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Wrongly Convicted

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Issue 38
Fall 2007

In September 1981 a terrible crime occurred. My ex-husband, Willie Jerome Scott was brutally stabbed to death inside of his motor home, on a dark street in a seedy part of downtown Los Angeles. Seventeen years later a second crime took place. I was arrested, charged, convicted and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for Jerome's murder. Both crimes were horrifying, but the second one was sanctioned by the legal system.

Jerome came out of the closet as gay

Jerome and I had a wonderful, loving marriage devoted to raising our children in a happy home. We socialized with many famous musical personalities like Barry White, a frequent visitor, and various artists from Motown, including the Jackson's; Michael, Randy and Janet. We even named our son after the legendary Quincy Jones.

We had it all until one day in 1978 when Jerome informed me that he was gay. We agreed to go our separate ways, divorcing in 1979. I couldn't understand Jerome's lifestyle of homosexual lovers, and I was concerned that he had become deeply involved in the dark world of drugs and shady dealings. Somehow in spite of our differences, we still remained good friends, and I saw him when he would come by to visit our children.

Jerome's unsolved September 1981 murder

I was shocked and saddened to hear that Jerome's decomposed body had been found inside his motor home with a knife sticking out of his chest and a plastic bag wrapped around his head. Trash and garment bags obscured his partially decayed body and there was blood inside the motor home. He had been brutally stabbed numerous times and there was evidence of recent anal sex, but the deteriorated condition of his body made it difficult for the medical examiner to determine exactly when he died.

The original investigation seemed to focus on his murder being related to his drug use and gay lifestyle. I was questioned at length about what else he might have been involved in. I helped as much as I could, but my last contact with Jerome had been over a week earlier, when he came by our house in Lake Encino (more than 20 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles). He told me he would return shortly to take the kids and I on a weekend outing in his motor home. He had his boyfriend with him and said he needed to drop him somewhere before we went on our outing. That was the last time I ever saw him.

"Cold Case" Detectives Close File By Fingering The Wrong Person — The Patricia Wright Story

By Patricia Ramdhan-Wright

Based on the details about Jerome's murder, anyone that knew him could see that something wasn't right. He had always been meticulous about his appearance and he favored expensive jewelry and watches. He had withdrawn \$10,000 in cash the week of his death, but when his body was discovered he had less than four dollars in cash and the only jewelry he wore was an inexpensive ring with someone else's initials on it.

I freely cooperated with the police in 1981, and believed I wasn't considered a suspect because none of the blood found at the scene matched mine. Nor did any of the thirteen sets of fingerprints or any other forensic evidence found at the crime scene point to me in any way. Since Jerome's case remained unsolved, LAPD detectives also questioned me in 1983, 1985 and 1987.

LAPD "cold case" unit reopens Jerome's case

In 1995 a new LAPD "cold case" task force was established, and Jerome's case was one they considered.

There were a number of people who could have had the motive, means and opportunity to kill Jerome. His nephew was a known drug dealer and gang-banger who had many run-ins with the law by the time of his uncle's murder. The nephew's fingerprints were among the thirteen sets found in the interior of the motor home, but when the cold case detectives looked for him in 1997, he was already in prison for another violent crime so they didn't pursue him. Jerome's ex-lover, Herman Cross, was originally investigated and considered a good suspect because of his jealousy over Jerome's younger lovers and the fact that he was the beneficiary for a life insurance policy on Jerome obtained when they were together. Cross died of A.I.D.S. several years after the murder, so the cold case detectives chose not to pursue investigating him as Jerome's murderer. The last person known to have been with Jerome was a male prostitute named Ralph or Roger, but he was never located. Consequently, the detectives chose the path of least resistance by focusing on me as a suspect.

My brother Larry, angry with me at the time, fanned the flames of suspicion by pointing a finger at me. In 1995, when he was living in

Connecticut, he told authorities that he had information about the 1981 murder of his ex-brother-in-law. Two LAPD detectives visited him and he signed a statement they wrote that implicated not just me, but also Larry Slaughter, a family friend, in Jerome's murder.

