Death row inmate sent to chamber for '90 slaying

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — A man convicted of killing a Montgomery County mother of two when he was 17 years old headed for the Texas chamber Tuesday night.

Glen Alan McGinnis, now 27, said in a recent interview that he doesn't want to use his dysfunctional childhood as an excuse for gunning down laundromat clerk Leta Ann Wilkerson, but he wondered what might have been had he not spent his youth largely on the streets.

"I mean, man, I'm young," McGinnis said last week. "I'm not crying, I'm not groping, but it's kinda sad that I got caught up so young."

> *"I mean, man, I'm young. I'm not crying. I'm not groping, but it's kinda sad that I got caught up so young."*
>
> — Glen McGinnis
> convicted murderer on death row

Back in the summer of 1990, McGinnis already had logged time in juvenile lockups, lived out of cars and fended for himself. His mother was serving a prison term for prostitution when he walked into a laundromat, opened fire and made off with $140.

On death row, McGinnis did not deny his crime. He shot Mrs. Wilkerson in the head, shoulders and back during the robbery, leaving for dead the 30-year-old mother of two young daughters.

At McGinnis' 1992 trial, Montgomery County district attorney Peter Speers told an all-white suburban Houston jury that McGinnis, who is black, was "bad to the bone.

"He has spit in the face of every chance he's had to go straight," Speers said.

But defense attorney William Hall described a deeply troubled teen whose race and homosexual orientation doomed him in the eyes of the jury.

"He was polite, respectful, legitimately sorry about what he'd done," Hall said. "But he was also a black man who killed a white woman. And he was very, very gay, and that didn't help."

The Vatican, the European Union, the American Bar Association and a collection of anti-death penalty groups pleaded for the life of McGinnis because he was a juvenile when he killed Wilkerson.

After McGinnis' father abandoned him, the young man lived in a one-bedroom apartment with a mother who traded sex for crack cocaine. McGinnis was raped as a child and beaten with an extension cord.

"I was kinda lost within myself," McGinnis said last week. "It seemed like every time I found something I thought I could grasp on to, it went away."

Just five days before the August 1990 slaying, McGinnis was released on probation for auto theft. McGinnis, on the brink of getting evicted from an aunt's home, said he went into the laundromat that day with a plan to steal cash for his imprisoned mother.

After shooting the clerk and emptying the cash register, he stole Wilkerson's van, which he intended to use as shelter.

"I used to have no respect for people," McGinnis said. "I never had no compassion."

After the jury condemned McGinnis, Wilkerson's widower drew a breath of relief.

"That was the only verdict they could have given that would have been fair to me and my girls," Larry Wilkerson told reporters then.

The death penalty was excessive punishment for the slaying, his lawyer said.

"It'll bother me forever, I guess," Hall said.

McGinnis' execution would be the sixth this year in Texas and the second of three scheduled for this week. He would be the eighth juvenile offender executed in Texas since capital punishment resumed in the '70s.

Approval of statue sought

ANDERSON (AP) — A battle brewing over plans for a Confederate monument on the lawn of a tiny central Texas courthouse could become a political landmine for Gov. George W. Bush, who has sidestepped similar issues in his presidential campaign.

That's because the Texas Historical Commission must approve the statue, which has been sought by the Grimes County Greys camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans since 1994.

Black ministers and others in this community 50 miles northwest of Houston oppose the statue, saying it will be a reminder of slavery. But Dal Dreher, commander of the Greys, views it only as a reminder of sacrifices made by his forefathers.

"This statue is to honor those people who fought for their land," Dreher told the *Houston Chronicle*, noting that more Grimes County residents died in the Civil War than in all other wars combined. "If we don't defend our heritage, then we will lose it."

The group has raised more than $30,000 for the memorial, a six-foot bronze infantryman gripping a rifle that could be replaced by a Confederate flag on special occasions. But because the Texas Historical Commission helped fund a previous renovation of the courthouse, it must approve future changes, such as addition of the memorial.

Dreher was scheduled to make his formal application to commission staff Tuesday. But the meeting was postponed so Commission Executive Director F. Lawrence could attend.

"Something of this magnitude or importance needs the attention of the executive director," commission acting deputy director Terry Colley said. The meeting had not been rescheduled as of noon.

Dreher said he will appeal to the 18-member commission, which includes 12 Bush appointees, if staffers deny his application.

So far, Bush has avoided entanglement in a debate over the Confederate flag flying atop the South Carolina Capitol. He has said he considers it a state's rights issue that doesn't require outside interference.

"The governor's governing style is to appoint capable and qualified people to the hundreds of state boards and commissions, and trust them to make the best decisions for the state of Texas," said spokesperson Linda Edwards.

