

THE TRIALS OF LODRICK PARKER SOME CLAIM THEY SAW HIM COMMIT MURDER

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Sunday, July 22, 1990

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GREENWOOD, Miss. -- **Lodrick Parker** , his mother recalls, tried his hand at a lot of things.

School, machine shop, cotton gin, assembly line, janitorial work, house painting -- **Parker** tried them all, from Mississippi to Ohio to Michigan, but nothing quite suited him, Evelyn Watts says.

But Watts and other people who knew Ricky **Parker** from Taft Street here in the self-proclaimed "Cotton Capital of the World" can't believe what police and prosecutors say about him in Detroit -- that he seems to have found his calling as a killer.

"Ricky's biggest problem was letting people talk him into things," his mother says. "But still, I can't see how this all came about. . . . Ricky always had that winning personality."

Parker , 31, is in the Wayne County Jail, held without bond, while awaiting a series of trials scheduled through the fall in Detroit Recorder's Court. He faces two counts of first- degree murder, six counts of assault with intent to murder, a firebombing and an armed robbery charge, plus several lesser gun and drug charges.

But he was found innocent the only time he stood trial for murder -- in one of the city's most flagrant drug killings -- and Jeffrey Collins, his lawyer in the firebombing and assault cases, believes **Parker** is getting a bad rap in Detroit.

"He strenuously objects to being termed the 'Hit Man of the '80s,' " Collins says. "He's never been convicted of any homicide or any shooting. Sure, he has that reputation but, to me, a reputation without evidence means nothing."

Collins says **Parker** is being charged mainly because of his reputation.

"The police are overzealous and hungry for **Lodrick Parker** ," Collins says. "They're bloodthirsty for him."

In one case, Sgt. Ronald Connell of the Detroit Police/Fire Arson Unit, testified to a conversation with **Parker** about the job of killing.

He said **Parker** pointed his fingers like a kid playing two- gun cowboy and said "Pow! Pow! Two in the head -- keep on kicking."

Connell's partner, Sgt. Thomas Horner, testified that **Parker** "said that he only takes out people that deserve to be taken out and that he's paid to take out; he doesn't hurt innocent people or bystanders."

During his recent court appearances, **Parker** has maintained a quiet reserve in the face of charges that carry life sentences. His poise may be based upon remarkable resilience.

In little more than 18 months, **Parker** has been acquitted -- despite eyewitness testimony -- of the sensational drug gang assassination of Richard (Maserati Rick) Carter as Carter lay in a hospital bed. **Parker** has been shot twice. He has survived a hand grenade attack and escaped with minor burns when an alleged hit literally blew up in his face.

Witnesses and survivors describe **Parker** as all business in the alleged attacks. Police testified that **Parker** shrugged off most of the victims, saying: "They knew what time it is."

The stories leave folks in Greenwood dumbfounded. How could Ricky **Parker**, who grew up across from the Stranger's Home Baptist Church, find himself in such trouble?

"He's charged with killing people?" says Maj. Charles (Lefty) McDaniel of the Greenwood police. "I don't know what would make him turn into a bad dude. There was no indication of that around here."

McDaniel wants to know "for sure we're talking about the same Ricky **Parker**," whose worst crime in Greenwood was sneaking a steak out of a local market by tucking it into his pants.

Roosevelt Shields, owner of the Club 49 roadhouse just outside Greenwood, says **Parker** was the best friend of his son, Alonzo.

"I know that kids can go wrong, but I never even so much as heard Ricky curse," Shields says. "When he moved up north, we hated to see him go."

His mother and Shields agree that **Parker**, while not fond of school, was a well-mannered child, respectful to his elders and diligent about his chores.

In Greenwood, where antebellum plantation mansions, some settling into genteel shabbiness, line the banks of the Yazoo and Tallahatchie rivers, police records show **Parker** had only two minor scrapes as a juvenile before the steak theft, and once did 30 days in the city jail for ignoring a traffic warrant.

"These aren't things every kid would get into, but they aren't real bad either," McDaniel says. "Why, I had him right in here -- as a trusty in the jail when he got picked up. He did his work and never caused any trouble."

The second of five children, **Parker** loved to play tennis, ride his bike and "was always full of energy -- he'd get on that bike and just ride," his mother says. "He helped the neighbors."

Watts says her son was especially fond of an elderly neighbor known as Miss Lady, once handing over to her a full coin purse he had found.

"That little purse was full of money and he gave it to her, saying somebody had lost it," she says.

"That's how they were raised. He and his brothers and sister were raised properly. They were bathed, fed and put to bed proper."

Unlike his siblings, **Parker** did not finish high school, because "Ricky didn't want to put his brains to work," his mother says.

She says he worked at a factory manufacturing school lockers, then studied to be a machinist. She says he was recruited by a Vicksburg, Miss., company but that job fell through, as did his plans to join the Army.

Shields says his son and **Parker** worked around the roadhouse, sweeping and mopping in exchange for pocket money and time at the pool table.

"He was an average youngster," Shields says. "He was good friends with Alonzo and I wouldn't allow any messing around."

