

# Fate of Karla Faye Tucker debated in Texas

By Sue Anne Pressley=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

AUSTIN, Texas -- In another life, Karla Faye Tucker was known as the Pickax Killer, a dissolute young woman who bragged to friends about the thrill of sending two people to their deaths. Since then, she says, she has been transformed -- by sobriety and her faith in God -- and if the state of Texas executes her on Feb. 3 as planned, it will be killing a different person entirely.

"Even though I did murder ... that night and not think anything of it back then, it is now the one thing I regret most in my life," Tucker wrote last week in a plea to the state Board of Pardons and Paroles. "And in the frame of mind I am in now, it is something that absolutely rips my guts out as I think about it."

The case of Tucker, 38, on Texas's death row for the past 14 years, encompasses the most serious debates surrounding mercy and punishment. It raises the question of whether rehabilitation should be considered in sparing the lives of condemned criminals, and it also goes to the heart of lingering societal attitudes about protecting women.

Tucker and her attorneys have said

repeatedly that her sex should not be a consideration in halting her execution. But the fact that she is a woman is largely why her fate is receiving so much international attention and inspiring such heated argument. She would be the first woman put to death in Texas since the Civil War -- the state is the overwhelming national leader in executions with a record 37 men killed by lethal injection last year -- and only the second woman in the United States since the resumption of executions in 1976. Margie Velma Barfield, another born-again Christian who insisted she was a different person, was executed in North Carolina in 1984.

Forty-nine women (and 3,316 men) are on death row in this country, with about five of the women nearing execution dates this year, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center. Opponents of the death penalty fear that if Tucker dies as scheduled, America's apparent reluctance to put women to death will lessen, and executions of women, like men, will become almost routine.

With her champions including Pat Robertson, the former presidential candidate and chairman of the Christian Broadcasting Network who usu-

ally supports capital punishment, Tucker's case has divided the religious right. It also has produced a potential political dilemma for Texas Gov. George W. Bush, Republican, whose action, or inaction, in the case may haunt him if he runs for president, according to both supporters and opponents of Tucker's cause.

As it stands, Tucker has few avenues for saving her life: a petition filed with the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals that attacks the legality of the state's clemency process, and another petition filed with the state Board of Correction to have her sentence commuted to life in prison -- something the board has not done in more than a decade. Ten of the 18 members of the board must agree on a recommendation to Bush, whose only independent authority is his ability to grant a 30-day stay of execution.

If her sentence is commuted to life imprisonment, Tucker would be eligible for parole in 2003, and in an effort to strengthen her plea to the Board of Pardons and Paroles last week, she offered to waive her right for early release. But parole officials responded that under the law she must be considered for parole when she becomes eligible, and Tucker's detractors in-

stist that her offer is an empty gesture, a ploy in her ultimate goal -- to win complete freedom.

"It's all, 'Sweet Karla Faye, Miss Saint,'" said Richard Thornton, 48, whose wife, Deborah, was killed in the June 1983 attack in Houston, along with Jerry Lynn Dean. Thornton plans to witness Tucker's death on Feb. 3.

"She is not wanting her life -- she wants back on the streets, in the bedroom with her husband."

The case has divided Deborah Thornton's family. Her brother, Ronald Carlson, 42, a machinist from Houston, said he believes in Tucker's transformation and has participated in rallies to protest her pending execution. Richard Thornton said Carlson recently tried to give him a letter of apology from Tucker, which Thornton refused to accept.

In recent televised interviews, Tucker has come across as sincere and remorseful, as someone, who in contrast to the required findings of her jury in 1984, no longer seems to present a danger to anyone. Backed by attorneys, and even former prosecutors and jail and prison personnel, she insists that her conversion is not a recent development, but began as she was awaiting trial nearly 14 years

ago in the Harris County Jail. While on women's death row in Gatesville, Texas, she has continued her Bible studies, appeared in drug-education videos aimed at youths, and married Dana Brown, a prison-ministry worker, by proxy, in 1995.

"She may be the same physical person she was when the case was tried, but she is clearly not the same person," said one of her attorneys, David Botsford of Austin. "She is totally rehabilitated, and her prison record supports that. Our position is, she is not, quote, death-worthy."

A 7th-grade dropout, Tucker experienced a sordid early life that seemed programmed for disaster, according to court records and her own accounts. At the age of 8, she began smoking marijuana; by 10, she was shooting up heroin. Her mother allowed her to travel with the Allman Brothers Band on tour when she was 13, she said. After splitting up with her first husband, with whom she began living at 15, she began working as a prostitute.

Tucker met Danny Garrett -- who also received the death penalty for the slayings but died of a liver ailment in 1993 while awaiting a retrial -- through a doctor they both used to obtain illegal prescriptions.

On the night of June 13, 1983, they decided to go to Dean's apartment, steal his motorcycle and possibly kill him. Tucker said she had not slept for three days and had ingested a wide array of drugs, including amphetamines, or speed. She also later admitted to conversations in which she, Garrett and others had discussed a spree of "offering" various people who ran drug labs.

