

Sometimes we need to do things for our peace of mind. The purpose of this website is my desire to share the truth of how I came to resign from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office in June, 2007. Also, you may be interested in what followed.

Most people saw me "wrecked" in the newspaper or on TV20 back In February, 2007, and then again in May, 2007, and essentially thought my ordeal was over.

What most people do NOT understand is that Darnell attempted to violate my vested retirement (unsuccessfully) and have my Law Enforcement and Corrections certifications permanently taken from me (unsuccessfully). This went on for a year following the investigations.

It was not until June 14, 2008, that I was in a position to make any public statements about my case, as it had been pending. Now, officially and thankfully, it is closed.

We have every reason to believe that the level of vindictiveness in which this was conducted was intended to fully justify her actions against myself to certain people whose good will she wanted to retain.

We also believe that relentless maliciousness follows when people know what they're doing is wrong and so become obsessed with proving that they're right.

Background

Pre-1998, there was a lot of press in the Gainesville community regarding the way the county jail was being run. There was a grand jury investigation and jail employees were at every public meeting complaining about the conditions at the jail. Sheriff Oelrich offered to take the jail and run it for the county commissioners. After awhile, the sheriff did sign an inter-local agreement to run the jail and asked if I would join him. I jumped at the opportunity. It took four months to complete my background investigation.

We had that jail turned around and state accredited in a little over a year and nationally accredited in 18 months. It was designated a Model Jail every year, despite our ongoing challenges.

As you read through this website, it is important to know that Sheriff Oelrich, for whom I worked for over 9 years, had always stressed complete cooperation, particularly with other law enforcement professionals, and to always tell the truth as best you can remember.

Know, too, that I have spent my entire life never having purposely done anything against the law. Mistakes I have made; as we all have.

My Mistakes ON February 26, 2007

When the entire interview with the FDLE was finished and the tape turned off, I was left with the proverbial stomach punched feeling. Why didn't I ask for an attorney from the onset? I had done enough interrogations in my career to know when an attorney would be advisable. While I can say, as we all can; hindsight is 20-20. I have also come to realize that the end result would have been the same when it came to my job.

The truth was that I could not remember the details of the car purchase or the timeline. My inability to honestly NOT be able to remember the fine details (largely because my wife, who worked in banking and oversees our domestic bills) for a purchase that occurred two years earlier was used as a sure sign that I lied.

Never for a single moment was I seeking to lie to FDLE. In fact, it was the honesty of my answers that created the challenges for me.

When the investigators said to me, "If we told you that you wrote a check for \$65.00, would you say you paid sales tax?" Well, NO! If that's what I paid, I did NOT pay the sales tax. Not remembering the transaction in its details, I honestly responded to their question.

The truly sad part is that a check for \$65.00 was never written by my wife or me, instead a check for \$175.85 had been written. If that dollar figure had been told me, I would have supposed that sales tax may well have been paid on the car.

I told the investigators, as well as the two sheriff's employees (Huckstep and Vermillion), that I could not properly recall the transaction. Both groups told me they would note this in their respective reports. They did not.

What I needed to do was to go home so my wife and I could review our payment and look at our records; in other words, find the answers for the questions they were asking.

As an aside, I went with my attorney (yes, I called Gloria Fletcher on Feb.26th) after we learned that we didn't pay the sales tax, to pay the tax at the tag office. I offered to pay any penalties or late fees and was told by the tag agency employee that this was no big deal and the tax due in 2005 was completely sufficient.

For the record, I have since returned to the tag agency for another car transfer and registration (a car for my daughter), and learned from the tax collector that they only have you "sign here", then "sign here" and "initial there." I can state with total honesty, that had a clerk brought to my attention a question regarding tax, I would have paid it with absolutely NO hesitation. (Please read State Attorney Bill Cervone's letters) There was more than enough money in our accounts to pay this bill.

Signs of Trouble Before February 26, 2007

In early 2006, Darnell contacted me to meet her for breakfast; she wanted to tell me she was thinking of running for sheriff and wanted my support. I explained that I was still working for Sheriff Oelrich and his second in command would be her opposition, therefore a difficult request. She persisted in requesting my support throughout the coming months, after the primary and Oelrich's departure. Finally I agreed. (Broken fences with Emery Gainey, a good man, have since been repaired.)

