

Background

My name is Mary Couey, formerly Mary Warren. The pictures you see of the young man on the cover and on the following pages are of my son Keith Warren. He was nineteen years old when these pictures were taken.

It was July 1986 and Keith had just graduated from Kennedy High School in Silver Spring, Maryland. Like many of his classmates, my son was headed for college and was spending the summer enjoying his friends and working at his jobs at Glenmont Chrysler and Bel Pre Shell.

Keith was an extremely likable and personable young man who made friends very quickly and easily. Sometimes, this worked to his advantage; other times it did not. Such was the case in the first few months of the Summer of 1986. Those first few months of new friendships were to be the last months of his life. Keith had fallen in with disreputable people, some of whom may have been involved in drugs.

Tuesday, July 29, 1986

After receiving a phone call, Keith left home to hang out with some of his friends. Wednesday he did not return. Growing concerned, I called around to inquire about my son, but to no avail. I then notified the Montgomery County Police at the Wheaton/Glenmont Station. I was informed that unless he was an invalid or on medication, they would not look for him until 48 hours had passed.

Thursday, July 31, 1986

Paramedics at the nearby Fire and Rescue station received a call from a girl who claimed a suicide had been committed in the basement of the house from which she was calling. The address is 14655 Tynewick Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Rescue personnel arrived on the scene with paramedic Dallas Lipp in charge. Three people, including Mr. Chip Wynn who resided in the house, were seated at the kitchen table. A young lady named Claudia "Michelle" Lawson, who was Mr. Wynn's girlfriend, was also present. It was Ms. Lawson who had called and reported the suicide in the basement.

Mr. Lipp informed the people that he was responding to the girl's call about a suicide and asked to be directed to the basement. He was advised that the body was in the woods a short distance from the house.

Mr. Lipp then asked the men at the table to accompany him to the body in the woods. They declined and told Ms. Lawson to take the paramedic to the scene. Ms. Lawson reluctantly agreed. Giving no reason why she had called saying the suicide was in the basement, Ms. Lawson changed her story and told the paramedic that she had been walking her dog in the

woods and came upon the body hanging from the tree. However, upon arrival at the hanging and making close observations, paramedic Lipp remarked, "This does not look like a suicide."

Montgomery County Police Officer Luther Leverette from the Wheaton-Glenmont Police Station responded to the scene and took charge. It appeared that Officer Leverette knew my son Keith and also knew Chip Wynn.

This officer did not follow proper police procedure and secure the scene by cordoning off the area. Why? Bystanders described his acts as being "hasty" and "unprofessional." Officer Leverette even said, "Why would this have to happen on my lunch break?"

Officer Leverette immediately ruled my son's death a suicide. Via telecommunications, Officer Leverette contacted the County Coroner, John Rogers, and told him there was no need for him (the Coroner) to come to the scene, and that he should just mark the death down as a "suicide." Officer Leverette stated in his report that Keith had "Apparently jumped off of a log." The paramedic stated that there was no log or any other thing from which Keith could have jumped.

Officer Leverette had the body removed from the tree and sent to Collins Funeral Home in Silver Spring with instructions to have the body embalmed immediately. Again, proper police procedure was not followed. Why? In accordance with proper police procedure, an autopsy and toxicological tests should have been performed on my son's body. Neither an autopsy nor a toxicological exam was performed. Why? Further, even though three forms of identification were found in my son's pockets, it wasn't until seven hours later that I, the next of kin, was notified of his death. Why? My next door neighbor gave Officer Leverette my work number and the use of her phone. He refused to call me and told her to have me call him when I returned home from work that evening.

My neighbor called me at work and said that an Officer Leverette was looking for me and to call him. She was upset, but wouldn't tell me why. I called and was told that Officer Leverette was out on another call and would not be available for at least two hours.

Two hours later, Officer Leverette showed up at my place of work and produced a swimming pool ID card of Keith's and asked if that was my son. I confirmed that it was, and that my son had been missing for two days. I asked if the officer had found him. Officer Leverette responded that yes, he had been found and he had committed suicide. He questioned me as to any reasons why Keith would have committed suicide, preying upon the innate pain and guilt that any mother would feel when receiving such a message. I cooperated with him the best I could while agonizing over this revelation. At the time, I trusted Officer Leverette. Even though I could not think of any reason why my son would take his own life, I tried to think of any recent disagreements between my son and me. The only thing that came to mind was my strong objection to Keith's choice of a car. Officer Leverette later exaggerated my statement and used it to substantiate his own creation of a reason.