Once inside Dean's apartment, Tucker and Dean began wrestling, and Garrett intervened and struck Dean over the head repeatedly with a hammer. Tucker testified that she wanted to stop Dean from making a "gurgling" noise and took a pickax and began hitting him in the back. She bragged to a friend later that she had "come with every stroke," or had orgasms, as she swung the pickax, but later said she had exaggerated to appear tough. Tucker then saw a figure cowering underneath some blankets, swung the pickax again, and struck Deborah Thornton, who had been estranged from her husband and staying with Dean, across the shoulder. Garrett intervened again, and Tucker said she saw him kill Thornton.

Tucker, who testified against Garrett in his trial, was tried only for the slaying of Dean.

## The beef's the beef in Hindu's suit against Taco Bell

By Hilary MacGregor=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

VENTURA, Calif. — A devout Hindu is suing a Taco Bell for serving him a beef burrito, rather than the bean burrito he ordered.

The one bite of beef he chewed violated Mukesh K. Rai's most fundamental religious principle, causing him emotional distress, as well as medical expenses and loss of wages, he claimed in his suit filed this week.

"Eating the cow, it was a really devastating experience," said Rai, reached at his home Friday. "So much so that I had to go to a psychiatrist. I went to a doctor. I couldn't sleep."

Indeed, Rai said he has already had to travel to England to perform a religious purification ceremony with Hindu masters.

And in March he will travel to India for the ultimate purification: bathing in the waters of the Ganges River.

Taco Bell officials would not com-

ment on the suit filed in Ventura County Superior Court.

According to the complaint, Rai ordered a bean burrito from the Taco Bell in Ventura last April.

"He clearly repeated the order twice so that he would be ensured of not receiving a burrito with meat," the suit states.

"When he received his order he took a bite, and after chewing it he realized to his horror that it was a meat burrito," the complaint continued.

Moreover, he said, after he bit into the beef burrito, Taco Bell refused to give him a refund.

Indeed, although they offered to exchange it for a bean burrito, they would not pay him the difference in price between the more expensive beef burrito, and the cheaper bean one, he said.

In India the cow is a sacred animal, considered a mother to everyone, he said.

## Camera catches car thief running red light

By Scott Hadly=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

OXNARD, Calif. — Every picture tells a story.

In the case of an unlucky 17-year-old, it was a picture snapped by an automated camera as he was running a red light in a stolen car.

Cameras installed in Oxnard two years ago were designed to help police nab motorists who plow through red lights in dangerous intersections. But in this case, investigators say they recognized the young man's distinctive profile as he drove a stolen dark-colored Oldsmobile Cutlass — a popular make for car thieves — through the light.

"The picture was just so crystal clear," said Det. Chris Orsini, who knew the suspect by sight because of his long history of stealing cars and going on joy rides. His name was not released because he is under 18.

This is the first time a picture from one of the city's automated cameras has been used in the city to solve another crime, Orsini said.

"It's pretty funny. I wish I had this

kind of thing on all the auto theft investigations I work on," he said.

Orsini went to the youth's home Monday and his sister said he had just been arrested on suspicion of riding in another stolen car.

The investigator tracked the teenager down at the Ventura County Juvenile Hall and asked him about the Olds.

He asked the youth if he had taken the car, and he said, "No."

"Well, what if I told you I have some more evidence?" Orsini asked. "No, I don't steal cars," the young man responded.

Then Orsini showed him the picture.

"Where'd you get that picture from?" Orsini said the youth asked.

Officials from the company that installs the cameras, U.S. Public Technology of San Diego, said the automated cameras have not solved many big crimes, except for traffic accidents at intersections.

"Unless they make the mistake of going through a red light, it's not going to take a picture," said Rob Kerr, a company spokesman.

## Reintroduction of wolves to Southwest begins

By Frank Clifford=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

APACHE NATIONAL FOREST, Ariz. -- Home at last, a tawny coated, 10-month-old Mexican wolf bounded from her cage Monday onto a snowy hilltop here in the White Mountains, where her ancestors lived before they were all but wiped out by a society that did not want to share the wilderness with wild animals.

The wolf pup was quickly joined by her mother after their cages were opened by U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and a group of state and federal wildlife officials. A wary papa stayed in his cage while the mother and daughter loped around a temporary fenced enclosure, where the wolves will be confined until they are ready for life in the wilds.

They soon will be joined by eight more wolves in the program to reintroduce the animals here in eastern Arizona, the latest step in a wildlife experiment that has been both hugely popular and bitterly contested every place it has been attempted -- from coastal North Carolina to central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park.

The Arizona wolves are facing the adventure of their lives. Unlike ones moved to Yellowstone three years ago

from the wilds of Canada, these were bred in captivity.

"It is going to be the biggest wolf conservation challenge in this country," said Mike Phillips, a former National Park Service wildlife biologist who directed wolf release projects in North Carolina and Yellowstone.

"You are taking animals who are new to the wilds, putting them in the midst of a landscape as perilous as Yellowstone."

