

Autopsy . . .

(Continued from A-1)

him. His (Scott's) credibility would continually be under question. For all practical purposes, his effectiveness would be destroyed."

Wise, 26, was found stabbed to death in her home here March 30, 1977, and her two children, Brandi Jondell Summers, then 5 years old, and Tiffani Wise, then 2, were missing.

Police investigated the case for several months in 1977 without making any arrests or finding the children. Then last September they reopened the case and since have interviewed numerous persons who say they have seen the girls alive as recently as February in Northern California.

Scott's admission that he was worried that he may not have surgically cut some organs is critical because it could prevent successful prosecution of the murder case.

"When I saw the letter from Scott this (Wednesday) afternoon," said county Supervisor Robert Hammock, "I would interpret that as having a great impact on that case."

But Chief Cocke said Wednesday that while he had "some apprehension" about what impact Scott's admissions might have on the case, he said he'd be much more concerned if the cause of Wise's death had been questioned.

However, he added: "Quite obviously we want the highest credibility we can obtain in murder cases . . . it's speculative about the future . . . Hell, yes, we're concerned. Certainly if anybody's credibility is going to be attacked, you're concerned about that and its future application."

Hill maintains that Scott "is an excellent pathologist and this (contract termination) has nothing to do with his being a good pathologist."

Although Hill said it was his decision to terminate the contract, Hammock said that he first approached Hill with the idea early Wednesday morning. Hammock said he became concerned about the quality of county autopsies after talking to Root over the past few months.

"When I read the newspaper, I realized that Scott's credibility was zero," Hammock said. "And when the perception of a coverup raised its head, I thought that was totally unacceptable. So I decided to just confront him (Hill) and tell him that I intended to act if he didn't. I told him I would recommend their contract be terminated if he did not."

"Of course, I had already checked in with other board members, too. And there was general support for what I was recommending we do."

Hammock said he thought the board would terminate the contract Monday at its next regular meeting.

Root, 49, said Wednesday he had "very, very mixed emotions about the news. I didn't want this to happen. I have never wanted to

have anybody hurt. I wanted to try to get improvements into the system so we could do a good job. I guess I'm kind of overwhelmed by it all. And confused about what's going to happen next."

Added Cocke: "Whether I disagree or not (with Scott's contract termination) the issue was raised and it becomes exceedingly difficult for him to continue . . . if there is continual trial and retrial of the issue of credibility from now on, that is simply going to be a confusing factor (in future cases). If he's dropped, that issue will no longer be there."

In a letter Hill wrote Wednesday, addressed "to whom it may concern," he verified that his office had lied to The Sun earlier this week. He gave the newspaper a copy of his letter and Scott's letter to him.

Both letters confirmed that in February, Chief Deputy Coroner Leo Reyes called the Police Department at the request of Scott, who "wanted to know how much difficulty there would be in distributing an amendment or supplemental report to the autopsy."

Lt. Don Levan said Reyes had talked with him about the matter.

In Wednesday's Sun, both Reyes and Hill denied that the coroner's office ever called Levan about the report and said they did not understand why the police were making such allegations.

Scott wrote that he "asked him (Reyes) to find out how many copies, if any, had been sent out. He later told me that the report had been widely distributed. I decided not to file an amendment at that time. I feared that the amendment might not get to everyone who had a copy of the original report and, thus, cause confusion."

Hill said Wednesday it did not matter how many copies of the autopsy report had been distributed or how long ago the report had been written — "He (Scott) could still send out amendments if he wanted to. As long as they did not affect the cause of death. And they would not have in this case."

But he did concede that the defense attorney in the Wise murder trial "probably could use it as a means to get the body (of Beverly Wise) dug up."

That is something investigators haven't anticipated happening, but Levan said Wednesday that the issue would have to be dealt with if and when it is brought up. And then it would be up to the district attorney's office to handle it, he said.

The letters also confirm that Levan told Reyes that the district attorney's office also had been given a copy of the autopsy report.

Sources in the coroner's office said Scott was not sure he had done all the things his autopsy report had claimed "and wanted to fix the language up a bit."

Specifically, the sources said, Scott was not sure he had cut the various internal organs because he was automatically inserting pre-written, or "canned," descriptions into his autopsy reports.