

The GOARC Gazette

Project II Takes Up The Battle Cry: "We've Got to Get Together and Get Johnny Out of Jail"

Johnny Wilson is a 24 year old man with mental retardation who is sitting in a Missouri prison. Accused of murder, he was sentenced to life in prison without a trial based on his guilty plea.

Since October, 1990 Project II has been following the case and has begun advocating for Johnny's release.

The following is a report from Robert Perske on Johnny Lee Wilson:

Aurora, Missouri. For all of his 20 years, shy, mild-mannered Johnny Wilson lived a reasonably stable, sheltered life with his mother and grandmother in this 6340-populated, Southwest Missouri town. His father left before Wilson was born. The Aurora Public Schools adjusted to his "organic brain damage and mental retardation," provided him special education classes and helped him follow his own rate of development for 12 full years. A principal and teacher said he had been "quiet, reserved, respectful--never a discipline problem." After graduation, Wilson did sporadic lawn-mowing with his mother driving him to the jobs. Even investigators of the murder of 79-year-old Pauline Martz found him likable. Missouri Highway Patrol Sgt. J.J. Bickers said "He was a nice kid. He was polite--yes sir, no sir. He was easy to talk to. The only problem is he killed her."

Sunday, April 13, 1986. According to the family, Wilson, his mother and grandmother attended morning services at First Presbyte-

rian Church. At noon, a friend came over and stayed until Wilson was driven to a lawn job by his mother. She picked him up a couple of hours later. Wilson's friend returned. The grandmother watched a Disney program on TV with the boys, then they taped songs until supper time. After supper, Wilson and his mother drove to the post office and Ramey's Supermarket. Leaving Ramey's, they heard sirens and followed the fire trucks to the home of Pauline Martz. The twosome went home to let the grandmother know what was happening since Martz was one of her card-playing friends. Then they returned to the fire.

Monday, April 14. Joplin Police Lt. Dick Schurman called local officers and told them about Chris Allen Brownfield, an escapee from an Oklahoma prison. Schurman said the Joplin native "has been known to tie up and beat old ladies and is more than capable of murder."

Tuesday, April 15. Officers questioned Wilson in his home. Earlier, they had received a tip from Gary Wall, a former special education classmate of Wilson's. Wall claimed that Wilson said he killed Martz. The police background check on Wall revealed his reputation as a chronic liar and troublemaker--one who had often used tall tales as an attention-getting device.

Friday, April 18. Wilson was watching a movie in the Princess Theater when officers came for

him and took him to the police station. He was interrogated from 9:30 pm until midnight.

Saturday, April 19. By 1:00 a.m., a confession for the murder of Martz has been signed by Wilson. According to an audiotape made of the police interview, Wilson denied involvement at first. Later he admitted committing the crime. He said he did it because he felt threatened by the police who "grabbed my face and turned it toward them." He told Connie Chung (CBS Saturday Night With Connie Chung, 5-12-90) "a cop said, 'Well, if you confess, you know, or 'tell us you did it,' or something, 'we can all go home.'" Excerpts from the officer's audiotape:

Deputy Seneker: "We have the fact that you're the one who started the story about the lady being tied up and in there and gagged before we even knew it, before we'd even found the body! We didn't even know she was in there when you knew it!"

Wilson: "And I didn't know it."

Deputy Seneker: "Oh yes, you did! And we can prove it!"

Later, Seneker asked about the color of the victim's blouse.

Wilson: "I'll say it was white, kind of white or bluish blouse."

Deputy Seneker: "Okay, how about bluish? I'll go for that."

Wilson: "Yeah."

Deputy Seneker: "How about bluish-green, maybe?"

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