The wolves will be kept for several weeks in the enclosure, which is about one-third of an acre, eating food and water that is brought to them. Then a section of the fence will be removed and they will be on their own in a wilderness twice the size of Yellowstone -- the forested mountains and canyons of the Apache-Sitgreaves and Gila national forests.

For many nearby ranchers, who already contend with livestock attacks by mountain lion, coyote and black bear, the wolf reintroduction represents a slap in the face by a federal government that puts wildlife preservation ahead of the economic well-being of rural people.

As the wolves were being released from their cages, a crowd of demonstrators gathered 20 miles away in the town of Alpine, holding placards that

read "Don't Import Wolves. Deport Environmentalists" and "Hello, Wolf. Goodbye Hunting."

At a news conference at the wolf release site, Babbitt, a former Arizona governor who comes from a ranching family, said he understands some people's misgivings.

"We will have to keep a very close watch on this program," he said, a reference to the team of state and federal wildlife experts who will be tracking the animals -- with the help of radio transmitters in their collars -- and moving them if they stray too close to livestock.

To re-establish themselves, the wolves will have to master ancient hunting skills. But they'll put themselves at risk if they make a habit of killing the easiest prey -- the thousands of head of cattle that graze in the national forests.

Wolves that kill livestock on private property can be shot legally if they are caught in the act. On public land, a marauding wolf is not a legal target until after wildlife officials have first tried to capture the animal and move it away from livestock.

Wildlife biologists estimate it could take eight to 10 years for the wolves to reproduce enough to reach a population of 100, the goal of the

project, which is expected to cost between \$6 million and \$7 million.

With fewer than 200 left, all in captivity, Mexican wolves are among the rarest land mammals in North America.

Such wolves once roamed the Southwest from the Texas Panhandle to central Arizona and from the Grand Canyon as far south as Mexico City. But they were mostly gone by the 1950s, having been trapped and poisoned as part of a federal predator control program launched to protect livestock.

Establishing a stable population may require several releases, as it has in Yellowstone, where the number of wolves has grown from 30 to 100.

"Putting the wolves back is just like legalizing bank robbery," said 81-year-old Jupe Means, who has been ranching in the area since 1919. "I've seen them tear apart full grown steers."

Here, just to the west of the wolf release area, officials on two Apache Indian reservations worry about attacks on tribal cattle and a trophy elk herd that draws hunters willing to pay \$12,000 per permit to hunt on the reservations.

"Some people have said they just might shoot the wolves if they come onto the reservation," said Paul Nosie, director of recreation and wildlife for the San Carlos Apache.

## Va. Lions chapter admits woman, loses some men

By Tara Mack=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

Several members of the Manassas, Va., Lions Club quit recently to form a men-only organization after the Lions admitted a woman for the first time.

"As a men's club, which (the Lions) was for 50 years, it was kind of a boys'-night-out type of situation," said Larry Fleetwood, a member of the new Manassas Men's Club, which formed last month. "And I knew that the day would come that they would admit a woman. (Even) if it had been my wife that had joined, I would have resigned."

The Manassas Men's Club, which has about 19 members, will perform charity work similar to what the Lions do, said Roy Frame, a former Lion and the newly elected president of the men's club.

Keith Garrett, president of the Manassas Lions Club and the husband of Margaret Garrett, the new female member, is taking a to-each-his-own stance, saying he bears no grudges.

"We're all still friends," Keith Garrett said. He said he wasn't sure

how many Lions had quit but estimated the number at four or five.

Lions Clubs International, which used to segregate women to an auxiliary called the Lionesses, began admitting women to the Lions in 1987, said Patrick Cannon, a spokesman for the international organization. Of the Lions Clubs' 1.4 million members, he said, 135,000 are women. The Manassas chapter did not have a female member until September, when Margaret Garrett decided to join.

Margaret Garrett said that she still is friends with some of the men who quit and that she can't believe they left on her account.

"I just hope it's not because of me, because all I'm doing is the same things that they're doing," said Garrett said, who has been active in activities from the monthly newsletter to the annual fruit sale fund-raiser since she joined.

Frame said he was concerned that the decision to admit Margaret Garrett was made by the board, without consulting the rest of the membership. Keith Garrett countered that the board decides on all applicants.

## Embalming older practice than we thought

By John Schwartz=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

A 4,000-year-old mummy indicates that ancient Egyptians started using embalming techniques about 1,000 years earlier than previously believed.

Ulrich Weser of the University of Tübingen in Germany and his colleagues examined bones of an man unearthed in Giza in Egypt in 1914. The researchers discovered that the bones had been treated with pine resins and sodium-based compounds that preserved the remains and served as an antiseptic. The

skeletal remains were heavily impregnated with the preserving goo, suggesting the embalmers "defleshed" the skeleton of Idu II, at least in part, before embalming, according to a report in the Jan. 22 issue of Nature.

Idu II served as secretary general of the Pine Wood Trade Office during Egypt's Old Kingdom period, roughly 2150 B.C. While it may not sound like a glamorous job, it probably provided such executive perks as mummification, the researchers say, and a ready supply of pine and pine byproducts.

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