Arrested For Jerome's Murder

The real nightmare began in earnest in August 1997, when I was arrested and charged with Jerome's murder based on my brother's claim. I was taken before Judge Lance Ito (of O.J. Simpson fame), and he ordered my immediate release due to a lack of evidence.

My relief was short lived because I was re-arrested two weeks later and taken before a different judge. This time the prosecution claimed to have a taped confession from Slaughter. They considered the alleged confession as the case's "smoking gun." The detectives alleged that Slaughter was taped telling them that I hired him for \$25,000 to kill Jerome. The new judge decided, without hearing the tape, that there was now sufficient evidence to hold me for trial. When my public defender demanded to hear Slaughter's alleged taped confession the detectives claimed the tape was "lost."

Even though they claimed to have Slaughter's (unsubstantiated) confession, the detectives began scrambling to find evidence against me. So they started a campaign of harassment against my family members and friends to try and induce them to provide incriminating information. As luck would have it for the detectives, by that time my disgruntled brother was imprisoned in Connecticut for child abuse related convictions. The detectives, Steve Koman and Russell Long, flew to Connecticut and questioned Larry in prison about Jerome's murder. They dangled in front of him the carrot of a "sweetheart deal." In exchange for him providing the evidence they needed for the charges against Slaughter as Jerome's murderer, and me as an accessory to stick, he would be sentenced to eight months in jail for a misdemeanor and the felony convictions would be cleared from his record.

Facing 12 years in prison targeted by other prisoners as a child abuser, he jumped at the deal and made a videotaped statement. By claiming I had made incriminating admissions, the detectives gave him the opportunity to get even with me for financially cutting him off years earlier. He implicated Slaughter as the actual murderer and me as the crime's mastermind.

Wright cont. on p. 19

Clay cont. from p. 18

Conclusion and current status

I wore no halo before my arrest for Martindale's murder. I had been a drug dealer for several years. However, I was only arrested once for drug possession and unlawful use of a weapon, a key chain's little knife. I know it was my involvement in drugs that led to my involvement in this case. I wanted to sell Stacy drugs and she didn't have the money on her to pay for them, so I went to her house where I waited in her car for her to come out with the money. If not for those actions of mine, I would not have been at her house just before Martindale's murder. I had good reason to flee from the police that night due to the illegal drugs I had on me, but I had no motive whatsoever to kill Martindale, and I had nothing to do with his murder. Yet, here I am, on Missouri's death row.

I have exhausted all my appeals, so in the absence of startling new evidence – such as Stacy unequivocally stating that I had nothing to do with her husband's murder, or Sanders coming forward and stating he was with me in the car and that my account of that evening's events is absolutely correct, or Chief McFerren coming forward and acknowledging he could have destroyed the drivers side footprints – I am simply awaiting my turn at being put to death unless Missouri joins New Jersey in abolishing the death penalty, or the Supreme Court somehow intervenes. But all that would do is transform my death sentence into life without parole – for a murder I did not commit and had no knowledge of until the day after it happened.

There is justice, just not here, and we need to find it for everyone, or we will only continue to condemn innocent men and women to prison and execution. I can be written at: Richard Clay 990120

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My lawyer is Jennifer Herndon. Her email is, jennifernix@netcom.com

Wright cont. from p. 3

Larry regretted what he said to save his own hide when he was flown to Los Angeles to testify against me at my trial. However, the detectives and prosecutors ignored him when he recanted his statement.

1998 trial and conviction

During my trial in 1998, the prosecution's theory of the crime was that Slaughter killed Jerome at my direction for both our financial gain. Slaughter didn't testify, but a detective testified that Slaughter confessed on the "lost" tape to committing the murder in exchange for \$25,000. My brother testified that he lied in his statement: Under oath he told the jury that he knew nothing about Jerome's murder and I never made any admissions to him about the murder. A detective testified about being present when Larry gave his statement, and who is a jury going to believe: a convicted child abuser or an LAPD detective?

