

Introduction

Jack Alderman

Born 1951 in Savannah; Age 55; Height 5' 7: White
Accused of murdering his wife, Barbara and sentenced to death in June 1975
32 years imprisonment, serving on Death Row in Jackson, Georgia
Last Appeal turned down in Oct 2006
Execution date: 2007

Background

Jack's mother walked out when he was three and his sister was 6 months old, his grandparents moved in. By his account his upbringing was happy: 'Our home glowed with gentleness, warmth and love.' He was an exceptional student, gained a scholarship and became a Senior Patrol Leader in the Boy Scouts.

But his life has been beset by difficulty. Just before his 4th birthday, he went on a family fishing trip; while everyone was putting bait on the line he found the bait knife and started sawing the line. The knife slipped and entered his left eye. He was in hospital for 10 weeks. The day the bandages came off he was given 2 nickels to buy drinks to celebrate. As he was choosing the drinks from the cool box, he felt a tap on the shoulder. He turned round and a 13 year old boy pushed a rusty hacksaw blade into his left eye and twisted it before yanking it out. The boy who attacked him had Down's syndrome and was severely retarded. Jack's left eye was destroyed. Twelve years later he woke to find he was totally blind. He was sent away from home to the Georgia Academy for the Blind where he learnt Braille and to use a white cane. Although it seemed beyond the realms of medical probability, Jack's sight slowly returned to his right eye and he was able to go back to High School where he gained remarkable grades.

He married Barbara Jean Blaise aged 18 years in 1971. She worked in the tax assessor's office in Savannah and he was assistant supervisor in the local supermarket in Garden City where they lived. Three years later , Barbara was dead and Jack was arrested. His colleagues offered testimonies and their savings but to no avail.

Events leading up to the murder of Barbara Alderman

Jack and Barbara Alderman had been married for 3 years. They had been trying to have a baby and that week Barbara had been to the hospital for tests. The results that came through suggested it was Barbara who could not conceive. They quarrelled that morning because Barbara said she felt incomplete as a woman and suggested she left Jack. He had suggested they adopt a baby from the local Bethesda Orphanage where they both did voluntary work. She was so upset he decided it would be better to leave her to calm down for a while without him there. That was the last time he saw her alive.

John Arthur Brown, a 29 year old who lived locally, was a skilled car mechanic and had been employed with Jack at the City of Savannah where he worked. However his services were terminated due to his drug and alcohol abuse. He had a common-law wife and 3 children aged 1 – 5 yrs. They lived a few blocks away from Barbara's mother and 15yr old sister, Debbie. Barbara detested him partly because of the way his family suffered from his addictions but even more because he made a pass at Debbie.

When Jack left his apartment he went straight to the store and then on to Savannah; he returned home around 10:00pm. He had expected to see Barbara's car in the parking lot but it was not there. He thought she might be with her grandparents about 20 miles away in Rincon. He and Barbara had previously lived adjacent to them and they were close so he decided to travel there in the hope of finding her.

Her grandparents property was about 3 miles off the highway bordered by Dashers Creek. As he crossed the wooden bridge, he saw something in the water. He stopped his motorcycle and discovered Barbara's car down the embankment, interior lights on, driver's door open, front bumper under water. He climbed down

the slope and found her face- up under the water, near the open door. He cradled her head in his lap. He heard a car and panicked; started his motorcycle and drove off passing a car on the dirt track.

Jack headed back to Savannah and stopped at a familiar bar at around 11.00 pm. He told no one about what he had seen but otherwise acted normally. It was later established that that he experienced disassociative amnesia brought on by the shock and fear. He was asked by a friend to give someone a lift home who lived close by,. It was raining and cold and the two stopped off at his apartment for Alderman to get his jacket. Minutes later the police were at the door.

