

## QUEST FOR A NEW TRIAL IN DOUBT - HIGH COURT SKEPTICAL IN 1983 BATTLE CREEK KILLING

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Convicted murderer Thomas Cress has campaigned 18 years **for a new trial in** the 1983 slaying of **a** Battle Creek teenager.

Judging from the grilling his lawyer received Wednesday **in** Michigan's Supreme Court, Cress shouldn't count on that **trial** any time soon.

Four conservative justices -- including three former prosecutors -- peppered Cress' appellate lawyer, David Moran, with queries that ranged from skeptical to downright dismissive.

Foremost, the justices expressed grave **doubts** about the credibility of **a** suspected serial killer who came forward years after Cress' conviction to say he, not Cress, abducted and murdered 17-year-old Patricia Rosansky early Feb. 3, 1983.

That killer, Michael Ronning, who is serving **a** life term **in** Arkansas **for** another slaying, is both the blessing and the curse of Cress' case. **For** although Ronning has admitted to killing Rosansky and two other women, his account of the slayings has contained inaccuracies that lead prosecutors to argue he falsely confessed **in** order to serve out his sentence **in** Michigan, closer to family.

Even Moran, the defense lawyer, conceded Wednesday that Ronning has told various relatives he did not kill Rosansky.

"What would be his motivation **in** telling four people he falsely confessed to **a** murder he didn't commit?" asked Justice Stephen Markman, **a** former U.S. attorney. Markman's **doubts** echoed those of Justices Clifford Taylor and Maura Corrigan, also ex-prosecutors, and Robert Young Jr.

Moran responded that Ronning lied to his relatives because he figured they would stop visiting him **in** prison if he told them he was **a** serial killer.

**In** all, Moran was on the hot seat **for** roughly 50 minutes of the 70-minute session, while Calhoun County Assistant Prosecutor Nancy Mullett was barely tested.

**In** June 2000, **a** Free Press investigation raised **doubts** about Cress' conviction, and the case has since gained national attention.

Rosansky's body was found **in** **a** ravine months after her abduction. She had been raped and bludgeoned. Investigators found semen, but **in** 1983, DNA science could not link it to **a** suspect.

Cress denied killing Rosansky at his 1985 **trial** . But jurors apparently believed the testimony of witnesses who said Cress confessed to the crime.

His appeals gained traction years later, when Ronning admitted to killing Rosansky, Maggie Hume, 20, and Karry Evans, 17, **in** the early 1980s. Ronning passed **a** polygraph **in** which he admitted killing three women **in** Michigan, while Cress passed **a** polygraph **in** which he denied killing Rosansky.

**In** 1992, Calhoun County Prosecutor Jon Sahli ordered the physical evidence **in** the Rosansky case destroyed even though two Battle Creek detectives said they had told Sahli and his staff that Ronning likely killed Rosansky. Sahli has denied knowing of Ronning's confession when he allowed the destruction of evidence.

The seven-member Supreme Court is expected to rule by July.

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Caption: Photo

Thomas Cress

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