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New Book Casts Doubt on Police Detective's Role in 1988 Long Island Killings

By **BRUCE LAMBERT** DEC. 27, 2008

Two decades after Seymour and Arlene Tankleff were brutally attacked in their cliff-top home overlooking Long Island Sound, the investigations into their deaths never seem to end. The latest chapter — actually an entire book — includes new revelations that revive the debate over who killed them.

The book, co-written by a former Newsday reporter and a private investigator and due out Tuesday, casts doubts about the lead police detective in the case. It offers new evidence that he was involved with Mr. Tankleff's embittered business partner and quotes the detective's taped statements contradicting prosecutors' theory of the case, as well as his own testimony, in the trial of the Tankleffs' son, Martin.

[Martin Tankleff](#) was 17 at the time of the murders and spent 17 years in prison for the crimes, until an appellate court overturned his conviction last year. He and other relatives of the Tankleffs have always accused the business partner of instigating the killings.

"A Criminal Injustice: A True Crime, a False Confession, and the Fight to Free Marty Tankleff" is being published by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House. The [book](#) challenges the conclusions of recent inquiries by the state attorney general's office and the State Commission of Investigation, which seemed to have closed the official pursuit of the case, leaving it unsolved.

"This book clearly documents my innocence and the guilt of others," Martin Tankleff said in an interview. "With its release, I and my family ask those in power to pursue the people involved in my parents' murders, as

The former detective, K. James McCready, who has long since retired from the police force, declined to comment on the details of the book, saying in a brief interview: "Nothing you have mentioned is true." The business partner, Jerard Steuerman, who has denied guilt under oath, no longer has a listed phone number and did not respond to a message relayed through a close relative.

Though Mr. Tankleff's release was the culmination of years of appeals, millions of dollars worth of free legal help, a campaign with a [Web site](#) and numerous new witnesses, the ordeal did not end there.

Former Gov. Eliot Spitzer ordered Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to re-examine the murders as a special prosecutor. In June, Mr. Cuomo [concluded](#) that there was some evidence against Mr. Tankleff and some evidence against others, but not enough to prosecute him again — or anyone else.

Then, this month, the Commission of Investigation issued a review concluding that Suffolk County authorities had handled the case properly, despite Mr. Tankleff's claims that Mr. McCready had framed him and shielded the culprits. Mr. Tankleff, dismayed at

not winning full exoneration and by the authorities' dropping the case, filed notice of a civil claim against Suffolk authorities for wrongful prosecution.

Mr. Tankleff and his lawyers contend that the killers were Mr. Steuerman and a band of three ex-convicts led by Joseph Creedon, who has admitted collecting debts for drug dealers. These men have publicly denied involvement, but, according to witnesses in Mr. Tankleff's appeal, have made private admissions.

Before the murders, Mr. Steuerman had been resisting Seymour Tankleff's demands to repay a \$500,000 debt, and they fought over control of the bagel shops they operated together. He was at the Tankleff house for a poker game the night of the attacks, in September 1988.

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The book quotes a startling statement by Mr. McCready, the police investigator, in an outtake of a 2006 segment on a "Dr. Phil" television program on the case. Responding to allegations that he was paid \$100,000 to shield the killers from investigators, Mr. McCready disputed the sum, by saying of Mr. Creedon, "I mean I think he only got paid \$50,000 to do the murder." The book says that Mr. McCready's comment, in a taped speakerphone interview that was cut from the broadcast, not only accepted that Mr. Creedon was involved in the killings and was paid for it, but also gave a figure that had not previously been reported.

Mr. Creedon's lawyer, Anthony M. La Pinta, dismissed Mr. McCready's statements about the payment for the murders. "This is a ridiculous allegation," he said.

Richard Firstman, a former reporter for Newsday who wrote the book along with Jay Salpeter, a private investigator, said he discovered another revealing "Dr. Phil" outtake after the book went to press. In that clip, Mr. McCready appears to be discussing Mr. Steuerman's motive: "Nobody ever talks about the real thing behind the murder itself and the argument with Seymour, between Seymour and Jerry. The argument was over two businessmen, and one outfoxed the other, and one got mad and wanted his money back."

Combined with his comments about Mr. Creedon, Mr. McCready in the interview effectively embraced Mr. Tankleff's version of what and who were behind the killings — not the prosecution's theory and his own testimony that Mr. Tankleff was a spoiled teenager who killed his parents to inherit their wealth.

New accusations about Mr. McCready's own involvement with Mr. Steuerman were raised by two new witnesses cited in the book. One witness, who gave a statement to Mr. Tankleff's lawyers but said she was afraid to testify, said that she worked at one of the bagel stores with Mr. Steuerman's son, Todd, a convicted drug dealer. She said he sold drugs at the store and told her that the police took payments to ignore the illicit activity.

One day Jerard Steuerman came into the store with Mr. McCready, then a police detective, introducing him as his “card partner,” and they went into the back office where the safe was, according to the woman, who was not identified in the book.

That encounter, which occurred before the murders, would contradict Mr. McCready’s emphatic denials under oath that he had ever been acquainted with Mr. Steuerman. In the appeal, two other witnesses placed the two men together.

Todd Steuerman could not be reached for comment.

Another witness interviewed for the book, Danny Hayes, also connected Mr. McCready to Mr. Steuerman and drugs at the bagel shop. Mr. Hayes owned a gym in East Setauket next to one of the bagel shops. Mr. Hayes said that Seymour Tankleff had told him about an argument he had with Mr. Steuerman and his anger over Todd Steuerman’s dealing drugs at the store. He said Mr. Tankleff was fearful and quoted him saying that “if anything happens” to tell the police everything. Mr. Hayes said he told all this to the original investigators, but there is no record of it in the police files.

Another accusation stems from Mr. Hayes’s part-time security work at an adjacent roller skating rink, along with some moonlighting off-duty police officers. He said the off-duty officers at the rink told him that men he noticed at the rear of the bagel shop in the middle of the night were also off-duty officers and were protecting the drug operation. One night, Mr. Hayes said, he spotted Detective McCready there.

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