The prosecution contended my motive was to collect two large life insurance policies on Jerome allegedly purchased just before his death. The proof offered by the prosecutor was the videotape of an 83-year-old insurance agent. Suffering from severe, late stage Alzheimer's disease, the agent rambled on about remembering Jerome. The insurance agent was so mentally debilitated that he was totally incoherent on the tape. Yet my public defender did not even attempt to call into question his competency to "testify" via the videotape about the policies. The insurance agent, who I had no opportunity to cross-examine, died later that year. My public defender failed to question the underlying truth of the prosecution's claims about these policies. In fact, we had several children together, and the smaller policy that paid about \$30,000 was purchased more than a year before Jerome's death, while the other policy was canceled before his murder. (I obtained written proof about both policies from the insurance company six years after my trial.)

The seventeen-year gap between the crime and my trial caused me severe problems in defending myself. Crucial

evidence had been lost, several witnesses had died or disappeared, and a detective from the original investigation had died. The murder weapon stained by blood that did not have either my fingerprints or Slaughters' on it was "lost" by homicide detectives prior to my trial, so it couldn't be subjected to state of the art DNA or other forensic tests. Also, Jerome's heart and brain had disappeared making an independent examination of his general physical condition by an independent pathologist impossible.

The coroner that testified about Jerome's cause of death had lost organs from other cases, and in other cases he had been proven wrong in his opinion of the deceased person's cause of death. My public defender, however, failed to discover this. I found proof of the coroner's questionable findings and past conduct on my own after my trial was over. The prosecution also alleged that Jerome wasn't gay so his murder couldn't have been related to his edgy gay lifestyle. (Remember, things were much different for gay people in 1981 when Jerome was murdered.) Again, my public defender failed me by not subpoenaing witnesses who could not only have established that Jerome was living a very risky gay lifestyle, but that we divorced when he came "out of the closet" and revealed to me that he was gay.

Needless to say, largely on the basis of testimony about Slaughter's fictitious confession and my brother's recanted statement, the jury convicted me of first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. I was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Many things didn't add up with me (or Slaughter) being charged with this crime, including the total lack of any physical or forensic evidence, or any eyewitnesses linking either Slaughter or me to the crime.

Appeals denied

My state direct appeal and post-conviction petition were both denied. I filed a federal habeas corpus petition in 2002 that was denied, but I was awarded a certificate of appealability in December 2003 on the issue that my constitutional right to a speedy trial had been violated by the sixteen year delay in charges being filed against me. My hopes, however, were shot down in June 2004 when the federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that my federal habeas petition had been untimely. It was filed *one day* later than allowed by the Anti-Terrorism and Death Penalty Act.

Wright cont. on p. 20

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Wright cont. from p. 19

Exculpatory evidence discovered after trial

Since my conviction I have obtained exculpatory evidence, favorable expert witness statements, and notarized declarations from a number of people who were not called as a witness at my trial. An example of this evidence is that in July 2004 I obtained documentation from the New York Life Insurance Company about the two life insurance policies. The smaller policy they paid a death benefit on was taken out more than a year before Jerome's death, and the second policy was canceled by me – the policyholder – prior to his murder. This evidence demolishes the prosecution's theory of why Jerome was murdered that the jury relied on to convict me.

Additionally, on August 30, 2004 the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office sent a letter to Jerome's mother, Mabel Goffee, confirming that at the time of his murder he was so sick that he was mere months away from dying of liver disease and pancreatic fibrosis. This letter states in part, "... he could only have had a few months to live even if there had been no stabbing injuries." Jerome was on death's door when he was murdered – and I would have been paid the small life insurance policy when his disease-ravaged body had soon died naturally.

