite, Heated, In Ground, Outdoor Pool, Pool Sweep, Separate Spa/Hot Tub  
**Street/Utilities:** Cable Available, City Sewer, City Water, Electricity Available, Electricity Connected, Gravel/Rock, Individual Gas Meter, Individual Water Meter, Natural Gas Available, Overhead Utilities  
**Lot Description:** Interior Lot, Landscaped, Lrg. Backyard Grass, Many Trees, Sprinkler System  
**Other Structures:** Cabana, Outdoor Kitchen, Other  
**Showing:** Appointment Service  
**Dock Permitted:** No **Lake Pump:** No

**Remarks**

**Property Description:** Don't miss this hidden gem located on a hard-to-find half-acre, treed lot in exclusive Bluffview - close to Love Field, private schools, hospital district and downtown. This exquisite home got a gut-renovation and expansion in 2005 and a meticulous update in 2015. Welcoming front porch, spacious rooms and intricate detailing throughout. This well-maintained home features a wonderful, open floor-plan kitchen with Viking, Sub-Zero appliances, an over-sized pantry, shaker cabinets. Dining room includes a wine room. Downstairs guest room includes a private full bath. The floor plan offers multiple room possibilities including two separate offices, artist studio, a media room and four bedrooms. The backyard oasis features lush landscaping, pool, outdoor kitchen and a screened-in porch. A cabana for entertaining with a full bathroom is adjacent to the pool. Upstairs master suite includes a light-filled primary bedroom with a sitting area. Spa inspired bathroom and fabulous closet space.  
**Excludes:** None  
**Public Driving Directions:** Lovers Lane west to Midway Rd, Right on Midway, Left on Swananoah  
**Private Rmks:** Square footage does not include large screened in porch overlooking backyard. Square footage and room dimensions to be verified by buyer or buyer agent. Fireplaces were never used. Plumbed for gas but no devices installed. Chimneys will have to be serviced before use. Home is wired for sound but that was operational. Speakers in the front living room, dining room and back porch all work. It is the responsibility of the buyer or buyer's agent to verify all information which is deemed reliable but not guaranteed.

**Financial Information**

**Loan Type:** Treat As Clear **Bal:** **Payment:**  
**Pmt Type:** **Lender:** **Orig Date:** **2nd Mortg:** No

**Agent/Office Information**

**SUB:** 3 - % **CDOM:** 1 **DOM:** 1 **LD:** 03/01/2023 **XD:**  
**BAC:** 3 - % **VAR:** No  
**List Type:** Exclusive Right To Sell  
**List Off:** [Allie Beth Allman & Assoc. \(ABAR01\) 214-521-7355](#) **LO Fax:** 214-276-1935 **Brk Lic:** 0515965  
**LO Addr:** 5015 Tracy St. #102 Dallas, Texas 75205 **LO Email:** [alliebeth@alliebeth.com](mailto:alliebeth@alliebeth.com)  
**List Agt:** [Diana Nelson \(0794338\) 214-598-1135](#) **LA Cell:** **LA Fax:**  
**LA Email:** [diana.nelson@alliebeth.com](mailto:diana.nelson@alliebeth.com) **LA Othr:** **LA/LA2 Texting:** Yes/Yes  
**List Agt 2:** [Gia Marshello \(0525234\) 214-616-2568](#) **LA2 Email:** [gia.marshello@alliebeth.com](mailto:gia.marshello@alliebeth.com)  
**LA Website:** [www.alliebeth.com](http://www.alliebeth.com) **LO Sprvs:** Keith Conlon (0589972) 214-521-7355  
**Off Web:** [www.alliebeth.com](http://www.alliebeth.com)  
**Pref Title Co:** HSTX, Coby Bullock **Location:** 8300 Douglas Ave., 75225 214-572-1486

**Showing Information**

**Call:** Agent **Appt:** (800) 257-1242 **Owner Name:** See agent  
**Keybox #:** **Keybox Type:** None **Seller Type:** Standard/Individual  
**Show Instr:** Two-hour notice required, listing agent to meet, no showings before 9 a.m. or after 6 p.m.  
**Show Srvc:** BrokerBay  
**Occupancy:** Vacant **Open House:** Public: Sun Mar 5, 2:00PM-4:00PM  
**Surveillance Devices Present:** Video  
**Consent for Visitors to Record:**None

Prepared By: Debbie Sherrington Dave Perry Miller Real Estate on 03/02/2023 15:14

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