

I was incredibly surprised by “Justice Wanted” because I was expecting some boring notes and newspaper articles strung together in a haphazard way in an effort to create a story, but what I got was a page-turning mystery that almost demands you join the author as she pursues justice for a family that has encountered so many wrongs.

After a brief intro that sets the stage for the story and a little bit of background on the author that provides insight into why she dedicated a large portion of her life to a family that was nothing but strangers when she first met them, Gentilcore begins leading us down a dark and twisted path filled with numerous mysteries. I’ve read plenty of true crime books but I don’t think I’ve ever seen justice so conveniently and expertly thwarted. As each new clue surfaces, you won’t be able to resist asking yourself how such a think could occur.

You will feel the excitement of the feisty reporter that’s busting with enthusiasm over the possibilities that are contained within this mystery, and you will still be right by her side as the weary journalist doggedly sticks to the path years later for no other reason than her desire to help this family that seems to have no other place to turn.

I love how the author holds nothing back. Our hero isn’t a perfect and flawless creature that always has the answers. She’s a real person that feels fear and doubt, sometimes using all her strength just to continue a fight that sometimes seems impossible to win. I also like how all the facts, evidence, and clues of the case are laid out for us, allowing the reader to put their detective skills to use in this quest for justice.

My only complaint is how the book ends because the conclusion seems a little rushed, with no sense of finality, but the book still receives five stars because that’s the price of true crime. Unlike fiction, real drama seldom has a conclusion packed with an overwhelming sense of fanfare; real drama just ends.

If you’re a fan of true crime or mystery stories, you need to give “Justice Wanted: The Kid in the University Stairwell” a try. I guarantee you will never again look at quiet college towns the same.

–Marty Shaw, Reader Views Book Review

Truth doesn't always come so easily. "Justice Wanted" follows Marlene Gentilcore as she seeks the truth on the strange death of Jack Alan Davis, whose death was officially ruled choking to death on his own vomit after binge drinking. Questioning this verdict, Gentilcore finds much on the table to reinforce her suspicions, questioning the quick dismissal of the case. "Justice Wanted" is a fine read that offers much to think about in the modern pursuit of justice.

—John Burroughs, *The Midwest Book Review*

JUSTICE WANTED



JUSTICE WANTED

THE KID IN THE
UNIVERSITY STAIRWELL

You Be the Judge.

A QUEST FOR PROMISED JUSTICE IN AMERICA

Marlene Gentilcore

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Back cover photograph of Jack Alan Davis, Jr. compliments of Elaine Davis-Lynch

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*In every child who is born,
under no matter what circumstances,
and of no matter what parents,
the potentiality of the human race is born again:
and in him, too, once more, and of each of us,
our terrific responsibility toward human life;
toward the utmost idea of goodness....*

JAMES AGEE

This book is dedicated to...

My father, Lee, "The Author."

My mother, Catherine, "The Registered Nurse."

My children, their children, your children.

Jack Alan Davis, Jr. and his family.

And, to justice for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank John Lynch for his courageous and dedicated effort to find truth and justice for his brother and family, and for believing in me. Without his determination, this story would not exist.

An extra special thanks to those not afraid to tell the truth.

Thanks to my friends and family for their constant support and for listening to me talk *ad nauseam* about this case for many years.

Finally, thanks to my mother for her constant encouragement and to my dear friend Mary Miller-Venturella for stepping up to help just in the nick of time.

PREFACE

In 1987, I became a mother mourning her 20-year-old son, who died while away at college. Our family was led to believe that his death was just an unfortunate accident, but there was much more to it than we were told.

As the years went by, more information became available because of the caring and diligent writer/investigator, Marlene Gentilcore, and *Justice Wanted* is the story that unfolds.

Of course, it is still unfolding; and I still miss Jack every day. For those of you who believe, I feel him around me; there are times I smell him. I've even felt him hug me.

It would be nice to know the truth of what happened in October 1987. And my hope is one day someone will walk up to me and tell me why this happened to my son. Until then, I will be forever grateful to those involved for allowing us to find his body.

Elaine Davis-Lynch
March 3, 2004

ONE

An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

I had to do it. I knew I had to do it.

