

# Wise

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accuser. He is seeking \$18 million in damages, accusing police investigators and prosecutors with violations of his civil rights stemming from his arrest and trial. His lawsuit is scheduled for trial in March.

His chief adversary, former San Bernardino police detective Donald J. Meyer, sits behind bars. He was arrested last weekend in Las Vegas in connection with a bungled Caesar's Palace casino robbery and shooting.

For San Bernardino police, the Wise case is an open book. While no detectives work actively on the investigation, murder cases are never closed, said Lt. Paul Baschaw. "Leads come in all the time," he said. "And the two youngsters could easily turn up."

But police have had only one lead in the last six months, he said. And while he wouldn't discuss the substance of the lead, it was apparent it hadn't panned out. Moreover, he said he would be "hard pressed to say when" they've had a sighting of the missing children.

The children, Brandi Jondell Summers, 5, at the time of the murder, and her half-sister, Tiffani Wise, then 2, were at the heart of the case from the start.

Late on the afternoon of March 30, 1977, Norton Air Force Sgt. Claude Wise, 26, returned to his home at 1505 E. Alto Drive. He found his 8-month-old daughter, Stacey, alone in a hallway. The body of his wife, Beverly Wise, 26, was slumped in a living room chair with a single, fatal stab wound in her chest.

Her other two daughters were nowhere to be found.

Beverly Wise was described by friends as an outgoing woman, fond of ceramics and painting, an eager card player and excellent cook. But the case quickly focused on the missing girls, particularly Brandi, who was afflicted with cystic fibrosis and needed medication to digest food properly.

Photographs of the cute, bright-eyed youngsters were widely circulated.

The search for the girls was joined by psychics, hypnotists and the FBI. More than 200 people were interviewed.

From the start, investigators sought a man seen putting one of the girls in a two-tone gold, Camaro-type car outside the Wise house. The man's description seemed to fit Beverly Wise's ex-husband, Roy Summers. He was Brandi's father. Summers, an itinerant farmer, and Beverly Wise were married for several months in 1971. But they had had no apparent contact after 1973.

Police located Summers in Utah a couple of days after the slaying and cleared him of suspicion when several witnesses said he had been there at the time Wise was killed.

After that, the leads slowly dwindled. But interest in the case never completely faded.

In September 1979, police reopened the case. It was never clear why police renewed their investigation or whether it was sparked by any new leads.

Two fresh detectives, Donald Meyer and John McDonald, were named to head the investigation. "I've been chomping at the bit for 2½ years to get at this thing. Most of the department feels this way, too," Meyer told a Sun reporter later.

"I feel like they're our kids. Everybody feels that way. I'm not going to be satisfied until we get those girls. That's the goal. God help all these people involved if something happens to the kids." Meyer, then 43, seemed a self-confident, ambitious detective. He was assigned to the case a year after an unsuccessful attempt to unseat longtime San Bernardino County Sheriff Frank Riland. It was the first time in Bland's 23 years in office that he had been opposed.

Meyer's campaign centered on what he said was a high crime rate. He contended criminals were being let out of the county's criminal



Roy Summers, left, and Detective Donald Meyer, in 1980 photo.

himself in the case.

A month later, in December 1979, Summers was formally charged with the Wise murder-kidnapping. At the time, he was in Oregon, accused of the attempted murder and kidnapping of his mother, Loucyle Herman, and his then-wife, Connie, whose arm he allegedly broke.

From court records, a picture emerged of Summers as a violence-prone alcoholic who had been married seven times and served a prison term in 1960 or 1961 in a kidnapping and assault case.

While the Wise investigation continued, Summers was tried in Oregon. His mother defended him, but his wife maintained that he was extremely dangerous. He was acquitted on the kidnapping charge, but convicted of misdemeanor assault and sentenced to a year in jail.

Meanwhile, Meyer and other investigators crisscrossed the county interrogating witnesses. They repeatedly found people who said they had seen the missing children with Summers, his sister or acquaintances. The kids were sighted in Northern California, Nevada, Idaho and back in Northern California.

Based on San Bernardino police investigation, five of Summers' acquaintances were arrested in 1980. Day care operator Juanita Iwakiri was arrested in Idaho as an accessory to kidnapping. Lee Casner of Cedar Ridge and his sister-in-law, Vivian Casner, were arrested as accessories. Vivian Casner is Juanita Iwakiri's sister.

Iwakiri's husband, Michael, was arrested in connection with false testimony to the San Bernardino County grand jury.

In some respects the accusations seemed harsh, and the grand jury proceedings in the midst of a police investigation were unusual, but law enforcement officials said it was all part of a strategy to pressure the suspects into revealing the whereabouts of the children.

The ethics of these investigative tactics were later argued in the Summers murder trial.

Before that, however, Lee Casner, while maintaining his innocence, agreed to a plea bargain and pleaded guilty to concealing a minor. He was sentenced to three years probation and six months in jail, which he already had served. Juanita Iwakiri, who also maintained her innocence, was tried and found guilty of kidnapping for hiding Tiffani Wise. She was sentenced to five years, but later granted probation after four months in prison as well as two years in and out of courtrooms and jails.