It was Officer Leverette's idea that Keith had become depressed over this and committed suicide. Although Keith had no history of drugs, I asked Officer Leverette several times whether or not drugs were involved, given the fact that the area of Aspen Hill in which we lived had reported drug activity amongst teenagers. He emphatically replied, "No." Upon his departure and hour later, Officer Leverette handed me a business card from Collins Funeral Home in Silver Spring and told me to contact them after 9:00 a.m. the next day.

I called my brother who immediately went to the funeral home to identify the body but was denied entry three times and told to come back the next day.

Twenty-four hours later, on the fourth attempt, we went to the funeral home and were finally allowed to briefly view Keith's remains after he had been embalmed. I was later sued for payment by a funeral home I did not choose and for services I did not order. I requested Keith's clothes and was told by the funeral home director that they (the funeral home) had destroyed his clothes because my son's body had severely decomposed and deteriorated the clothes. I have never heard of that happening within two days, and I make my living working in pathology. I then requested the noose and rope. I was told that it was in the possession of the Montgomery County Police.

My brother and I went to see Officer Leverette who gave us a brown bag containing the rope and Keith's brown boots which he said Keith was wearing at the time he was found, along with a few other items.

A few days after the death of my son Keith, the Montgomery County Police went to the woods and chopped down the tree, stating that they needed it for evidence. My son's death was ruled a suicide, and the police called it an "open and shut" case. Why then did they need evidence? Were they worried that someone else would have looked at the tree and been able to determine that this was not a case of suicide by hanging, but that my son died elsewhere and was later put in the tree?

I have never believed my son committed suicide and have constantly pursued an investigation with each of the Montgomery County Police Chiefs, the State's Attorneys, and the County Executives in office from the time of Keith's death to the present. I am always met with cordial expressions of sympathy, only to be cut off soon after. People who confided to me that they thought something was suspicious and that they would investigate now avoid communications with me as though they have been silenced by an empowered authority.

The following defensive or inappropriate remarks have been made by several Montgomery County Police Officers: "I don't care how many lawyers she hires, it will not change the ruling of suicide." "If you had been a better mother, this wouldn't have happened." "She is an emotionally distraught mother who cannot come to terms with her son's death." It is implied that I am having a hard time letting go.

Let me at this point assure you that I have completely accepted the fact that my son is

dead and have let go of any false sense of guilt. **What I have not let go of is the fact that there is more to this story than I am being told!**

April 9, 1992

Had he still been alive, this would have been my son Keith's twenty-fifth birthday. I returned home from work to find a manila envelope addressed to me on my front porch. There was no return address. I opened it to find the five pictures of Keith you see in this booklet.

These are copies of the original police photos taken of the scene which I had never seen and are classified to the Montgomery County Police photo archives. How did they end up on my porch? Who put them there? What was the message?

Also contained in the envelope was a note. This note said that two friends of my son's, Mark Finley and Laurent Berman, would be next. Four months later, Mark Finley was killed in what was called a "freak" bicycle accident. Subsequently, my car was broken into, and among other things taken, was this note.

After reading what appeared to be a veiled threat and getting over the initial shock of seeing pictures for the first time, six years after the fact, of my own flesh and blood, a child I carried for nine months and raised for nineteen years, hanging by his neck, I noticed several other things:

- I did not recognize any of the clothes Keith was wearing. Like any mother who often did her son's laundry, I knew his clothes.
- Keith was not wearing his brown boots as I was told by Officer Leverette. He appears to be wearing white running shoes.
- He is almost sitting with his feet touching the ground. It does not look as though he jumped from atop anything. It appears he was hoisted up after he was dead.

Police officials were shocked that I had somehow received copies of their pictures; they could not explain how or why, but were now willing to meet with me with what I can only describe as an attitude of trying to ease my mind and prevent me from stirring up any trouble. Despite the new developments, the police still refused to conduct an investigation into Keith's death.

After making the aforementioned astounding discoveries and after sensing that lies were being told and a cover up was in effect, I requested to see the tree the police had in evidence. I was told that it had been destroyed by a fire which broke out in the storage facility at police headquarters.

Assistant State's Attorney, Matthew Campbell (most recently known as the prosecutor in the Ruth Ann Aaron case) met with me and other supporters. He stated several times that when

Keith died the police did a "poor" and "sloppy" investigation, but refused to have the case reopened.

New Evidence

A social group called CLAMS (Chatter, Laughter and Mingling Society), which was founded over thirty years ago, became interested in my cause and helped raise the thousands of dollars it cost to have Keith's body exhumed and to hire independent pathologists and forensic experts to conduct an autopsy and toxicological exams.

Five independent pathologists from around the nation examined and tested the remains of Keith's body. They concluded that Keith had died from the inhalation or ingestion of toxic chemicals prior to being placed in the tree.