My brother Larry has executed three affidavits, in 1998, 2000 and 2004. The three affidavits are of varying length and detail, but they all express the same sentiment: In eliciting his taped 1997 statement the LAPD detectives took advantage of his terrifying situation of being imprisoned as a child abuser, and his desire to get out of prison by any way possible. Larry swore in his affidavit of July 16, 2004, "My entire statement was a big ass lie."

As luck would have it, I discovered on Christmas Day 2006 that a fellow prisoner of mine frequently saw Jerome in the downtown LA area of drugs and prostitution where he was murdered, and she knew the gay prostitute he frequently paid for sex. The woman is Elvira James, and she swore in an affidavit dated June 23, 2007 that Jerome was known as "C-Note" because he paid \$100 for sex, and he was widely known to carry a large amount of cash. She wrote that because he paid top dollar, "Jerome was a 'big trick' downtown." The area where Jerome was murdered was one of LA's most dangerous areas at the time. James' information provides the most logical motive imaginable for Jerome's murder: the theft of the money, jewelry and drugs he had on him or in his motor home by one or more

persons who either knew of his reputation, or actually sold him drugs or gay sex. That is 100% consistent with the fact that Jerome had been robbed of his expensive jewelry, whatever drugs he had on him or in the motorhome, and as much as \$10,000 in cash. James also swore in her affidavit that word on the street at the time was that a gay guy known as Ms. Ross murdered Jerome.

Slaughter executed an affidavit dated January 20, 2001 in which he swears that he made a taped statement to the LAPD, but that he said nothing suggesting that either he or I had any involvement in Jerome's murder. In fact, Slaughter says of his questioning by a detective, "I told him I did not know what he was talking about!" Slaughter's affidavit logically explains why only days after his statement the LAPD claimed the tape of it had been "lost." The LAPD couldn't on the one hand claim Slaughter's taped statement constituted a confession, and on the other hand provide the tape to my public defender when it in fact contained no incriminating evidence against either Slaughter or me. Slaughter's affidavit is also consistent with the fact that neither he nor I have been identified as the source of any crime scene evidence.

I want to emphasize that Jerome's murder involves a triple injustice: I was wrongly convicted; I believe that after his separate trial Slaughter was also wrongly convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison; and the person or persons who actually murdered Jerome got off scot-free.

In spite of my setbacks, I have not lost faith that I will be proven innocent and set free. What I need is a skilled investigator and a determined attorney to help make this a reality. I pray someone reading this will feel "called" to help right this terrible wrong, and assist me. I can be written at:

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My outside contact is my son Quincey Scott. His email is, TMSO9@aol.com

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Federal Tax Breaks Proposed For Exonerated

Currently all compensation received by a wrongly convicted person is federally taxable as personal income, and a number of exonerated persons have gotten into trouble with the IRS over tax payments.

Asserting that federally taxing the compensation an exonerated person receives is "like throwing salt on a very deep wound," New York Senator Charles Schumer (D) introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate on December 6, 2007 that would provide those people with special federal income tax breaks.

The Wrongful Convictions Tax Relief Act of 2007 (S. 2421), if enacted, will amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt a "wrongfully incarcerated individual" from paying federal income taxes on "any civil damages, restitution, or other monetary award" related to their wrongful incarceration. (All other income would be subject to federal taxation.) The bill would also exempt, for a maximum of 15 years, an exonerated person without a prior felony conviction from paying income taxes on up to \$50,000 earned each year after their release (or up to \$75,000 if married and filing a joint return).

Schumer said at the time he introduced the bill: "The criminal justice system is not perfect, so at the very least, we ought to do what we can to make amends to the people who were wrongly convicted — a very small number of people who pay a big, big price for those mistakes. The compensation they receive should not be taxed."

A wrongly convicted person's state compensation is exempted from state taxes in California, Massachusetts and Vermont.

Sources:

S. 2421, The Wrongful Convictions Tax Relief Act of 2007. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:S.2421>
Bill Would Give Tax Break to Exonerated Prisoners, *The New York Times*, December 7, 2007.

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