Four teenagers joyriding in the area had seen Barbara's body in the creek and reported it to the authorities. They said they had passed one person on a motorbike, though Jack was not informed of this at the time. He was then taken to the hospital and shown Barbara's body. He fell to his knees and wept. He was held for ten days in the local jail and questioned. He was still suffering from the amnesia diagnosed and resolved eight months later. The authorities concluded that he was lying.

Ten days later John Arthur Brown came forward and confessed that he had struck Barbara with a twelve inch wrench in her apartment and then drove the body in her own car off the bridge and into the river at Rincon. He claimed that Jack Alderman had paid him to kill Barbara and offered him half the insurance money on her life. The life insurance was one of the two elements on which the State based its grounds for the death penalty. It has subsequently been accepted by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, Oct 2006, that such insurance 'lapsed prior to Mrs. Alderman's death. The State's insurance motivation for the murder depended solely on the testament of John Brown.'

There was no evidence other than Brown's statement and watery blood stains in Alderman's lap.

The Case

Jack Alderman, 24, was convicted June 17, 1975, for killing his wife, Barbara Jean Alderman, 21, at their Chatham City apartment. Alderman and Brown were accused of drowning her in the bath and then taking her to Dashers Creek in Effingham County where she was left in a partially submerged car.

US District Judge B. Avant Edenfield overturned the conviction and sentence Sept, 1980, directing a new trial or his release. Edenfield ruled that evidence produced by the prosecutors included improper testimony about Alderman's constitutional rights. A federal appeals court reversed only the sentence and returned the case for a new sentencing. A second jury reinstated the death sentence, April 1st 1984. Although there were over 30 people who wrote detailed statements as to Alderman's character , good standing and honesty, and were all prepared to speak in Court, the majority were never called upon and the character statements were never read.

Jack Alderman has written that after the sentence of death, various parties had strongly suggested that a 'confession of guilt' would allow a commuting of the death sentence and parole release. Alderman has consistently refused this route, insisting on his innocence.

In a separate trial John Arthur Brown pleaded guilty and was sentenced to death on December 2nd 1975. He was freed twelve years later. It seems that an understanding already existed that his death sentence would be commuted. Although reluctant, Brown signed the following affidavit, [quoted in 2003 Habeas Petition]. " I have always testified that Assistant DA Lionel Drew never promised me a specific deal in exchange for my testimony against Mr Alderman. However Mr Drew and I did have conversations outside the presence of my attorney, Mr Alex Zipperer. During these conversations, Mr Drew told me that if I testified at Mr Alderman's capital trial, it would definitely be to my benefit. As a result of my conversations with Mr. Drew, I decided to testify against Mr Alderman.'

John Arthur Brown committed suicide subsequently. He was about to be arrested and charged with falsifying records to obtain an assault weapon. He shot himself with that weapon.

It was always Brown's word against Alderman's. State witnesses contradicted Brown's testimony in court. There was no one other than Brown who intimated Alderman's involvement. Alderman's prosecutor stated that ' the case was structured around Brown's testimony' and at a later re-hearing to commute Brown's sentence, another District Attorney said 'it would have been a legal impossibility to convict and sentence Mr. Alderman to death without Brown's testimony'. [quoted in the 2003 Habeas Appeal].

Jack Alderman had his last hearing in October 2006 and has been informed that the appeal has been denied by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. He faces an execution date in 2007. In the court's opinion they stressed Jack Alderman had maintained his innocence throughout and that the key witness was exceedingly untrustworthy and inconsistent and gave three different versions of events. They also noted overwhelming testimony that Jack Alderman is considerate, honest and peace loving and not at all the sort of person who would commit the crime unlike John Arthur Brown who testified against him, who had a terrible history and was a known drug addict. Despite this, the lawyers, through lack of evidence, were not able to show that the lower court had been erroneous in its findings and so Jack Alderman faces execution.

The court opinion is available on the website at the following link:

<http://www.ca11.uscourts.gov/opinions/ops/200414595.pdf>

(41 pages)

Simone Sandelson
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