

Midwest Innocence Project Blog

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[Josh Kezer freed after more than 16 years](#)

Posted by: [themip](#) in [The Organization](#) , [General Info](#) on Feb 21, 2009

By ALAN SCHER ZAGIER

Associated Press Writer

When Sheriff Rick Walter was a reserve deputy, he discovered slain college student Angela Mischelle Lawless in her idling car along a rural southeastern Missouri highway and was sure at least two people had attacked her.

He raised that and other suspicions, both during the initial investigation and after Joshua Kezer's 1994 conviction on second-degree murder in the 19-year-old woman's shooting death.

'I went as far as I could go. And it fell on deaf ears,' he said. 'The sheriff said, 'I have a conviction in this case, I don't even want to hear it, case closed.'

The 48-year-old Walter never gave up searching for the truth and on Wednesday joined friends, family and defense lawyers outside the Jefferson City Correctional Center to celebrate the release of Kezer, who spent nearly half his life behind bars for the 1992 killing that a judge now says he couldn't possibly have committed.

Despite Walter's desire to take another look at the case, Kezer was wary when the lawman first visited him in prison.

"I didn't set out to free Josh," Walter said. "And I told him that at our first meeting. He was a little cold and didn't trust me."

He also met opposition from former investigators and powerful ex-Scott County Sheriff Bill Ferrell, who reminded Walter of the potential damage to his political career.

"This could have been a career-ending decision," said Walter, a Democrat first elected in 2004 in the county of about 40,000 people. "There's a lot of people who did not want me to do this. Law enforcement was my biggest stumbling block."

After all, Kenny Hulshof, a tough-on-crime special prosecutor who parlayed his credentials into six terms in Congress and the a Republican nomination for governor, was the man who convinced a jury that Kezer was guilty of shooting the Southeast Missouri State University student three times and leaving her body in her car along an Interstate 55 exit ramp just west of the Mississippi River.

Cole County Circuit Judge Richard Callahan ruled Tuesday that Kezer, who was 17 at the time of the killing, was wrongly convicted. His 44-page decision included a stinging rebuke of Hulshof, saying he withheld key evidence from defense attorneys and embellished details in his closing arguments.

Other than a statement Tuesday in which he affirmed his belief that Kezer is guilty, Hulshof has declined to comment.

The state's prosecution was based on the testimony of another suspect in Lawless' death who said he saw Kezer at a nearby convenience store on the night of the killing. But he gave conflicting testimony and three jail inmates who claimed Kezer had confessed to the killing later acknowledged lying in hopes of getting reduced sentences.

After he became sheriff, Walter assigned a team of investigators to re-examine the case and the probe turned up evidence that contributed to Kezer's release. When the 34-year-old Kezer, dressed in civilian clothes, walked out of the prison's front doors, he kept a promise to the

sheriff and vigorously shook Walter's hand.

"He showed a lot of courage in coming to see me the first time," Kezer said. "He didn't know what to expect. ... But he still decided to look me in my eyes. He didn't play games with me. He told me was going to find out the truth.

"I told him what the truth was, but he didn't really listen to that too much. He wanted to find out what the truth was for himself."

Walter joined the department full time in 1996 and ran against Ferrell in 2000, losing by several hundred votes. He later won when Ferrell retired in 2004 after 28 years in office. Ferrell did not respond to messages left at his Sikeston home requesting an interview.

Olga Akselrod, a staff attorney with the Innocence Project, a New York-based group that works to free the wrongly accused, called Walter's work on the case, including frequently collaborating with defense attorneys, "unusual and highly commendable."

"He's a big reason why an innocent person who was still in prison all these years is now out," said Akselrod, who assisted in Kezer's defense. "The trend is clearly toward more cooperation from law enforcement."

Walter isn't done. On Thursday, he was already turning his attention to following leads he hopes will result in new charges being filed in Lawless' death.

"There's still a hole here," Walter said. "You don't want to lose sight of what started this. Somebody killed Mischelle Lawless. I will feel better when I put someone in the cell that Josh was in."

[Missouri Bar Grant Awarded](#)

Posted by: [themip](#) in *Untagged* on Jul 30, 2008

The Missouri Bar

We were informed this week that the Missouri Bar Foundation has approved our technology grant request for \$16,900.

When Tiffany and I took the reins of the MIP several months ago we had one overwhelming desire in comon: to take the system of moving cases forward into the digital age. So, we wrote a grant to the MO Bar asking for help with that goal.

With this money the MIP will: scan over 40,000 paper documents into a digital form that can be accessed over the internet; purchase an in-house, high-volume scanner to handle the day to day scanning of documents; purchase a server to keep all our digital casework on and serve it up to the internet; upgrade the MIP website (www.TheMIP.org); buy two new computers for our volunteers to use to scan and organize our thousands of documents; and buy the software necessary to run them effeciently.

Anyone within earshot of the board members of the Missouri Bar, please tell them thank you on our

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[KCPD Videotapes Interrogations](#)

Posted by: [themip](#) in [Remedies](#), [Policy](#), [Causes](#) on Jun 13, 2008

By NADIA PFLAUM OF [THE PITCH BLOG](#) :

Time to wax the mustache and polish the good-cop, bad-cop routine: The Kansas City Police Department plans to start filming all interrogations of crime suspects.

It used to be that the KCPD only filmed a suspect's official statement. Everything leading up to that, however, was off-camera. As of now, there is only one interrogation room at KCPD headquarters equipped with a video camera. But recently, Kansas City Police Chief Jim Corwin approved a decision to film the entire process. Police spokesman Capt. Rich Lockhart says that no specific incident prompted the policy change.

"This is one of those national trends that lots of departments are starting to follow," Lockhart says.

Not everyone at the KCPD is thrilled about the change. "There are some detectives that are supportive," Lockhart says. "Some are not."

Why wouldn't a detective want his or her interrogations thoroughly documented?

"There are certain techniques you use in interrogation that aren't

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