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Bruce Lisker files suit alleging that LAPD detectives framed him

By SCOTT GLOVER AND MATT LAIT DEC. 23, 2009 | 12 AM

A man wrongfully convicted of killing his mother and freed after serving 26 years in prison filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing Los Angeles police detectives of framing him.

Bruce Lisker, 44, contends his civil rights were violated by the city of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Police Department and the former detectives who investigated his mother's March 10, 1983, slaying, according to the suit filed in U.S. District Court.

"It wasn't an innocent mistake, and those responsible should be held accountable," said attorney William Genego, who represents Lisker. "He lost the heart of his life from ages 17 to 44. It's hard to comprehend the loss of that much time."

Lisker's 1985 murder conviction was overturned in August after a federal judge ruled that he had been prosecuted with "false evidence" and that his original defense attorney did not adequately represent him.

The judge's findings mirrored those of a 2005 Los Angeles Times investigation that raised questions about key elements of the prosecution's case against Lisker and exposed the LAPD's murder investigation as sloppy and incomplete.

At the time, detectives were immediately suspicious of Lisker, a frizzy-haired 17-year-old who had a history of drug abuse and fighting with his 66-year-old mother, Dorka.

Lisker's relationship with his parents had deteriorated to the point that they paid for him to live in a studio apartment near their home in Sherman Oaks. On the day of the killing, Lisker told police he had come to the family home to work on his car.

When his mother didn't answer the front door, he said he went around to the backyard and looked through the living room window and patio sliding glass door. He said he thought he saw his mother lying in the foyer and broke into the house through the kitchen window to come to her aid and call paramedics.

The detectives didn't believe Lisker and placed him under arrest that day.

His lawsuit focused largely on the work of the lead detective in the case, Andrew Monsue.

He could not be reached for comment to respond to Lisker's charges. In a 2005 interview with The Times, Monsue denied any misconduct in the case and said he believed Lisker was guilty of the murder.

A spokesman for the L.A. city attorney's office, which generally defends LAPD officers in civil litigation, said it could not comment because officials had not read the lawsuit.

The 28-page complaint accuses Monsue of fabricating evidence and giving false testimony.

For example, the detective testified that bloody shoe prints at the crime scene matched Lisker's shoes. In fact, forensic experts have since determined the prints were made by a shoe other than Lisker's.

Monsue also testified that Dorka Lisker's slaying occurred on "a very bright sunny day" and that, because of reflection from the sun, Lisker would not have been able to see his mother through the living room window, as he stated. Evidence has since "overwhelmingly showed" that the morning was cloudy and overcast and that Lisker would have been able to see his mother, the lawsuit contends.

Moreover, Monsue ignored evidence pertaining to another suspect in the case, the lawsuit alleges. The suspect, Mike Ryan, was a friend of Lisker's with a juvenile criminal record for theft, trespassing and assault with a deadly weapon. Ryan admitted approaching Dorka Lisker seeking work the day before the slaying, gave police a false alibi, and spontaneously said that he had been in a knife fight on the

same day Dorka Lisker was attacked with a knife. Despite these and other potentially incriminating facts, Monsue chose not to pursue Ryan as a suspect, writing in a report that Ryan had been “convincingly cleared,” the suit alleges.

Monsue continued to falsely implicate Lisker even after his conviction, the lawsuit contends. Monsue wrote a letter to the parole board 13 years after Lisker’s conviction in which he claimed that the case had only grown stronger with time. In the letter, Monsue wrote that police had suspected Lisker killed his mother while trying to steal money from her purse but were never able to prove it. In the intervening years, he wrote, the new owners of the home had found \$150 in the attic above Lisker’s old bedroom. The man who owned the home at the time in question has since told Lisker’s private investigator that neither he nor his wife, who has since died, found any money or told Monsue they did.

Monsue’s letter, the lawsuit alleges, “was a complete fabrication.”

Genego said he and Lisker’s other attorneys reached out to City Atty. Carmen Trutanich before filing the suit to see if a settlement could be reached without litigation.

He said their requests to meet with the city attorney went unanswered.

“It seems the city is more interested in fighting this than doing the right thing,” Genego said.

Matt Lait

Scott Glover

Scott Glover is a former investigative reporter for the Los Angeles Times.