

MURDER CASE HITS COURT AFTER DELAY OF 12 YEARS

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A killing that has gone unsolved for 12 years. A former prostitute named Cinnamon who says she convinced her boyfriend to kill her mother's female lover. The victim's twin sister who single-handedly bullied the Detroit police into reviving a botched investigation. A street-smart cop who crisscrossed the country on the cold trail of a hot witness.

All those things are coming into focus as the murder trial of 41-year-old Donald Nash takes place in the 3rd Circuit Court in Detroit before Judge Daniel Van Antwerp.

Barbara Patton has taken a seat in the front row every day since the trial started Tuesday.

It was her sister, Betty (Bo) Martin of Detroit, who was shot 10 times in the bathroom of the east side dry cleaning shop where she worked Dec. 30, 1985. She was 52.

Thirty dollars was taken from the cash register; change was left scattered across the floor. It looked like a robbery.

For more than a decade, no one was charged in the killing. Tips to the Detroit police were apparently not followed up. Evidence disappeared. Life moved on.

But Patton, a 63-year-old grandmother from Ormond Beach, Fla., who wears polyester pants and sensible flats, had become tired of walking around not knowing who to be mad at because no one had ever been caught for killing her sister.

In December 1995, Patton phoned the Detroit police homicide section. It was a Sunday. Officer Art Wimmer picked up the phone. It wasn't unusual to get a barrage of calls around holiday time from grieving relatives on unsolved cases.

It took Wimmer three days to find file number 85-681 in the basement of police headquarters. He immediately spotted some conflicting statements.

"There were things that needed to be followed up on," Wimmer said. He called Patton back with some information. The last piece of paperwork on her sister's killing was a statement from a 26-year-old hooker whose street name was Sunshine.

Less than two months after the killing, Sunshine was arrested in a prostitution sweep and told authorities she had information about the killing of **Betty Martin**.

She named Donald Nash and his girlfriend Cinnamon Miller.

Patton's heart skipped a beat.

Cinnamon Miller -- also a former prostitute -- was the daughter of Linda Sue Miller, **Betty Martin**'s live-in partner for 12 years. Martin and Cinnamon Miller had been at each other's throats most of that time.

But police had never questioned Nash or Miller; they couldn't find them -- although they both lived in Detroit and a different detective had no trouble locating them.

The lack of action baffled and angered Patton.

"I said, 'Who dropped the ball? What could be more important than getting to the bottom of my sister's death? What other crime?' "she said. "They made a mistake and they knew I knew they made a mistake."

Throughout the spring of 1996, Patton fired off letters from her Ormond Beach home to the mayor, the chief of police, the head of the homicide section, prosecutors, judges and anyone else in a position of power she could think of.

It worked.

The case was passed to Investigator Daniel Budz of the Violent Crimes Task Force, a squad that specializes in long-term investigations and hard-to-crack cases.

"I heard the chief was hot about this case and it landed on my desk," Budz said.

Budz found Miller and Nash. Both denied any involvement in the killing.

That's when he knew he had to talk to Sunshine. Budz found himself in California, Sunshine's last known address, where he got a tip that she was married and living in a one-stoplight town in Tennessee.

In August 1996, Budz climbed onto the front porch of the woman's home. He heard someone call his name.

"Budz!" the woman said. As it turns out, she used to walk Michigan Avenue when Budz worked there as a beat cop.

He took a detailed statement from the woman, now a housewife, about how Miller had told her twice that she and Nash had been behind Martin's killing. She also agreed to testify.

The woman's statement was crucial because physical evidence from the case had been lost. A crumpled paper towel encrusted with blood found near Martin's body and turned in to the police evidence room had disappeared six months after the slaying.

Budz flew back to Detroit and typed up a warrant for the arrest of the couple, who, since the killing, had married, had a child and divorced.

Faced with Sunshine's fresh statements, Miller confessed that she had hated Martin and asked Nash to kill her. She said that the day of the killing they drove to Engleside Cleaners on East 7 Mile. She said she waited in the car while Nash went in through the back door and shot Martin.

When Nash came back out, he said, "I did it," according to her confession. She replied: "Thank you, baby."

They threw the gun into the Detroit River and went to a Big Boy for lunch, according to the confession.

Charged with first-degree murder, Miller was allowed to plead guilty to being an accessory after the fact and in April was sentenced to five years' probation on the condition she testify against Nash.

Nash sat in silence Thursday as his former wife testified against him.

Miller, 30, whose mother is white and father is black, said her mother's lover was racist and that's one reason she wanted her "Aunt Bo" dead. "She did not like black people and because I was black, she didn't want anything to do with me."

Miller, who admitted to prostitution on the stand, described her life in and out of mental institutions, and her incessant fights with Martin. "I hated her," Miller said. "That was just a part of my life."

Nash's lawyer, Kristi Glenn, attempted to portray Miller as a liar who is blaming Nash to beat a murder charge. "At what point can we tell when you're being truthful and at what point you're lying?" Glenn asked. "Is it a coin toss?"

Testimony will continue today.

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Caption: Photo Photo KIRTHMON DOZIER/Detroit Free Press

Donald Nash

Betty Martin

Barbara Patton of Florida worked to get sister **Betty Martin**'s slaying case reopened.

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