An investigator from the state Attorney General's office called and said I had to watch the videotape of the second autopsy. I'd read transcripts from both the first and second autopsies over and over many times. The first one sent me into battle, the second made me cry.

As an investigative reporter, my job is to find all the pieces of this case, put them together and hopefully come up with answers. So far, none of it was easy and nothing in my life up to this point had prepared me for the gruesome task before me.

Seeing eight-by-ten, black and white, glossy photos from the first autopsy was one thing; imagining what this boy would look like in living color on a 27-inch television screen in my living room after three long years underground scared the living hell out of me! I knew his face. He graduated from high school with my son.

Pictures of him stretched out on a cold, grey, stainless steel slab in the autopsy room the morning after his body was found are burnt into my brain forever. In some photos, he's still dressed in the plaid button-down shirt he borrowed from his roommate the night he disappeared. He's wearing ordinary, faded blue jeans

and new, white, back-to-school sneakers. Other shots show him stripped naked with a huge dark, bloody hole carved into the space where his beautiful, young chest and vital organs should be.

When I finally mustered up enough courage to pick up the video of the second autopsy from the family's attorney, I felt relieved and very grateful to find this little audio cassette tape tucked under the larger video case in the bottom of the big, brown envelope. Their lawyer, who also needed to know the facts but apparently did not want to watch another human being dissected and mutilated in front of his eyes, recorded the sound track.

"Thank God, I don't have to watch the video. Thank God, I don't have to watch the video," became my mantra as I slowly crossed my living room, opened the plastic case, popped the cassette into the tape deck, and pushed PLAY. Recognizing sounds took a few minutes as my ears adjusted to strange banging noises. I stretched out on the floor with pen and paper in hand, determined to scribble down every word. Emotions could not get the best of me. I had to get through this tape to understand what an investigator at the Pennsylvania State Attorney General's office told me about this case.

My stomach muscles tightened. I could barely breathe as my ears honed in on each voice. Since I had worked on this case with world-renowned forensic pathologist Dr. Cyril Wecht for a few years, I recognized his voice immediately.

"Good preservation. Fair amount of hair is present on the forearms, thighs and forelegs. Higher half of the bony thorax and abdomen show no abnormalities. The pubic and external genitalia are normal adult male. The penis has not been circumcised. The upper and lower extremities show no deformities such that suggest fracture or dislocation. The soft body tissue of the hands

are shrunken and dehydrated. No deformities of the fingers are noted. The fingernails are intact and evenly cut. The toenails are intact and evenly cut. The back is unremarkable. The skin of the back shows somewhat shriveled and lightly leathery in appearance but is intact. The skin and soft tissue of the entire body are in fairly well preserved condition, although the epidermis sloughs easily with slight pressure,” Dr. Wecht dictates in his report.

“Debbie make a note, fit this paragraph in somewhere, I guess back to the beginning where the casket is mentioned. I may have already said, no separate bag or container is present within the casket containing the viscera.”

“Just some cotton and sawdust,” a voice says.

Dr. Wecht immediately identifies his assistant Joe and introduces him to those in attendance. “Sawdust material,” Dr. Wecht says. “We don’t have any organs, viscera.”

“They went with the body to the funeral home,” another voice says.

“There’s nothing to be done about it,” Dr. Wecht replies. “I know these things happen. If it’s not there, it’s not there. There is nothing we can do. Joe, we’ll see if we can get another look at the testicle and we’ll get a big hunk of ribs. So, why don’t we take a look here first? Okay. All right. Take your time and we’ll get all this stuff out. Probably need to get the tongue out, too. All right, fine. Then, we’ll look. Then, we’ll open the head and come down the back of the cervical spine.”

“You’re going to open the spinal cord?” Joe says.

My body stiffens as if in the dentist’s chair waiting for the click and sudden shrill squeal of the drill. I press both hands over my ears to shut out the scream of the electric saw as it splits through the hard bone of his skull. It sounds worse than a million

fingernails scraping across a slate chalkboard. I jump up and pace around my tiny living room, trying with all my might not to imagine Jack's child-like face.

