

## Home Sweet Home

Twice-convicted murderer Mark Woodworth recently won a postconviction appeal. The Missouri Supreme Court ruled that the county prosecutor withheld favorable evidence from Woodworth prior to his trial, undermining confidence in the jury's verdict.

At trial, the State alleged that, at midnight on November 13, 1990, Woodworth, sixteen years old at the time, sneaked into the home of Lyndel and Catherine Robertson, shooting Catherine once in the neck and once in the chest. Lyndel was shot three times in the face and once in the shoulder while he and his wife laid sleeping in their bed. Although evidence of this wasn't offered at trial, it is rumored that Mark's dad, Claude Woodworth, and Lyndel Robertson, Claude's business partner, each held million-dollar life insurance policies on the other. It is further rumored that Claude complained about Lyndel in Mark's presence, prior to the shooting.

The State did offer evidence suggesting that the Robertsons' did not want Mark planting and harvesting soybeans as part of their business dealings with Claude. Mark's fingerprint was found on a box of .22 caliber ammunition in the Robertsons' shed. When asked about it, Mark denied ever seeing the shells or touching them.

Ironically, Lyndel was not killed as planned, his wife was. No million dollars for Claude Woodworth, no shiny new Ford Mustang for socially awkward Mark to impress kids at school or the teenage girl of his musings with. Instead, nearly two years after shooting, Mark was charged, tried, and convicted of second-degree murder, even though the facts supported a first-degree murder charge under Section 565.020, RSMo.

Passing Mark on his way to the administration building, where police officers waited to take him into custody and transport



him back to the local county jail for retrial or bail, I was reminded that I once took the same walk, feeling cocky and optimistic about being free, only to be reconvicted and returned to prison two years later.

Fortunately, Mark's dad has money to throw at the problem, posting a \$50,000 cash bond within days, freeing his son, the half-witted man-child, for the first time in almost seventeen years. The event was covered intensely by all local media, catapulting Mark to instant celebrity status, nearly as recognizable as his peers--to name a few: Dale Helming, Casey Anthony, and the West Memphis Three, Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin, and Jessie Misskelly.

These well-known killers are free, cashing in on society's gullibility and ignorance of how the media were manipulated to turn murderers into instant celebrities.

The notorious West Memphis Three molested, mutilated, and murdered three innocent eight-year-old boys--Michael Moore, Christopher Byer, and Steve Branch--during a bizarre satanic ritual. The penile mutilation inflicted on each of the boys indicated oral sex had been performed on them. The skin of Byer's penis had been removed; his scrotal sac and testes were missing. The boys anuses were also dilated. One boy bled to death. The other two were killed by drowning.

When Detective Bryn Ridge questioned the cult leader, Damien Echols, he asked him how he thought the three boys died. Echols stated that the boys probably died of mutilation, that some guy had cut the bodies up. He claimed he had heard that they were in the water and may have drowned. Echols said one boy was cut up more than the others, that the purpose of the killings may have been to scare someone. He believed it was only one person for fear of squealing by another involved.

Although Echols wanted to appear innocent by being cooperative,



he actually revealed his personal knowledge of the crimes. At the time Echols made the statement, there was no public knowledge that one of the boys had been mutilated more severely than the others.

Echols told Dr. James Money Penny, a psychologist, that he obtains his powers by drinking the blood of others. Echols stated that it makes him feel like a god. Echols further said, "I want to go where the monsters go. Pretty much hate the human race. People are in two classes, sheep and wolves. Wolves eat sheep."

Echols's loyal follower, Jason Baldwin, also made incriminating statements, stating that Echols, Miss Kelly, and he sucked the blood from the boys' penises and scrotums, and that he, Baldwin, put Byer's testicles in his mouth. Other incriminating evidence was found in the bedrooms of Echols and Baldwin, specifically, journals containing morbid images, references to dead children, photos of young white males and knives, as well as other cult or satanic materials, books etc.

Despite the evidence against Echols, Baldwin, and Miss Kelly, they were set free due to a single hair entwined in a shoestring or rope of some kind used to tie one of the boys up. Although the hair's DNA didn't match the killers, this does not conclusively prove their innocence. Rather than retry the case, the State offered them each a plea in exchange for time served. The West Memphis Three all accepted the deal.

It's telling that none of these "falsely accused" murderers are using their new status and resources to bring to justice whoever they claim is truly responsible for these horrible crimes.

One of the things I find troubling is that society welcomes these murderers with open arms. Having personally watched prisoners come and go, I know the majority make little effort toward rehabilitation or personal growth. Here in Missouri, Mark Woodworth



spent his time working in the prison's maintenance department, working out in the gym, and walking circles on the yard, complaining about his case and talking about going home.

What does "going home" actually mean for Mark Woodworth or others set free after many years in prison? Does it mean getting a second chance to live out the life once lived, prior to incarceration? Does "going home" mean being free to nurture selfish and destructive habits again, on the outside, without the restrictions of confinement? Does it mean a celebration, a time to eat steak and fried chicken, get inebriated, get high on illegal drugs, and have unprotected sex with strangers?

If a man is incarcerated for over a decade, during which time he made no efforts toward rehabilitation or personal growth, spent his time watching *Jerry Springer*, attained no communication skills, no education, no money or resources, and let himself be consumed with thoughts of all the things incarceration deprived him of, wouldn't his focus be fixed on gratification, his motivation be trained on fulfilling his urges as soon as he is released from prison? Might this explain why the recidivism rate is so high?

To me the proposition "going home" means nothing, I don't want to go home to the neighborhood or house I grew up in--I want a life, a life I work on building daily, by reading, writing, and studying the problems around me, looking to improve my life as well as the lives of others. I work on personal growth, setting goals and accomplishing them with few or no free-world resources. And I commend every other prisoner who is doing the same thing, who spends his or her time working toward building a life, building a better self with all the energy that can be mustered, despite the cold, dark, lonely cement cell entombing them day and night, draining their creative life force. *These* are the prisoners deserving of society's embrace.