

I thought I had done the right thing. I was to discover later that I had made a drastic mistake...

Exactly one year ago today the bodies of two young women were found in a field, in the middle of Virginia. I remember that day so clearly. I had woken up at six o'clock, as I did every week-day morning, had breakfast of ReadyBrek porridge, and a 10-minute shower. I got dressed, and at twenty-five to seven, left the house, knowing that my wife would take the children to school at half eight. I began the drive to my work place, a law firm in Washington. As I was driving along the highway, I remember passing an old, battered, red Dodge pick-up truck, with two women and a man in front. The man was driving. A few minutes later, as I passed an exit, I saw the same pick-up truck turning down the slip road. Of course I thought nothing of the pick-up truck, a common sight in the area where I lived. Well, I thought nothing of it until later that day, when I had turned on the television in my office during my lunch break and switched it to a news channel. I was speechless as I watched the story being reported unfold. Police were investigating the deaths of two young women, whose bodies had been found in a field, near the town of Dumfries, Virginia. Pictures came up on the screen showing the two women. I had a sudden flashback to when I was driving to work. The two women in the pick-up truck had flashed up on the TV screen. The man was not mentioned by the TV presenter. "Something weird's going on" I thought. As soon as I had finished work I climbed into my car and sped towards Dumfries. It wasn't long before I was in the small town in Prince William County. With a population of only 14,000, it really was quite small, compared to Richmond, where I lived and the capital of Virginia. I was soon parked outside the small police station. I walked inside and told the lady at the desk that I wanted to see the officer in charge of the case. She told me to sit down and that she would go and get him. She soon returned with Officer Matthew Smith behind her. Officer Smith took me to an interview room and asked me numerous question, at first about who I was and what I did for a living, before he moved on to the more important information that I had about the case. I wrote down and signed a statement that I would never see again. I left the station feeling that the man I had seen with the women would soon be found and arrested.

Three days later there was a knock on the front door of my house. Two police officers were there, standing on the porch. They said words I will never forget, “David Johnson, you are under arrest on suspicion of two counts of first-degree murder; you have the right to remain silent, but anything you do say may be used as evidence against you.”

They took me to the nearest police station, not far away. Two cops from Dumfries were there. They took me to a secluded interview room. I was subjected there to three hours of brutal shouting and goading, the cops asking me over and over again, ‘why I’d killed the women?’ I don’t know what happened, but by the end of the ordeal the cops were satisfied. By that time I didn’t know what I was doing, but maybe, to stop them, I had told them [the cops] that it was me who had killed the women. I must have done that; otherwise I would not be where I am now. I was remanded in custody in Dumfries and trial date was set for a month away. The lawyer became the defendant.

On the 16th May 2009, I went on trial in Dumfries. The prosecution had scraped together bogus witnesses and evidence. They were small town police, all they wanted was results, and a guy behind bars. I was defended by my best friend, John Smith, someone who I had known since college. So on that day jury from Dumfries sentenced me to twenty-five years in prison. They transported me to Virginia State Prison, took all my clothes, gave me prison issue underwear, trousers and shirts. They took me to my cell and introduced me to my cell mate, Tony. We were allowed time in the recreation area every day. As often as possible I met with John to discuss my appeal. Eventually, he succeeded. Today I got the news that my case had been overturned by the United States Supreme Court, the last stop for many appeal cases. I am a free man, once again. This is the story of my year in prison.

By Will Goddard