

Danial J. Williams: The police focused on the wrong man from the start

Introduction:

Danial Williams, a young sailor in the middle of his second tour of duty in the Navy, had absolutely nothing to do with Omar Ballard's rape and murder of Michelle Bosko. Danial planned to make a career in the Navy, but his plans were destroyed and his military career ruined because, within a few hours after William Bosko discovered Michelle's body, the police jumped to the conclusion that Danial, an innocent man who lived in the apartment across the hall from the Boskos with his wife Nicole, had committed this heinous crime. The police tunnel vision zeroed in on Danial Williams and continued despite glaring warning signs that he could not have committed this crime, and long after the evidence conclusively proved that he was innocent of Michelle Bosko's rape and murder. This misguided focus persisted even after DNA evidence proved that Omar Ballard, and Omar Ballard alone, had raped and murdered Michelle Bosko.

Danial Williams is, in every respect, the polar opposite of the kind of person the police should have suspected in this case. At age 27, he had never before been accused of any crime. A cub scout, a paper boy, and a member of his high school marching band, Danial was a good kid and a kind young man who cared about other people. He enlisted in the Navy immediately after graduating from high school to follow the tradition of military service that his maternal grandfather and uncle, and paternal great-grandfather and cousins, had established, and he reenlisted in the Navy when his initial tour of duty ended, planning to make a career as a sailor. Danial married his wife, Nicole, after dating her for three years; they married just eleven days before Michelle Bosko was raped and murdered and were, by all accounts, very much in love.

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Danial, too, was an unlikely suspect because of the events that were going on in his life when Omar Ballard murdered Michelle Bosko. In June 1997, Nicole Williams learned that she had ovarian cancer. On June 30, 1997, Danial requested leave from the Navy to accompany Nicole to her pre-operation appointment and to be by her side during and after her surgery; a request that was granted by the Navy. Doctors operated on Nicole and removed the cancerous tumor a week before Michelle Bosko's death. Danial visited Nicole in the hospital every day and she returned home from the hospital on Sunday, July 6, 1997, the day before Michelle Bosko was last seen alive. Danial Williams' parents arrived in Virginia with their trailer from Michigan on Saturday, July 5th to visit Danial and Nicole. Danial visited with his parents each day that they were staying in the Norfolk area and, when Nicole was released from the hospital, Danial and Nicole socialized with his parents at their campground site and at Danial and Nicole's apartment. Most importantly, Danial was in bed with his wife while, across the hall, Omar Ballard was brutally assaulting Michelle Bosko.

With no eyewitnesses and no credible leads, the police focused on Danial Williams because of a hunch from Michelle Bosko's friend Tamika Taylor. Taylor told the police that Danial seemed interested in Michelle, and a detective came to Danial's apartment the afternoon after the murder while Danial's parents were visiting with Danial and Nicole. The police asked Danial to come to the station to answer some questions. Thinking he was being a good Samaritan, Danial readily agreed, but the questioning quickly became an interrogation rife with pressure and peppered with lies – including false claims that a witness had seen Danial coming out of Michelle's apartment late at night after she had last been seen alive. Although Danial

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passed a lie detector test, the police told him he failed and insisted he was lying when he denied any involvement in Michelle Bosko's rape and murder.

Eventually, Danial Williams caved under unrelenting police pressure, pressure that culminated with a forceful interrogation from Detective Ford -- a police officer with a talent for obtaining confessions, a police officer with a history of coercing false confessions, and a police officer with a penchant for bending the rules. Danial Williams confessed, telling Detective Ford what he insisted upon hearing. None of the details that Danial Williams concocted in his false confession matched the obvious facts revealed by Michelle Bosko's wounds, so the police fed him these facts and urged him to change his story to match the physical evidence, which he did. Only after falsely confessing to the crime to the satisfaction of the police, was Danial Williams finally relieved from their coercive and badgering tactics.

Danial Williams' undeserved fate was sealed from the moment he relented to Detective Ford's pressure and falsely confessed to a crime he did not commit. He is now serving a sentence of life in prison without any possibility for parole for a crime that a three-time violent offender, Omar Ballard, unleashed on his own during the midst of a three-week crime spree.

1. Danial William's Background and Character

Danial Williams' character, his upbringing, and his actions throughout his life present powerful proof that he could never have committed the atrocious acts attributed to him by the Commonwealth. They also provide some foundation for understanding why he falsely confessed to the acts committed by Omar Ballard. Danial is a man who has tremendous respect for rules and for authority, and a commitment of service to others. His parents instilled in him a sense of

personal responsibility and a work ethic that he has carried throughout his life. Most importantly, he is a peaceful, non-violent man, who never before has been accused of any crime nor engaged in any reckless, delinquent, or aggressive behavior.

a. Personal Responsibility, Respect for Rules, Deference to Authority:

Danial Williams, 33, is the second of three children born and raised in a blue-collar family with traditional values in Owosso, Michigan, a small town of about 20,000 located 30 minutes west of Flint, Michigan. His father, Norman Williams, quit high school in the ninth grade to go to work in a General Motors factory doing body work; Mr. Williams retired in 1999 after thirty years with General Motors. Danial's mother, Rhea Williams, married Norman after she finished high school and became a homemaker, raising their three children. Danial's older sister, Stacey, 35, is a college student and his younger brother, Chris, 26, is a diesel truck mechanic.