He had very delicate facial features for a 20-year-old male. His dark blonde hair was cut in a shaggy 1980's kind of style in his high school senior picture. His deep blue eyes looked bright, enthusiastic. His thin lips gently curved into a warm, friendly, impish smile. He joined the track team and decided to major in business his freshman year at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

"Tom, do you want to get a picture here?" Dr. Wecht says, matching the previously heard unidentified voice to a name. Thomas Streams, the Indiana County Coroner who handled the first autopsy. "That membrane is called the dura mater," Dr. Wecht says, describing Jack's brain. "On top of it where there is a hemorrhage, that is called the extradural or epidural. Beneath it is called subdural. So, it's beneath the membrane but on top of the brain. Well, it's from injury. It's not spontaneous. But, I don't want to jump to conclusions.

"It's more consistent. Let me stop right there, you can get it from a blow or a fall. The other things you look for that help you in a fresh body and such, sometimes there are things like if there is a fracture. Just take your time because I want to be able to lay that down and orient it properly. So, I don't want to jump to conclusions yet as to the ideology of this, the cause. See that's the membrane. That's on the undersurface."

"How wide is the surface damage?" Coroner Streams asks.

"We'll take some measurements and describe its location," Dr. Wecht replies. "Tom, we'll set this brain down and you can take pictures. Get some larger containers. I want to show you the whole brain, of course. You see the hemorrhage?"

“How big is the hemorrhage?” Streams asks.

“This is a substantial hemorrhage. Don’t forget we got shrunken tissues here and a lot of this is dried up. Here look,” Dr. Wecht answers. “This is a big area. I’ll turn it around. Here Tom and Carl (Pennsylvania State Trooper Carl Schwinberger) take your pictures. This is the brain stem here, back of the brain. This is on the left side. This is a wide substantial area. I can tell you this, this much I will say. I can already understand why he would have been incapacitated. Fuck! How it happened? Who the fuck knows! And where it happened I don’t know. But I can understand one thing already, why he was incapacitated. Why he wasn’t able to cry out or call out for help. And, you can’t die right away from this.”

“Do you want to take the whole cord,” Joe says.

“Oh God! Oh God! Oh Jesus!” Dr. Wecht yells over the screaming saw now slicing through his spinal cord. “Look at that! That’s hemorrhage in the fucking spinal cord. You’re looking at spinal cord. Joe has lifted up the bone. That hemorrhage is in the Goddamn spinal cord! Let’s take out the spinal cord.”

My teeth hurt. I hold my ears, desperate to block out the horrific images again. Of course, when you are transcribing a tape you have to stop, rewind and play it over and over to make sure you’ve written down every word as accurately as possible. Just the memory of listening to this tape over and over that day brings tears to my eyes.

“Joe, take some more of that away. Wow! See what happens is the blood drips down from the head. See, very good, Joe. This is the spinal cord. See that soft stuff. If you were to feel it, you can feel it if you want. See, I’m wiggling it now. That is blood overlying it. Take your pictures. Then what we’re going to do is cut the

whole cord out and save it. We'll put that in a separate container, Joe. Well, the hemorrhage is staining in here, too. It's staining in the inside of the bone."

"We can take that vertebrae," Joe says.

"I think we will, too," Dr. Wecht said. "In fact, I think we will save this part. Just cut it off there, Joe."

"Anyone's wife sell Tupperware?" a voice says. "Maybe we've got a sale here."

Everyone laughs. Further along on the tape everyone chuckles about the odor.

"Could you close that door?" Joe says. "My clothes are in there and I don't want to take too much of this smell home with me."

"Don't worry, Joe. When it buys your kid a new car in a few years, he won't give a shit about the smell," Dr. Wecht says. "He'll say come home smelling a little more often."

Tears well in my eyes, spilling one by one down each cheek. Something inside me changes at that moment. His young face is gone. All that's left is a pile of raw flesh and severed bones where the bright promises, hopes and dreams of a young human life use to be.

"No! This is not the way it's supposed to be!" a voice screams inside my head. You'd think I'd be used to all the gut-wrenching twists and turns in this case by now, or maybe as some might say, my expectations were just too high.