My brother-in-law, Joe Cirulli, was another person whom Darnell contacted for financial support following her decision to run. Once I decided to throw in my support, several other family members did the same financially.

On the one hand, I had every reason to believe that my position was secure. On the other hand, I and my daughters were ignored to the point of awkwardness when we showed up to work on Darnell's campaign. Walter Withey was always present. (For the record, Withey was not promoted during Sheriff Oelrich's time in office and was promoted by Darnell after I left the agency.)

For months leading up to February 26th, I would find Walter Withey sitting next to Joyce Gallagher's desk. When I showed up in the morning to go into my office part of the suite, they would cease speaking and he would leave, characteristic of his behavior toward me during the campaign.

Walter Withey was the inspector/investigator assigned to my case.

From the beginning to the end, there was a singular lack of justice, honesty and integrity to this investigation. The purpose was my removal, the destruction of my reputation, a take-no-prisoner kind of experience. My hopefulness at the time, mixed with deep sadness and bouts of fear, remained intact until the final, conclusive blow.

Back to February 26, 2007 and the Aftermath of the FDLE Investigation

After the FDLE interview was finished, the two staff members (Huckstep and Vermillion) walked down the hall and back to my office to serve me with administrative suspension papers. Darnell had them signed, sealed and delivered. Following the service of papers in my office, I was escorted from the jail, my assigned car inventoried, and I was brought home.

I was not home yet and the media began calling my residence. A press release had already been issued. (I suspect that, like the administrative suspension papers, the press release was prepared months earlier, if not in actual form; in true "intention")

And so begins the most bizarre 17 months that I have ever had to endure in my 32 years of Law Enforcement. Over this period, I wrote a single letter to the Gainesville Sun, thanking those who supported me and expressing my pride for my work at the jail. You can read this letter in the **Documents Index** section.

It is a point to be made that every allegation made by Joyce Gallagher was found to be false. (The original charges against me.)

I and my attorney, believed that that we could clarify any discrepancies in the FDLE interview during our interview with ACSO. In the interim, State Attorney Bill Cervone wrote a letter back to FDLE stating that my case is not criminal and that he will not entertain prosecuting. He would let ACSO deal with the matter internally. He believed, as I did, that I would maybe get some time off – or a worst case scenario, demotion to captain or reassignment.

A follow-up story went to the Gainesville Sun and we all thought it was over. I, my family and my attorney could not have been more wrong.

ACSO Internal Investigation Lasts 7 Weeks- Results and Aftermath

I went into my interview with ACSO truly believing that by clarifying the allegations, this matter would come to a close. Remember, there were two investigations; FDLE, followed by my and my attorney's interview with ACSO.

Instead, I later came to realize that their one and only agenda was to destroy my career. They took everything I said in the interview, plus the prepared four-page clarification statement, and twisted it to make the FDLE report their gospel.

In the ensuing report from ACSO, five people were to smear me with exaggerations, distortions and outright lies; Joyce Gallagher, Karen Keith, Cheryl Stinson, Jeff Cloutier and Mike Kittel. The questioning of Walter Withey as the investigator was abominable. He could not have been more transparent. It was very clear in his questioning that Withey wanted only one outcome. This was his agenda, along with Joyce Gallagher, Darnell and her administration.

The only upstanding individual in the report was Charlie Lee. Hats off to a man who responded honestly without any hidden agenda.

On May 15, 2007, I was told and given a one piece of paper document by Huckstep that Darnell sustained ACSO's findings with an intended termination or resignation in lieu of termination.

My wife and daughters sobbed, I was in disbelief. Gloria was equally shocked. This is a seasoned lawyer who did not expect this result for obvious reasons. She requested a copy of the report. State statutes indicate I should have had a copy of the report for three days pending a next move on my part. Huckstep and Vermillion said the report was not ready.

Now, even more bizarre; Darnell called Joe Cirulli, her long-time friend and supporter, that same afternoon to tell him how bad it was, and offered him a copy of the report. She even implied that she wanted his support in what she had to do with me. Remember I did not have a copy of the report when I had to sign my paperwork to resign pending termination. (See Debbie's Summary Part II.)