Danial Williams' childhood reflected the values common in small towns in the Midwest: personal responsibility, respect for rules and deference to authority. Danial grew up in a household where his parents expected him to obey their rules, and he did not stray from them. His close childhood friend, Jeffrey Campbell, recalls that Danial's parents were "kind of strict. If his mother said that he had to be home at a certain time, Dan would make sure he was home then."

There was a strong history of military service in Danial's family. Danial's great-grandfather, Harry Cornell, and his great uncles on his father's side, Ace Williams and Phil Williams, fought in the Army in Europe in World War I. On his mother's side of the family,

during World War II, Danial's grandfather, Burton Frezon, served in the Navy Seabees, the Construction Battalion, and his uncle, Donald Frezon, served in the Merchant Marines. When Burton Frezon returned home to Owosso after the War, he helped form the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in Owosso. Danial's grandmother, Helen Frezon, joined the Women's Auxilliary Post, and she has insisted that all the female members of the family join the Women's Auxilliary Post as well; in the years since, they all have. Danial's uncle, Jerry Frezon, served 20 years in the Navy and retired as a Chief Petty Officer. Finally, Danial's second cousin, Anson Newman, served in the Navy.

Danial's goal was to emulate his relatives and to begin a career of service to his country. He pre-enlisted in the United States Navy while he was in the middle of his senior year of high school and left for basic training in June 1991, right after his graduation from Owosso High School.

Danial has always respected authority. Dennis Campbell, Jeffrey Campbell's father and a police officer in the Owosso Police Department who later became the Deputy Chief, remembers Danial as a quiet kid in the neighborhood, who was respectful of others. As a senior police officer, Dennis Campbell knew the kids in town who were troublemakers, and Danial was not one of them. Jeffrey Campbell, who followed his father into law enforcement and is now a lieutenant in the Easton County (Michigan) Sheriff's Department, said Dan always expressed respect for the police. "He wasn't the kind of kid that would give anyone trouble."

Personal responsibility is an important value in the Williams family. Danial had a paper route as a kid growing up to earn spending money. When he was old enough to drive, his

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parents bought him an old "clunker" car for \$500 but it was Danial's responsibility to pay for his own gas and his car insurance, which he did with savings from his paper route. Danial joined the Cub Scouts and, although he did not advance far, he enjoyed the camaraderie and community service exemplified by the Scouts. Danial participated in little league football and played on the freshman football team in high school.

b. A kind, shy young man:

Growing up, Danial Williams was a nice kid who was dependable and friendly but fairly shy. His best friend, Jeffrey Campbell; Jeffrey's dad, Dennis Campbell; and Danial's long-time band teacher, Carl Knipe, all remember that Danial did not have a lot of friends growing up. Jeffrey Campbell said that Danial was not as outgoing as some of their other friends, and could be socially awkward at times. "Basically, I'd describe Dan as shy."

Danial's mother describes her son as a very affectionate child, who often gave others hugs and kisses. She also says that Danial would apologize when he was wrong and forgave other people. She remembers that he forgave his sister when she pushed him down the stairs, which resulted in Danial breaking his leg.

Danial's maternal aunt, Doreen Trevena, feels that Danial is a very sensitive person who cares deeply about other people's feelings. When Danial was eight-years-old, Mrs. Trevena married her second husband, Gary Trevena, who was blind and used a guide dog. Doreen Trevena remembers that many people, and most children, were a little awkward around Gary because of his blindness. But "Danny was never like that, he was always jumping in to give Gary a hand and was very comfortable around Gary, from the very beginning."

c. A steady, but slow student who tried hard:

Those who knew him well feel strongly that Danial could be manipulated by an authority figure, like a strong police officer, into saying something that was not true. Because of his limited intellectual ability, his low self esteem, and his significant respect for and deference to authority, they believe that Danial could even confess to a crime that he did not commit.

Danial is not a bright person or even someone with average intelligence. Instead, most people, including Danial's aunt, Doreen Trevena, his band instructor Carl Knipe, and his best friend's father, Dennis Campbell, describe Danial as "slow" intellectually. Doreen Trevena said she always felt very close to Danny because, although he was not retarded or stupid, he was always a little slow -- "a half step off", and she felt the same way herself. Mrs. Trevena remembers coming back to Owosso one summer when Danial was in high school and he was struggling with algebra. She had just finished an algebra class at a community college in Arizona and remembers helping him with his math. She remembers that Danial worked very hard at algebra and that he never gave up or lost his temper even while struggling to understand the subject.

