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Falsely Accused of a Murder That Shook Up Small Town, Man Sues for His Wrongful Conviction

***Police fabricated evidence and the lab hid exculpatory DNA,
sending Nicholas McGuffin to prison for a crime he didn't commit***

PORTLAND, OR – A man wrongfully sent to prison for manslaughter filed a federal civil rights lawsuit today against police and other officials in Coquille, Oregon and surrounding jurisdictions for manufacturing false evidence and hiding other evidence that would have cleared him.

Nicholas McGuffin had at least 20 alibi witnesses for the time when his girlfriend, Leah Freeman, was abducted and murdered on June 28, 2000. A decade later, he was wrongly convicted of manslaughter by a non-unanimous jury and spent nine years in prison after police fabricated evidence against him, coerced witnesses, and withheld DNA and other evidence that would have cleared him.

“Leah’s abduction and murder was the ‘crime of the century’ for the small town of Coquille. The police were under enormous pressure to solve the case, and they cracked under that pressure. They created false evidence and sent an innocent man to prison for nine years,” said Janis C. Puracal, one of McGuffin’s attorneys.

A decade after Leah’s abduction and murder, the police launched a deeply flawed “cold case” investigation that focused almost exclusively on McGuffin.

The police appeared on national television to gin up rumors and publicize the false evidence before McGuffin’s criminal trial, and the prosecutor presented the same fabricated evidence to the jury at that trial. A decade later, after McGuffin was exonerated by DNA evidence, that same national news program, ABC News “20/20,” came back to Oregon to help correct the record and expose the police misconduct.

“This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Leah’s abduction and murder, and we are still trying to find out what really happened to Leah. The police wasted the last 20 years and destroyed McGuffin’s life in the process,” said Ms. Puracal.

McGuffin was exonerated in November 2019 after a court in Oregon found that the Oregon State Police lab violated McGuffin’s constitutional rights by failing to report DNA evidence that would have cleared him of the crime.

Eighteen days later, the State of Oregon decided not to appeal that ruling, the Coos County District Attorney’s Office dropped the charges against McGuffin, the Coos County Circuit Court dismissed the case against him, and Nicholas McGuffin walked out of prison a free and innocent man after nine years of wrongful incarceration.

According to today’s lawsuit, former Chief of the Coquille Police Department, Mark Dannels, led a team of inexperienced investigators on a quest to implicate McGuffin, made up blood evidence that did not exist, falsely reported that McGuffin cleaned his car to destroy evidence, and buried evidence that corroborated McGuffin’s alibi.

During his wrongful incarceration, McGuffin missed most of his young daughter's childhood. His career as an Executive Banquet Chef was destroyed by years of harassment preceding his wrongful imprisonment and the nine years behind bars that followed. He is still trying to put the pieces of his life back together.

"Even after Nick was exonerated, and his presumption of innocence fully restored, the people responsible for his wrongful conviction are out in public and in the press calling him 'guilty'," said Andrew C. Lauersdorf, one of McGuffin's lawyers. "They have really left Nick no choice but to file this lawsuit to reveal the truth about what they did to him, and, hopefully, persuade them to reopen their investigation and get to the bottom of what really happened to Leah. Today we start that process."

Mr. McGuffin is represented by [Janis C. Puracal](#), [Andrew C. Lauersdorf](#), and [Christine A. Webb](#) of Maloney Lauersdorf Reiner, PC of Portland, OR and [David B. Owens](#) of the Chicago-based Loevy & Loevy Attorneys at Law.

The attorneys at [Maloney Lauersdorf Reiner, PC](#) have collectively taken over 200 cases to trial and routinely handle multi-million-dollar complex litigation. They represent both plaintiffs and defendants in the investigation and litigation of complex cases involving fraud, arson, and human trafficking in Oregon, Washington, and throughout the country.

[Loevy & Loevy](#) is one of the nation's largest civil rights law firms and has won more multi-million-dollar jury verdicts than any other civil rights law firm in the country.

A copy of today's suit, *Nicholas James McGuffin, as an individual and as guardian ad litem on behalf of S.M., a minor v. Mark Dannels, Pat Downing, Susan Hormann, Mary Krings, Kris Karcher, Shelly McInnes, Raymond McNeely, Kip Oswald, Michael Reaves, John Riddle, Sean Sanborn, Eric Schwenninger, Richard Walter, Chris Webley, Anthony Wetmore, Kathy Wilcox, Craig Zanni, David Zavala, Estate of Dave Hall, Vidocq Society, City of Coquille, City of Coos Bay, Coos County, and Oregon State Police*, Case No. 6:20-cv-1163, can be found here.

https://mlrlegalteam.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NICHOLAS-JAMES-MCGUFFIN_2020-07-20-Complaint.pdf

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