

U.S. Helsinki Commission

Testimony of Ann Patterson of Wall Township, NJ

July 11, 2012

My name is Ann Patterson and I am the daughter of Walter Patterson. My father was robbed, brutally beaten, and shot in his gas station in Wall Township, New Jersey on November 23, 1962. He died of his injuries on November 25, 1962. I was 14 years old and my sister, Kaye, was 13.

My father was a quiet, sensitive person. The gas station was his "American Dream" and he was so happy to be able to have his own business. He worked sixteen to eighteen hour days to support our family.

Daddy's name is also on the Patterson "Honor Roll" of soldiers- part of a family that has fought in all of our country's wars. At age 21, he went to Europe and served our country for four years during World War II. He was a TEC 5 and a truck driver/mechanic and was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service.

It was the day after Thanksgiving and Daddy had come home for supper. It was about 4:30 when he got into his truck to go back to work. I stood at the kitchen window waving good-bye and that was the last time I saw him alive.

About five hours later, the phone rang and I answered it. Aunt Jennie said "Walt's been shot" and I screamed "No, no, no" and called my mother to the phone. I was crying, told my sister, and she started crying.

My mother was not well. She called Uncle Charles to take her to the hospital. When she got there, she couldn't recognize my father. She later told us they had "beaten him to a pulp." The doctor operated from about 10:30 P.M. to 6:30 A.M. and told my mother he thought he had "gotten all the bone fragments." When I asked her what Daddy had to say, she told me that he couldn't talk because his jaw was wired shut. He was wild with pain and could not be given anything for it because he had head injuries. He had to be restrained in the bed. The doctor told my mother that seizures were to be expected with this type of injury and Daddy had a seizure Saturday night.

Kaye and I had been scared to death to stay home alone on Friday night, so we rode to the hospital with Uncle Dick and Aunt Ginny as they took my mother to see Daddy on Saturday night. Aunt Ginny asked my mother if she had told us what we were going to see. But my mother did not allow us to see Daddy and we waited in the car. Daddy was in critical condition and no one except immediate family was allowed in. The doctor told my mother that if Daddy came through this, he would be a vegetable and need a lot of care.

On Sunday evening, the doctor was talking to my mother in the hallway about my father's condition when the nurse came to them and told them he had passed away. They allowed my mother to spend some time alone with him. When she came home, Uncle Dick and Aunt Ginny were each holding her arms and helping her to the house. I looked at Kay and said "Daddy died."

The viewing was Tuesday and the funeral home asked for a photo of Daddy so they could make him look like the picture. Does that sound odd to you? My father was unrecognizable in the casket. His wavy black hair with a touch of gray was replaced with straight black hair combed back. His face was all uneven and caked with make-up. I knew he was my Daddy by looking at his hands.

The \$70 that George Wright and Walter McGhee stole wasn't enough. They had to beat my father beyond recognition. George Wright was identified by the imprints of the stock of his gun on my father's skin. If there had not been such a beating, the doctors could have operated on the bullet wound to the abdomen and it is quite possible that Daddy would still be with us today.

For Kay and me, the nightmare was just beginning. Since our mother was not well, she could not take care of us. We were told that we would be sent to "Clinton, a home for wayward girls." Later, I found out that Clinton was, in fact, a prison for girls. There is something wrong with sending the victims to prison while the criminals do not have to be incarcerated for their actions. I thank God that Uncle Dick stepped in to take care of us.

Our mother was very ill with a heart condition and her death was hastened by losing Daddy. She passed away fifteen months later on February 26, 1964 leaving Kaye and me orphaned. In our house lived my mother's aunt and uncle, both of whom passed away during that fifteen month period. In just over a year, we experienced the deaths of all four people we lived with and lost our home. We were robbed of normal teenage years.

There was no counseling available in 1962. We were left to deal with all this sorrow on our own. We tried to be strong for our mother while she was still alive.

It has not been easy to relive all these events during the past ten months. The FBI Victims Specialist suggested I see a counselor which was beneficial to me. One of the problems that came out was the nightmares that I suffered from for years after my father's death. The counselor said that I had had post traumatic stress after I described the nightmares to her. I also developed asthma and colitis within a few weeks of Daddy's death.