Similarly, according to Carl Knipe, Dan "absolutely was a little slow, he wasn't strong academically," although he is not sure that Dan's limitations rose to the level of a handicap. Dan played coronet in band, and Knipe recalls that Dan did not have that much musical ability – he was not good at music theory – but he tried hard. Knipe found that Dan's greatest strength was in marching; "Dan could learn something well by imitation and by repetition." Like Carl Knipe,

Dennis Campbell thought Danial was slow intellectually, but not to an extreme: "he was able to feed himself and make a sandwich so I wouldn't say he was extremely limited."

Danial struggled academically in school, but not for lack of trying. At his parent's request, Danial repeated the second grade. During Danial's four years at Owosso High School, Danial never missed a day of school and had a perfect attendance record, consistent with his general respect for following the rules and fulfilling his responsibilities. Carl Knipe, Danial's high school marching band director, says that Owosso High School was not strong academically when Danial attended, yet Danial received poor grades in his academic subjects. Danial had mostly C's and D's in his English, math, science and social studies classes and -- despite earning A's and B's in gym, band, auto mechanics and other less challenging classes -- his overall grade point average was barely a C.

Carl Knipe said Danial did not have a lot of self confidence or self esteem. "It would not shock me that Danial could be coerced into confessing to something he did not do because of his low self esteem." Doreen Trevena also believes Danial's respect for authority and his desire to please others could also lead him to confess to something he did not do. She said Danial always seemed like someone who wanted to please others and she could see him giving in to a strong personality. But she does not believe that he would actually do something that he knew was wrong or that went against his values. She said that is not the kind of values her family was raised with; they were raised to obey the law and her sister and Norman, Danny's father, raised their children to obey the law too.

Most importantly, everyone who knows Danial was "shocked" to hear that he was accused of the rape and murder of Michelle Bosko. None of them would ever expect him to get involved in anything like this, and they all believe fervently that he is innocent of this crime.

d. Danial Williams' Naval career

Danial Williams enlisted in the Navy after graduating from Owosso High School in June 1991. After boot camp, Danial was assigned as a machinist mate on the USS John F. Kennedy based in Norfolk, Virginia. While on the John F. Kennedy, Danial took his first cruise to the Mediterranean in 1992 and 1993. Danial's superior officers repeatedly recommended him for advancement and noted he was a valued sailor, although they found that he had average skills. After a brief stint at the Navy Shipyard in Philadelphia, Danial was sent back to Norfolk and assigned to the USS Saipan, a helicopter landing and assault carrier. In 1995, Danial reenlisted for another four year tour in the Navy. By the summer of 1997, Danial had earned the rank of E-4, a Petty Officer, and was trained as an emergency medical technician.

In 1994, while living in Norfolk, Danial met Nicole Matthewson, who at the time was in the process of getting a divorce from her husband. Danial and Nicole began dating seriously soon after they met. They fell in love and eventually decided to move into an apartment together. In total, Danial and Nicole lived together for about two and half years.

The summer of 1997

Given Danial Williams' background and character, it is inconceivable that he could have been involved in the brutal assault on Michelle Bosko. Moreover, at the time that Omar Ballard began his spree of violence in and around the Gates of the West Bay apartment complex in late

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June and into July 1997, Danial Williams was focused on Nicole's serious (and ultimately fatal) health problems and was spending his time with Nicole and his parents, who came to visit from Michigan. It stretches the imagination and borders on the absurd to believe that in the midst of all that was going on in his life at the time of Michelle Bosko's rape and murder, that the Commonwealth's version of Danial's involvement could be true: the Commonwealth's theory is that Danial Williams invited six Navy buddies over to his small, two bedroom apartment for a drinking party while his wife was recovering from major surgery in the next room, and then plotted to rape and murder his next door neighbor with the other half-dozen men. That bizarre scenario simply never happened.

1. Danial and Nicole

Danial and Nicole began discussing marriage when their dating became a serious commitment. They moved into an apartment together on 41st and Bentley Street in Norfolk and in 1994, Danial bought Nicole an engagement ring. In 1996, Danial's ship, the USS Saipan, was sent on a six month cruise to the Mediterranean. In January 1997, Danial's ship returned to Norfolk and Danial and Nicole rented a small, two bedroom apartment together at the Gates of the West Bay; shortly thereafter, they invited Joseph Dick, one of Danial's friends from the USS Saipan, to share their small apartment.