Greenwood has its share of drugs, bullies and hoodlums, but Shields says "I never saw any of that in Ricky."

Most of **Parker** 's friends left Greenwood for college or the military, like his son Alonzo, Shields says.

"Not too many of those buddies left around here," he says. "There isn't much for them."

Parker fell in love and married. His wife, Francis, graduated from Mississippi Valley State University in nearby Itta Bena and moved to Dayton, Ohio, to teach. She still lives there, with their son, Shaundrick.

Although his mother says she "told him he should stay put and take care of his family," **Parker** bounced between Ohio and Mississippi "doing any kind of work to support his family," including a stint at the gin in Greenwood, baling and loading cotton.

While in Ohio, he also visited Detroit and became acquainted with Ira (Pancho) Barclay and his family, a group that would figure prominently in his future.

In 1987, **Parker** had his first brush with the law in the Detroit area.

He pleaded guilty to possession of a small amount of cocaine, paid a \$100 fine and served a 13-day jail term in Oakland County.

If that was an indication that **Parker** was dabbling in the drug trade, he apparently moved into it big-time the next year.

"Maserati Rick" Carter, a flashy figure reputed to be one of the city's major cocaine dealers, was gravely wounded in September 1988 outside a west side car wash. **Parker** was shot in the arm in the same incident, but told police he was just on an innocent walk and got caught in a crossfire.

The next week, someone walked into Carter's hospital room and shot him in the face before he could grab a pistol that was stashed with a crucifix in a table next to his bed.

Another patient said it was **Parker** who calmly walked out of Carter's room.

Several days later, **Parker**, arriving in Barclay's silver Jaguar sedan, surrendered to homicide detectives at Detroit Police Headquarters.

Three months after Carter was buried in a coffin rigged out with a Mercedes-Benz grille and wheels, a Recorder's Court jury acquitted **Parker**. Outside court, **Parker** said he was glad to be free for the Christmas holidays.

Trouble followed **Parker** to Indiana in January 1989. Police arrested him outside Gary after a shooting at a home rented by a reputed Detroit drug figure.

Officers caught up with him in a grocery after witnesses saw him stuff a bulletproof vest into the frozen food case, but **Parker** was not charged.

The next month, someone lobbed a smoke and tear gas grenade into an Oak Park house owned by the Barclays and then opened fire with automatic weapons. A bullet shattered **Parker**'s right thigh as he scrambled down a back stairway from the home.

On Sept. 12, Charmaine Tye and two passengers, Dennis Conley and Edith Mae Wilborn, got into her car in front of her apartment at 1135 Superior. Another car blocked their path and a man emerged with a gun.

"He just kept shooting," testified Wilborn. "He didn't say anything."

Tye and Conley died. Wilborn, paralyzed below the waist, said **Parker** was the gunman.

Eight days later, Highland Park police arrested **Parker** wearing a police uniform and shoulder holster and carrying a change of clothes in a gym bag. Not yet linked to the Superior shooting, he was released.

On Sept. 28, Alice Tye and her husband, Thomas -- brother of the slain Charmaine -- were working at Blessed Candles, a religious goods shop they own in the 19700 block of West 7 Mile.

When a man walked in and said "Hey!" Thomas Tye turned and was shot in the head and throat. Alice Tye grabbed a shotgun in the office but the man wrested it away and shot her as she lay on the floor.

The Tyes survived and later identified the gunman as **Parker**.

A month after the Blessed Candles shooting, **Parker** was arrested by Detroit police on a drug charge. Not yet linked to the other attacks, he was freed on bond.

Federal authorities, meanwhile, moved against the Barclays, seizing the Jaguar, houses, fur coats and other goods as drug profits.

In early January 1990, three men walked into Blessed Candles, drew guns and ordered three employees to hand over their identification and lie on the floor. The invaders splashed gasoline around the shop, where about 15 display candles were burning.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Richard Cunningham said the taking of the identification showed the attack was a professional hit, not just a robbery, with the material from the victims to serve as proof of a job completed.

Passersby were rocked by the explosion that blasted three smoldering men through the front window. They stumbled away before help arrived to rescue the people in the shop.

Kamania Kaza Barclay was arrested for that attack and a week later, Detroit police -- acting on a tip -- arrested **Parker** and a third man, Kimball Gaskin, in a Chicago hospital being treated for burns.

Police said they told **Parker** how they found him and he said: "It just goes to show that you can't trust anybody."

The investigators said **Parker** told them he "was really hurting in his heart that the older lady in the store got injured."

In her tidy house, **Parker** 's mother shakes her head at the allegations.

"I can't see it," she says. "Honest to God, I just can't believe it.

"You know, every time he got into a scrape, I was always the last one to know," she says. "He always said he never wanted to worry me.

"Lord," she says, "I just wish I could bring him on home."

Caption: Photo

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: WWL

Page: 1H

Index Terms: MAJOR STORY ; LODRICK PARKER; MURDER ; BIOGRAPHY ; CHARGE

Dateline: GREENWOOD, Miss.

Record Number: 9001280480

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