

Year 2000 newspaper report explaining how police probe narrowed down

Secret meeting altered course of Moxley probe

By Leonard Levitt - Greenwich Time

In 1991, investigators of the murder of Martha Moxley held a secret meeting with Skakel family lawyers in the Belle Haven home of Rushton Skakel Sr., whose son, Thomas, was then the prime suspect in the case.

The gathering resembled a high-stakes poker game. The investigators held a thick black book that they said pointed to none other than Kenneth Littleton, the tutor who had moved into the Skakel home the night Martha was bludgeoned to death with a golf club in 1975. They said they had information that suggested Littleton was a serial killer, and they tried to lure the attorneys into showing their cards by allowing them to question Thomas.

That meeting altered the investigation in ways none of the participants could have foreseen.

Ultimately, it helped lead to an arrest 12 days ago - not of Littleton or of Thomas Skakel, but of Thomas' younger brother, Michael.

And Michael's attorney, Michael Sherman, now says he can use that meeting in his defense of Michael Skakel, a nephew of Robert F. Kennedy who was charged with murder as a juvenile.

At the meeting, the state's former lead investigator, Jack Solomon, appeared certain of Littleton's guilt.

"I'd have absolutely no hesitation about calling (Solomon)," Sherman said last week. "The prosecution is going to have to justify why they believed for so many years that Michael was not guilty."

A lawyer familiar with the case said that pointing to a third-party suspect is an obvious direction for Sherman to go, as it would be in any murder case. He said it puts Sherman in a position to show that authorities should have explored this area further than they did. And it is the prosecution's burden to establish why they discontinued its pursuit of Littleton and gave him immunity, said the lawyer, who asked for anonymity.

Littleton was a teacher at Brunswick School when he moved into the Skakel home Oct. 30, 1975, to be a tutor for Michael, then 15, and Thomas, then 17. That night, the boys' neighbor, 15-year-old Martha Moxley, was murdered.

Littleton became a suspect the following summer after committing a string of burglaries on Nantucket and subsequently failing a lie detector test when questioned about Martha's murder.

Solomon became the case's lead investigator when the Fairfield County State's Attorney's office took over the investigation of the Moxley murder. The case was reopened in August 1991 after details of the investigation were published in Greenwich Time and The (Stamford) Advocate. Solomon remained on the case until his retirement three years ago.

In late 1991, Solomon took the unusual step of meeting with Emanuel Margolis and Thomas Sheridan, the attorneys for Thomas and Michael, respectively. Sheridan was also a close friend of the boys' father.

According to Margolis, three such meetings took place, and the participants included - at different times - Solomon; Frank Garr, then a Greenwich detective and Solomon's successor as the case's lead investigator; Henry Lee, then the director of the state crime lab; and Solomon's boss, State's Attorney Donald Browne, who was assigned to the case.

The key meeting, Margolis and Sheridan said last week, occurred at Rushton Skakel's home, where Martha is believed to have spent the last hours of her life. As she walked home, she was beaten to death with a golf club that belonged to a set owned by Rushton's late wife, Ann.

"(Solomon) came to a meeting with Margolis and myself with a big black book," Sheridan said. "He led us to believe (Littleton) had bludgeoned four or five teenage girls under similar circumstances and that he was the prime suspect in the Moxley murder."

Margolis said Solomon would not allow them to touch the three-ring spiral notebook, which he described as "2 inches thick with a lot of pictures and dates."

"He flipped through it as he talked but wouldn't allow us to look inside it," Margolis said. "He kept referring to a 'book compilation' that had been assembled as part of the state's investigation. He said he was in close touch with law enforcement in these various communities."

Margolis said the state authorities assured him the meeting would be secret and the media would not learn of it. And they didn't.

In a telephone interview last week, Solomon confirmed the meetings occurred, but offered a different interpretation. He said that while he told the attorneys that Littleton "may have been" involved in the murder of other teenage girls besides Martha Moxley, he had "no substantive proof" this was the case.

"As in any long unsolved murder case," he said, "it is in the best interests of the police to keep an open mind. We did seek out unsolved homicides in the area that may have had similarities to the Moxley case."

There were at least four murders of teenage girls that law enforcement officials looked at. One was in North Adams, Mass.; another in nearby Williamstown, where Littleton attended college; a third in Maine, where Littleton supposedly vacationed; and a fourth in Orlando, Fla., where Littleton visited. A law enforcement official familiar with the case said to his knowledge no one

has been arrested for any of the so-called serial murders.

However, Solomon added: "We made it clear to them we were looking at unsolved murders. A girl was murdered at Williams College, and we put (Littleton) in a hotel there the night before the murder. But did we say he was responsible for it? Absolutely not."

"Throughout the investigation," he continued, "we never had any substantial evidence that led us to believe that any of these murders were connected to the Moxley murder. There was no evidence (Littleton) had committed these murders, no evidence that we were able to acquire. Take the murder in Williamstown. Could he have done it? Can we say he was responsible? Was there any substantial evidence? At this time, no."

Solomon described his approach to the attorneys as a "ploy to get them to cooperate." He added, "Browne was not totally satisfied that either one of those kids (Michael or Thomas) did it. Nor were we satisfied Littleton did it."

In a telephone interview last week, Browne said: "I recall we had a meeting with Margolis to see if we could get Thomas and Michael to answer some questions. I don't have a clear recollection of anything about Littleton at all."

Garr declined comment, and Lee did not return a call to his office.

Solomon's so-called ploy apparently succeeded in part. After listening to him expound about Littleton, the attorneys acquiesced to his request to allow an inspection of the Skakel home, Margolis recalled.

As Margolis put it: "We were anxious to be given access to Solomon's black book on the basis of which we would lend whatever assistance they asked. They were seeking the opportunity to use video and still cameras inside the Skakel house and we allowed this to happen."

Margolis also recalled that they wanted to make test holes or borings in the ground. "We agreed to let them do that outside," he said. "I suspect they were looking for the remaining piece of the golf club. They talked about bloody clothes, and they wanted to use a metal detector and we allowed them to do that."

"We turned over that house, lock, stock and barrel to Solomon and Dr. Henry Lee for a complete investigation and scientific analysis. They seemed to have an idea things were buried there. They wanted to inspect the carpeting of the entire house. We were sure they would turn in a different direction when they saw nothing in the Skakel home."

Solomon's "ploy" had another component, which did not succeed.

"He wanted access to question Thomas and Michael," Margolis recalled. The Skakels had not allowed this since Margolis entered the case as their attorney in January 1976, six months after the murder.

"We considered making Thomas and Michael available for interviews by the police," Margolis continued. "Among our conditions were that they provide us with copies of (the boys') original statements, which they never did. We were also anxious that neither Skakel brother was a prime suspect, and we requested something in writing to that effect. We wanted Browne to announce it in return for our cooperation. We never got it."

Relations between the Skakels and the state ended in mutual distrust and recriminations.

But Solomon's move had an unintended result. Based at least in part on the theory that Littleton may have murdered Martha, the Skakels hired private investigators Jim Murphy and Willis Krebs of Sutton Associates.

Their investigation resulted in both Michael and Thomas admitting they lied to the Greenwich police, sources said. Thomas placed himself as having a sexual encounter with Martha at the time police believed she was murdered, while Michael said he climbed a tree outside Martha's window and masturbated. He then passed by what turned out to be the murder scene. It was Michael's statement to those investigators that helped lead to his indictment, sources say.

As for Littleton, he was cleared of any involvement in Martha's murder and granted immunity in return for his testimony before the state grand jury that decided enough evidence existed to arrest Michael for Martha's murder.

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