Let me just say again that Joe Cirulli is my *brother* (albeit brother-in-law) and has a long history of my honesty and integrity to reference. His response can be imagined. And he would look at the report in Gloria Fletcher's office not with the likes of Darnell.

The following day the story appeared on TV 20's website at 1:15 pm and I was still at my office cleaning it out. I still did not have nor did my lawyer have a copy of the report. On the 5:30 p.m. news, TV 20 ran the story with the reporter on camera holding a copy of the report! I had just gotten a call to go to lawyer's office as she had just received it. My wife and daughters found out more information from TV 20 because they had the report in their hands on the TV before I did!

The following day the story appeared in the Gainesville Sun. My grief on opening it and reading the slant was perhaps the most painful thing I have ever done in my life. That report was designed to murder my name and reputation; there was not any attention to TRUTH. And I was NOT that report.

Pride in My Accomplishments

My life, prior to February 26,2007, was like most lives, up and down, laughter and pain, gain and loss. But, I was always proud of the work I performed. At the time of the investigations, I was 56 and had worked in law enforcement for 32 years.

I was in charge of a multi-million dollar detention operation, sitting on the most prestigious law enforcement panel in the State of Florida, sitting on a corrections accreditation board, one of a few statewide planners for county corrections events through the sheriff's association, sitting on several panels in the Eighth Circuit and Alachua County, sitting on two committees at Santa Fe College and doing a host of guest lectures at both the UF and SFC(C) campuses.

I would NEVER PURPOSEFULLY VIOLATE THE LAW. I treasured my career. But I was human and I can make a mistake.

For what turned out to be \$342.50, my life was turned upside down. Mike Pressler, the former Duke Lacrosse coach told the writer of his book, Don Yaeger, and it so fits my case; "It's Not About the Truth."

Testimonials Over the Years

I have many letters and many notes saved over the years from moms, dads, sisters, brothers and friends who asked for and received help from me for their inmate, because, very simply--it was the right thing to do. I am not sorry for any on of those times.

FDLE and ACSO made it sound like the young man whose mom I bought the car from was the only former inmate to receive "special privileges." There was nothing "special" about working or getting appropriate medical treatment or a special visit because of some urgent family matter. I have done that for hundreds of inmates. It is within the law, standards and then policy.

Interestingly, former GPD officer Sadie Darnell was among those who contacted me for a special favor for an inmate.

Nothing was ever given to an inmate or to his family outside the law. But these were human beings and, provided they demonstrated good behavior, there could be a reasonable consideration from time to time (one example; an inmate in a meltdown and staff requesting that a young woman be able to make a phone call).

Personal Observations

Over the past 17 months, I have received literally hundreds of calls, letters, and cards from friends, family, professional contacts and people I don't even know offering their support and kindest regards. Those who know me, know that what I say and do is the truth.

You know, too, last fall the Florida Sheriff's Association magazine, The Sheriff's Star presented an article on a sheriff I have admired for many years, David Harvey of Wakulla County. It's entitled; "The Dean of Florida Sheriffs" and I mention it because the writer talks about all the "special privileges" Sheriff Harvey has done for families of inmates and inmates over the years. It's called *sheriffing* which is whole lot different than just *policing*. I know what *sheriffing* is because my 32 years were all in sheriff's offices. There's a big difference from working in a police department. Read the article in the **Documents Index** section.

I'll close this passage now because there is a lot more for you to read.

My priest has assured me that good will wins out over evil. My faith is strong. In the times when I was at very low ebb; I looked in the mirror and knew that I was proud of the man that I was. I've never hung my head through any of this, nor will I. My wife and our two beautiful daughters never for one minute doubted their husband and dad.

Trust me when I say that I spent 32 years of my life in law enforcement and have literally lived in a glass house. I always went by the book and according to the law.

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

These 17 months have been deeply painful, but we're preparing for the next wonderful chapter in our lives, wherever we end up or whatever we do.

Thank-you for visiting my website. Please feel free to contact me, as we welcome you into our lives.