Meanwhile, the Rev. James Mable, vice president of the Grimes County Ministers Union, said many local residents are hoping that if the statue is erected, it is placed somewhere other than the courthouse lawn.

"We don't mind if it's in a cemetery or park, but not at the courthouse where we have to go every day," Mable said. "It's offensive there."

"We are losing so many of our freedoms, and this is one of them," he said.

News in Brief

Bush announces crime prevention

AUSTIN (AP) — The state's seven largest urban counties will receive more than $2.78 million for crime prevention programs, Gov. George W. Bush announced Monday.

BUSH

Each county will receive $338,500 over the next two years to establish or enhance local programs in high-crime neighborhoods. The counties to receive the money are Bexar, Dallas, Harris, El Paso, Nueces, Tarrant and Travis.

Projects could range from school and community-based initiatives for young children to intervention for teens and young adults.

Runaway faces murder trial

WACO (AP) — The capital murder trial of a teen-age runaway who allegedly beat a 73-year-old man with a hammer, stabbed him to death and stole his car is scheduled to begin Tuesday.

Jonathan Daniel Rushing, 17, is charged with the May death of Houston Burgess of Asa. Because Rushing was 16 at the time of the crime, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Rushing has confessed to a psychiatrist, his probation officer and his foster home roommate, the *Waco Tribune-Herald* reported.

When he was arrested, Rushing allegedly told police, "The old man shouldn't have come at me with a pair of scissors."

A 14-year-old boy also was arrested in connection with the murder. He has contended he is incompetent to stand trial and is undergoing psychological testing. His case is pending in juvenile court.

Rushing and the 14-year-old suspect lived at a foster home near Burgess' house in Asa, about 12 miles south of Waco.

Judge accused of harassment

TYLER (AP) — An East Texas appeals judge's encounter with a legal assistant has prompted a sexual harassment complaint by the woman.

Roby Hadden, justice of the 12th Court of Appeals, has admitted hugging and kissing the employee, but denied any wrongdoing. He said that what happened is subject to interpretation.

Tom Ramey, the appeals court's chief judge, told the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* that the State Commission on Judicial Conduct has acknowledged receipt of the complaint.

No public action has been taken on Hadden.

Mary Ellen Keith, an attorney for the commission in Austin, said Tuesday that she could not comment on any investigation or pending action.

The legal assistant, Bethena Atwood, contended she was following Hadden through the Tyler-based court's office at the Cotton Belt Building receiving last-minute instructions on the afternoon of Sept. 1 as the judge was preparing to leave on a Colorado vacation.

She said the judge asked for a goodbye hug.

"We're a close-knit group pretty much," Atwood told the newspaper, adding it was not unusual among the 16 office members.

"But this time was different," she said. "He came at me and grabbed me around the waist with one hand and grabbed my face with the other."

She said that as she tried to turn away, the judge kissed her for what seemed like several seconds. Hadden, in a written statement to the newspaper, admitted hugging and kissing Mrs. Atwood. There had been goodbye hugs before so it was not unwelcome, he said.

"The alleged kiss was more of a smack like I would give my sister or daughter," the statement read. "There was absolutely nothing sexual about it and there was certainly no harassment involved."

Ramey confirmed he forwarded the complaint to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct on Nov. 29 at Hadden's request.

♀Women's Open House♀

January 26, 2000
10 am - 2 pm MSC Flagroom

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We are located in MSC 003 (that's downstairs next to Hullabaloo)

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P.O.Drawer K-1
AggielandStation, Texas 77844

Phone: 409-845-5974
Fax: 847-9384
Email: scadets@tam2k.tamu.edu

The Voice Of Aggieland

Texas A&M University Journalism Open House

4 to 6 p.m. Thursday Jan. 27 in the MSC Flagroom

Meet the profs, meet the pros
Journalism professors and professionals will give advice about careers in journalism.

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Several student organizations with business contacts are looking for members.

All majors welcome
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For information contact Joe Schumacher at 845-2612 or <j_schumacher1134@hotmail.com>.

Society of Professional Journalists
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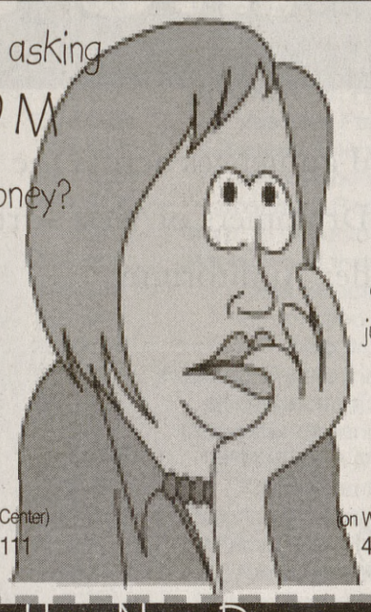

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