Charges against the others — except Summers — were dropped. Summers was extradited and brought to San Bernardino in June 1980.

During his preliminary hearings later that year, Summers' court-appointed attorney, Timothy Guhin, put police on trial. He characterized the police probe as a willful and malicious investigation that disregarded other leads while concentrating solely on Summers. He questioned whether the children had ever been positively identified. He accused investigators of intimidating witnesses and withholding information.

It was not an unusual tactic for a defense attorney to attack a police investigation.

But Guhin said Summers also had an alibi. Loretta Tullis-Bower, Summers' girlfriend in 1977, said he was in Utah on March 29 and worked with her brothers all the next day — the day Wise was slain.

Further, she suggested police improperly, saying she had noted the date of Summers' arrival in Utah in a pocket calendar, and she gave it to detective Meyer in May 1980. But Meyer didn't show the calendar to attorneys or the court until after her testimony.

Tullis-Bower and another witness testified they had been threatened and harassed by Meyer and his partner, McDonald.

Challenging the purported sightings, Guhin said investigators used 1976 photos of the missing girls, so sightings three or four years later, when the children had grown, were worthless. He suggested another scenario for the Wise slaying. He said it may have been drug-related and that Beverly Wise was a drug dealer.

While Municipal Court Judge John Kennedy agreed Summers seemed to have a persuasive alibi, he said there was enough of a case to order Summers to stand trial.

When Summers went on trial in June 1982, the case against him included a map found in the Wise house and traced back to Tullis-Bower, the alleged sightings of Summers with the missing kids, and incriminating statements Summers supposedly made to cellmates and police.

Further, Deputy District Attorney Michael Smith said Summers had repeatedly expressed his hatred for his ex-wife, providing a motive for the murder. And Smith argued Summers had kidnapped the children because they witnessed the slaying.

Guhin, in Summers' defense, hammered repeatedly at what he viewed as unethical police tactics.

When Tullis-Bower was questioned about the map found in the Wise house that showed markings of a route into Utah — where Summers was later located — she testified that Meyer had threatened to lock her up when she told him she was uncertain if the map was hers.

She had confessed to investigators the map was hers, but only after she was told falsely by police that her fingerprints had been found on the map.

For the prosecution, Tullis-Bower's son recalled that Summers arrived in Utah on March 31. He said he and Summers watched an Errol Flynn movie together that night.

A woman positively identified the map as belonging to Tullis-Bower.

One of Summers' cellmates testified that Summers made incriminating statements about Wise's death and the girls' disappearance.

A dozen witnesses testified they saw Summers with the two missing girls. But Guhin again and again raised questions about the credibility of the sightings and the ethics of investigators.

Under his questioning, Juanita Iwakiri admitted she lied to investigators about caring for the missing girls. She said her admission came because of her fears of Meyer. "I would have said anything to get him to leave me alone," she said.

The testimony of another prosecution witness was disallowed because of the way she was shown photos of Summers.

In what Judge Hyde was later

## The Beverly Wise murder case

### What happened:

- 1 MARCH 30, 1977: Claude Wise finds his wife, Beverly, stabbed to death and their children, Brandi and Tiffani missing.
- 2 Roy A. Summers, Beverly's ex-husband, is questioned in Utah and later cleared of suspicion. The search for the children includes 200 interviews. Sightings are made in three states.
- 3 1979: Police reopen the case and assign two investigators, Donald Meyer and John McDonald, to the case. Summers is named as a prime suspect.
- 4 1980: Summers is extradited to San Bernardino from Oregon for a preliminary hearing, during which he attacks the investigation as willful and malicious.
- 5 1982: Summers goes on trial. Donald Meyer resigns midway through. October 28, 1982: Summers is found not guilty after 4½ months and nearly 100 witnesses.



### Afterward:

- Nine jurors called for a perjury investigation of Meyer but the DA's office found insufficient evidence.
- Summers filed an \$18 million lawsuit against the police, city and county of San Bernardino. It comes to trial in March.
- Meyer was arrested in Las Vegas Jan. 6 in connection with a robbery and shooting.
- The children are still missing.



BEVERLY WISE  
Murder victim

### The victims



BRANDI SUMMERS  
Still missing

Staff graphic by Jean Moxam

investigation a waste of taxpayer money.

The case cost the city and county nearly \$750,000 — making it the most costly in city history.

Nine jurors later called for a perjury investigation of Meyer. The district attorney's office was later to find insufficient grounds to prosecute him.

Meanwhile, Summers, his sisters and the Casners filed an \$18 million suit in 1983 against law enforcement officials, the city and county for alleged civil rights violations stemming from their arrests and trials.

Named in the suit were former Police Chiefs Warren Cocke and Ben Gonzales, former District Attorney James Cramer, former Deputy District Attorney Joseph Canty Summers' first prosecutor, and nine former and present police investigators including Meyer, McDonald, Ernest Tull, Ronald Sharp, Terry Wood, Dale Roberts, Michael Maudsley and Donald Levan.

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