

Thenjiwe Griffiths Acquitted Of 'Black Widow' Carjacking Murder Of Her Husband

On April 6, 2017 Thenjiwe Griffiths [was acquitted](#) of the 2006 murder of her husband Allan. The Pietermaritzburg High Court in South Africa ruled the prosecution's evidence didn't support her conviction of being involved in his murder during a carjacking.

Thenjiwe was 24 when she married Allan Griffiths in April 2005. She was 35 years younger than the 59-year-old Allan. His family disapproved of their marriage because they thought she was a gold digger.

On January 20, 2006 Thenjiwe and Allan stopped to pick-up two hitchhikers while they were driving on the N3 highway near Estcourt, about 110 miles northwest of Durban. The men forced Thenjiwe and Allan out of the car, and she was able to escape.

Thenjiwe led the police to where they stopped. Their car was gone, but Allan's body was found in tall grass next to the road. She gave a description of the men to the police.

Allan had been beaten, but his death was caused from strangulation.

The car was found abandoned on the N3 highway, which is the main road between Durban and Johannesburg.

In 2006 carjackings were a common occurrence in South Africa. A March 2006 [article in the](#) *The Guardian* of London stated: "Thousands of motorists are ambushed at gunpoint each year in South Africa. The lucky ones are left by the roadside, shaken and without their cars. The unlucky ones are abducted, raped and murdered." A South African movie about carjacking, *Tsotsi*, won the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film of 2005.



Thenjiwe Griffiths after her release from prison on April 6, 2017. (Supplied)

Eight years after the crime Thenjiwe was charged with murder and robbery in the death of her husband. She was charged even though the men who killed Allan hadn't been found, she had not confessed to any involvement, and no physical or forensic evidence linked her to his murder. She was released on bail pending her trial.

The press dubbed her the "Black Widow" killer.

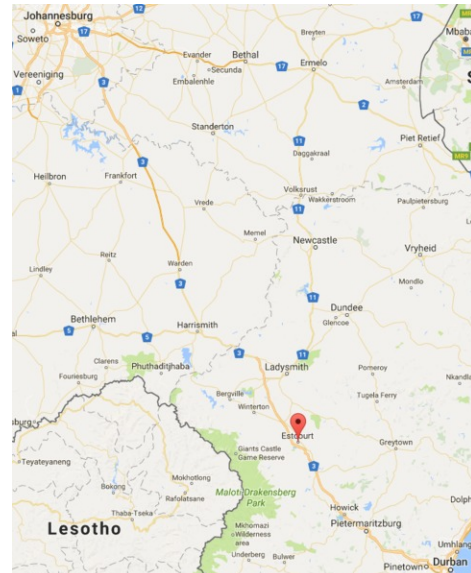
During Thenjiwe's trial the prosecution's case was primarily based on circumstantial and hearsay evidence. The circumstantial evidence was the 35 year age difference between her and Allan suggested she married for money and not love. The hearsay evidence was testimony by several people that Allan told them he wasn't happy with Thenjiwe and he wanted a divorce.

Thenjiwe testified in her defense what she told the police in 2006: they stopped to pick up two hitchhikers who turned out to be carjackers, and she was able to escape.

In their closing, the prosecution argued she set-up the car hijacking as an alibi by arranging for the killers to pose as hitchhikers. However, the prosecution presented no evidence to support their argument. The prosecution also argued Thenjiwe was guilty because she took the police to where the hijacking took place and Allan's body was found.

On December 8, 2014 the panel of Judge Rishi Seegobin and two assessors found Thenjiwe guilty of murder and robbery.

During her sentencing hearing two days later, Thenjiwe's insistence on her innocence offended Judge Seegobin. [He said](#), "Griffiths continues to deny her guilt. She has shown no indication of remorse and persists in her denial.



Estcourt on Hwy 3 between Durban and Johannesburg (Google Maps)

The court is obliged in these circumstances to impose a life sentence." He also ordered a sentence of 15 years in prison for robbery with the aggravating circumstance of the stolen car. He revoked her bail and she was taken into custody to begin serving her sentence.

In May 2015 the Pietermaritzburg High Court [granted Thenjiwe](#) leave to appeal her convictions, but she was denied bail.

On April 6, 2017 the Pietermaritzburg High Court overturned Thenjiwe's convictions. The Court ruled there had been a "serious failure of justice," because the prosecution failed to present evidence establishing a *prima facie* case against her. The lack of evidence was compounded by prejudicial procedural and evidentiary errors by the trial judge. Those errors included considering evidence of Thenjiwe's guilt was that she took police to the scene of the hijacking where Allan was killed.

The High Court noted the prosecution's case was based on circumstantial evidence related to the age difference between Thenjiwe and Allan, and uncorroborated hearsay evidence they may have had marital problems. [However](#), "The state did not tender any direct evidence tending to prove the appellant [Thenjiwe Griffiths] had unlawfully and intentionally robbed and killed the deceased [Allan Griffiths] at all. Nor did it prove that she in any way participated in the commission of the crimes charged."

The Court observed the trial court assumed the age difference and possible marital problems between Thenjiwe and Allan was



Thenjiwe Griffiths, with her attorney Narain Naidoo, outside the Westville Prison after her release on April 6, 2017. (Supplied)

Griffiths cont. on p. 9