These results were given to Dr. John Smialek, the Chief Medical Examiner of the State of Maryland. Without even reading the results, Dr. Smailek refuted everything stated by the independent pathologists and brushed off their report by stating that the chemicals found in Keith's body were from the embalming fluid used after he had died, maintaining that my son hung himself from the tree.

The fact of the matter is that some of the chemicals found in my son's body were not the type used for embalming, and the amount of toxins found was more than lethal. It was determined by the independent pathologists that there was no possible way my son could have had the state of mind and energy to conduct his own hanging with the amounts of toxins he had in his body. These pathologists stated that Keith Warren's death **could not** be ruled "Death by Hanging." They could not say whether or not the chemicals were taken voluntarily or put into his system by someone who wanted him dead, but they could say without question that physically, there was no way Keith could have hanged himself. Despite these facts and the opinion of five respected scientists, the Chief Medical Examiner and his Coroner, John Rogers, stood by Officer Leverette's original claim, and the official ruling still remains "Suicide by Hanging."

The Keith Warren case became the subject of the TV show, *Unsolved Mysteries*, which has aired several times since 1992. After it had aired, a girl in Alabama called the phone number given at the end of the program and claimed to have dressed Keith's body. Now, for reasons unknown, she is not forthcoming with details. She did not explain why Keith's clothes were off in the first place and why she dressed him in someone else's clothes. However, her tip confirms that Keith was, as we believe, dead before seen hanging from the tree.

I have personally asked Chief Carol Mehrling of the Montgomery County Police Department to investigate these circumstances. She has refused.

As if to add insult to my injury, within the last several months, Chief Mehrling assured the family of Michelle Dior who disappeared two months prior to my son's death in 1986, that

the Montgomery County Police Department will continue its investigation into her case. I commend Chief Mehrling on her tenacity. However, why is this family entitled to a continuing investigation when my family was denied even the initiation of an investigation.

With the joint cooperation of the Montgomery County Police, the Office of the County Executive, the Montgomery County State's Attorney's office and the Office of the Governor, several trips to Israel have been made in a massive effort to bring back a suspect named Samuel Sheinbein in the gruesome murder of a young man named Alfredo Tello in September of 1997. I commend and support all of these massive efforts and the people initiating them. However, why wasn't even a small effort to find the truth made on behalf of my son and his family?

In July of 1991, a two-year-old Hungarian Shepherd named Vader ran away from his handler while training for the Montgomery County Police K-9 Unit. Foot, horseback and helicopter searches were conducted to no avail. In a last ditch and desperate effort, the Montgomery County Police called in a psychic from Baltimore to locate the missing dog. Why was my family denied any attempt on the part of the Montgomery County police to try and find out what happened to my son?

Why couldn't Keith's death have been awarded one iota of the compassion shown to the Dior and Tello families or to Vader the canine?

I was raised to honor justice and to be truthful. Therefore, given all of these facts, I have to ask, "Is it really a matter of perception, your perception or mine? Or, is it a question of who is Black and who is White? Or, is it a matter of who is rich and who is poor?" I think it is a matter of justice and injustice! I have fought alone and I have fought with many wonderful allies by my side over the last twelve years, and God willing, I will continue to fight for the truth! As the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "A lie cannot, and will not, live."

The only person involved in law enforcement here in Montgomery County who is avidly interested in finding out the truth about the Keith Warren case is Montgomery County Sheriff Raymond Kight. Sheriff Kight has gone against the status quo position of many of his law enforcement colleagues and has sided with me to get to the bottom of this case.

UPDATE

Chip Wynn: Died, apparently of an overdose of drugs.

Claudia Michelle Lawson: Was the girlfriend of Chip Wynn. Is the daughter of Warner Lawson who is the Dean of Howard University School of Law. She is now a clerk for a judge in another state and claims not to have any memory of the incident because it was "so long ago."

Laurent Berman: He and his family continue to reside in the Aspen Hill area of Montgomery County, Maryland.

Officer Luther Leverette: Is still on the Montgomery County Police Force, but is not cooperative in discussing this case. He stands by his original claim that my son committed suicide by hanging himself.

Paramedic Dallas Lipp: Is now a Colonel in the Montgomery County Fire Department and has been very cooperative throughout the years. He still maintains his original claim that my son's death did not appear to be a suicidal hanging.

John Rogers: Former County Coroner who marked suicide on Keith's death certificate without even seeing or examining the body -- he did so just on an officer's say so, and broke police procedure by not performing an autopsy in what appears to be a "suicide." He is now in private practice on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

John Smialek: Is still the Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Maryland. He maintains his position that Keith committed suicide by hanging himself.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am now asking you for your help. I believe that with enough interest in this case, something can be done. Nothing can be done to bring Keith back, but with your help, the case that was never opened could soon be closed.

If you have any information or are interested enough to help me pursue this matter, please contact me at the following address:

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