The premeditated actions of the four individuals involved in my father's murder have negatively impacted five generations of the Patterson family. I have already spoken about my parents and my sister and me. My mother's uncle who lived with us refused food when he learned of this tragedy. He said "I don't want to stay in a world where this is allowed to happen" and he died four months later. My grandfather never spoke my father's name without crying and told me "they didn't have to beat him up so bad."

My father's seven grandchildren were deprived of a loving grandfather and they are angry at the injustice exhibited in the past ten months.

But the saddest to me are the hurt reactions of some of my father's fourteen great-grandchildren. One of them saw the clip on TV of the capture and asked "What is wrong with people?" not knowing it was about her great-grandfather. Another one curled up in a corner of the couch and, crying, asked if he could escape again. Five generations of fear and hurt are five too many.

George Wright cannot erase his life of crime. He is fraudulently a Portuguese citizen. Four aliases do not change the fact that he was born George Edward Wright in the United States of America and committed crimes during his years here. When he chose the crime, he also chose the punishment as they go hand in hand.

George Wright did not give my father a choice on November 23, 1962 and so he should not have a choice about not serving his sentence. He does not owe Portugal time; he owes the United States.

George Wright is not sorry for what he did. There has been no apology to the Patterson Family. On the contrary, he has made this all about himself and basked in the limelight. To want to profit from a book and movie highlighting his heinous acts against the Patterson family is a slap in the face. He is not the victim here- we are.

George Wright is a convicted murderer who lived a life of violence, then fled and lived a life of lies. Now his past has caught up with him and he needs to come back here and serve his sentence.

In light of all the recent media coverage, I have been approached by many people who have expressed their disgust toward this man and this situation. I feel it is a disgrace that our justice system has failed in assuring a proper punishment for this crime. This whole case sets a terrible precedent for this country both here and worldwide. It is a negative toward decent citizens and a positive for criminals.

The failure of extradition has affected us in the following ways; 1) fear of a known criminal on the loose, 2) fear of reprisal from criminal. Both of these fears are now 50 years long. 3) makes a mockery of the crime against my father. Did his life matter? 4) has perpetuated our pain and loss, 5) loss of any kind of confidence in the criminal justice system from the local branch which gave too lenient a sentence to the state branch that put a convicted murderer on a minimum security work farm to the federal branch who have backed down to Portugal in the matter of extradition. The case was dropped before the final appeal was filed. It is one thing to do all you can, another to give up before you exhaust all avenues.

I have asked if there are any other avenues of justice such as withholding aid and have not been given any answer. Don't we have a right to seek justice for our father?

Our family has been emotionally affected by injustice in the following ways: 1) no closure, this is still an emotionally draining, open wound, 2) we have family members and friends across this entire nation who are appalled at the injustice of trying to obtain justice, 3) we are not happy that George

Wright wants to do a book and a movie and capitalize on his inhumane treatment of our father, 4) we were extremely upset when we read in the newspaper that the final appeal had been dropped. I was told that I would be notified of any decision so that I wouldn't be blindsided up learning something from the media, 5) on a personal level, this has split my family in two. Some members support efforts to obtain justice and some cannot emotionally face the details of this crime to even talk about it.

What can be done? Here are my suggestions: 1) reinstate the death penalty for criminals convicted of heinous crimes. Such a strong penalty may act as a deterrent, 2) put pressure on Portugal. I understand there is a treaty from 1907 to this effect, 3) do not send any financial aid to Portugal, 4) form a committee at the state level to double check paper work so that errors like this can't happen, 5) support and pass Illinois Senator Richard Durbin's Bringing Fugitives to Justice Act, and 6) nothing that any of us say or do will bring my father back but if we can look ahead and help the countless number of children who are similarly affected or will be affected by senseless crimes, then all of our efforts will not have been done in vain.

There is no conclusion to my story. It has not occurred yet for the Conclusion now rests in the hands of the politicians. The FBI and the U.S. Marshals have done their job in locating this fugitive and we thank them. I have done all I can by telling about our family events from November 23 to November 25, 1962 and the impact of this despicable crime. On behalf of the Patterson family, I ask you to please bring justice for the untimely death of my father, Walter Patterson.

Thank you.