Over the next few months, Danial and Nicole started seriously talking about picking a date to get married. Sometime in the late spring of 1997, Nicole noticed that she missed her period and believed she was pregnant. Both Danial and Nicole were excited about the pregnancy. In early June 1997, they traveled to Owosso to attend Danial's brother Chris' high

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school graduation. They shared the news with Danial's family and openly discussed their marriage plans. Doreen Trevena remembers Danial and Nicole coming over to her house for dinner during this trip and recalls they had a lovely time; "Danny seemed very devoted to Nicole and quite loving toward her." Shortly thereafter, Danial and Nicole returned to Norfolk.

Every summer, Danial's parents take a trip in their trailer. Norman and Rhea Williams decided that for their summer trip in 1997, they would visit their son, Chris, at the Diesel Institute in Nashville and then travel to Norfolk to visit Danial and Nicole.

Sometime in June 1997, shortly after Danial and Nicole returned to Norfolk from Michigan, Nicole started bleeding vaginally while Danial was at work. Nicole thought she was having a miscarriage. She paged Danial at work and called her friend, Regina, to take her to the hospital. When Danial received Nicole's page, he called Nicole and then rushed to the hospital. Nicole's doctors performed a series of tests that disclosed that Nicole had not actually been pregnant, but instead had a mass on her ovaries. After a biopsy showed the tumor was malignant, the doctors said that Nicole would need surgery to remove the cancer and probably would require a hysterectomy.

Realizing that their long-term plans might be in jeopardy due to Nicole's diagnosis, Danial and Nicole decided to get married immediately. On June 27, 1997, Danial Williams and Nicole Matthewson were married at the Norfolk Circuit Court.

Danial took two weeks of personal leave so that he could be with Nicole while she was in the hospital and help her upon her release. On July 1, 1997, Nicole entered the hospital for surgery to remove the cancerous tumor and the affected ovary. While Nicole was in the hospital,

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Danial spent most of the day, from about 8 in the morning until visiting hours ended at 9 p.m., at the hospital by Nicole's side.

2. Danial's Parents Arrive from Michigan

Norman and Rhea Williams arrived in Virginia on Saturday, July 5, 1997 and settled at a trailer campground about 45 minutes from Norfolk. Danial drove out from the hospital to meet them and spent several hours visiting with his parents on Saturday. Danial told his parents that Nicole was going to be released from the hospital the next day, Sunday, July 6th, and invited his parents to his apartment for dinner Sunday afternoon. The Williams spent four or five hours visiting and having dinner with Danial and Nicole on Sunday. Nicole looked tired, but otherwise seemed to be recovering well from her surgery. The doctors told her that they thought they had gotten all of the cancer but she would need to undergo chemotherapy.

The Williams had plans to spend Monday on their own, visiting the Pottery Factory, an outlet mall and flea market, and so Nicole, Danial and his parents planned to meet at the apartment on Tuesday afternoon, July 8th, to go out to dinner. But on Monday afternoon, Danial received a call from his sister, Stacey, who said that one of their father's cousins had died in Michigan. Danial and Nicole drove out to the campground that afternoon to share the news with his parents, and ended up visiting with the Williams until almost dusk. Danial and Nicole stopped at a Cracker Barrel restaurant for dinner on the way home. When they returned to their apartment, Danial and Nicole went to bed. Unbeknownst to Danial and Nicole, while they slept together in their apartment,, Omar Ballard knocked on Michelle Bosko's door latethat night and, after gaining entry to the apartment, Ballard raped and murdered Michelle Bosko.

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On Tuesday, July 8th, Danial and Nicole ran errands, including a trip to the local Social Security office to officially change Nicole's last name from Mathewson to Williams. That afternoon, Danial's parents bought a coffee maker, a microwave oven and a cart for the microwave, which were wedding gifts for the newlywed couple. Danial and his father put together the microwave cart while Nicole made the first pot of coffee with their new appliance. Danial and Nicole both seemed happy and comfortable to Norman and Rhea Williams. Danial was concerned about, and very attentive to, Nicole, but otherwise his parents did not notice that he was distracted, under stress (other than the stress of caring for a sick wife who had recently had major surgery), or in any way acting out of the ordinary that afternoon.

Over the next eighteen hours, William Bosko would find his wife dead in their apartment, the police and their suspicion on Danial Williams without any legitimate justification, and Norfolk Police detectives would extract a coerced and false confession from Danial after hours of relentless, high pressure interrogation, punctuated by threats of the death penalty from Detective Ford. After his interrogation, Danial was ordered held without bond and sent to the Norfolk Detention Center. Two days later, Danial appeared in court to be arraigned on capital murder and rape charges; Danial was facing the death penalty for a crime he did not commit.

On November 2, 1997, while Danial was in jail, Nicole Williams died of Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome as a consequence of her ovarian cancer. Danial's personal nightmare blossomed into a family tragedy. Danial felt distraught and even more alone. He was not permitted to attend Nicole's funeral.

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