

From Michael Morton's Wrongful Conviction to Exoneration (Timeline)

In the 30 years since Christine Morton was murdered, her husband Michael Morton has been wrongfully convicted of killing her and fought for sweeping changes to state law. Look back at his case and the developments since his release.

BY **ANNIE DANIEL** AND **JOHNATHAN SILVER** AUG. 13, 2016 6 AM

REPUBLISH

In the 30 years since Christine Morton was murdered, her husband Michael Morton has been wrongfully convicted of killing her, sentenced to life in prison, exonerated after 25 years behind bars, seen his wife's killer brought to justice, fought for sweeping changes to state forensics laws and written a memoir documenting his experiences.

Take a look back at Morton's nightmare of a case, and the glimmers of light since his release.

AUG. 13, 1986

Christine Morton is murdered at 9114 Hazelhurst Drive in Austin.



Christine and Michael Morton: April 7, 1979

AUG. 14, 1986

Christine Morton's brother, John Kirkpatrick, finds a bloodstained, blue bandana near the crime scene and gives it to Williamson County detectives. Neighbors tell Williamson County investigators they have seen a man in a green van parked near the Morton home several times. They say he gets out of the van and walks into the woods behind their home.

AUG. 15, 1986

The Jewel Box in San Antonio reports to the Williamson County Sheriff's Office that someone appeared to have fraudulently used Christine Morton's credit card.

AUG. 24, 1986

Rita Kirkpatrick, Christine Morton's mother-in-law, tells Williamson County sheriff's Sgt. Don Wood that 3-year-old Eric Morton saw the attack on his mother. Eric describes a "monster" with red gloves and a big mustache and says the man was not his father.

SEPT. 27, 1986

John B. Cross of Colorado sends Wood copies of a canceled check he had given to Christine Morton before her death. The \$20 check was a gift for Eric Morton after his surgery. It was cashed after Christine's murder with a forged signature. Family members believe her purse was stolen during the incident, but in this report, an officer writes, "Course, we know better."

FEB. 06, 1987

Judge William Lott orders Williamson County District Attorney Ken Anderson to provide all of Wood's investigative reports on the Morton murder to him for in-camera inspection to determine whether the file contains any information that could help Morton prove his innocence. Lott determines there is nothing exculpatory in the file and orders it sealed.



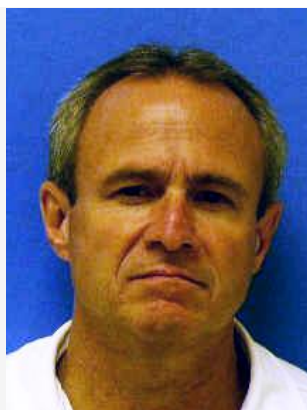
Former Williamson County District Attorney Ken Anderson

FEB. 09, 1987

Morton, after being charged with murder and pleading not guilty, stands trial. His defense argues that an intruder must have attacked and killed his wife after he left for work. Anderson argues that Morton beat his wife to death when she refused to have sex with him on the night of his 32nd birthday.

FEB. 17, 1987

The jury finds Michael Morton guilty. He is sentenced to life in prison.



Michael Morton

MARCH 17, 1987

Morton's lawyers request a new trial, citing a remark from Williamson County Assistant District Attorney Mike Davis to the jurors regarding an inch-thick stack of police reports they never saw that could have sparked doubt about Morton's guilt. The motion is denied.

JAN. 13, 1988

Debra Masters Baker is beaten to death in her bed in her North Austin home, 12 miles from where Christine Morton was beaten to death in her bed.

MARCH 22, 1990

Morton files an application for a writ of habeas corpus and requests testing on bedsheets from the murder scene. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals grants the testing, which reveals Morton's semen. His application is denied.

FEB. 11, 2005

Under Texas' post-conviction DNA law, Morton requests testing on several items from the crime scene, including the bandana and fingernail scrapings from Christine Morton and evidence from the unsolved 1988 murder of Debra Masters Baker, near the Mortons' home.

AUG. 15, 2006

The trial court in Williamson County grants testing on some items, including the fingernail scrapings, but denies testing on the bandana and evidence from the other murder. Morton appeals the denial.

MARCH 17, 2008

DNA tests ordered in August 2006 are inconclusive, and the court finds that Morton cannot be excluded as the murderer.

AUG. 11, 2008

Bradley tells the Williamson County Sun that DNA testing is not going to identify a "mystery killer."



Williamson County District Attorney John Bradley

OCT. 08, 2008

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott orders Bradley to provide Morton's lawyers with the investigative documents regarding the Morton murder. Bradley objects, citing the ongoing litigation over DNA testing, which Bradley has also opposed. Morton's lawyers discover for the first time the Kirkpatrick transcript with Eric's description of his mother's murder along with police reports about Christine Morton's credit card and check being used fraudulently and neighbors' reports about the green van seen near the Morton home.

SEPT. 30, 2009

Perry appoints Bradley chairman of the Texas Forensic Science Commission.

OCT. 11, 2009

Bradley tells the Houston Chronicle that Morton's lawyers are "grasping at straws."

JAN. 08, 2010

The 3rd Court of Appeals in Austin allows DNA testing on the bandana.

MAY 31, 2011

Bradley's term on the Texas Forensic Science Commission ends after the state Senate fails to confirm his nomination.

JUNE 30, 2011

DNA testing firm Orchid Cellmark issues a report that confirms biological material on the bandana belongs to Christine Morton and to another man who is not Michael Morton.

AUG. 19, 2011

After the man's DNA profile is uploaded to a national database, it is matched to Mark Alan Norwood, who was arrested in California in 2007.

AUG. 24, 2011

Innocence Project lawyer Nina Morrison and Houston lawyer John Raley meet with Austin Police Department cold case detectives to share information about Norwood. They had learned about the Baker murder on the APD cold case website. At the time of the 1988 murder, Norwood lived less than a mile away from Baker's home.

AUG. 26, 2011

After Judge Billy Ray Stubblefield orders that the file of Wood's investigative report, be unsealed, Morton's lawyers discover that Anderson did not provide Lott with all reports as ordered. The file contains six pages of preliminary reports; it excludes the Kirkpatrick phone transcript, the reports on the use of Christine Morton's credit card and forged check and the neighbors' reports about the man in the green van. The file was ordered sealed in 1987.

SEPT. 16, 2011

Travis County DA Rosemary Lehmberg sends a fax report to Judge Sid Harle, who was appointed to preside over the Morton case after Stubblefield recused himself, explaining that the DNA profile of Norwood found on the bandana matches DNA found on a hair at the scene of the Baker murder.

SEPT. 26, 2011

Harle conducts a status hearing and informs Morton's lawyers of the DNA match to the Baker case. Morton's lawyers, in a closed hearing, argue that he be released as soon as possible. Williamson County prosecutors object, arguing that they need more time to review the evidence and put on a full hearing. "I'm still waiting for them to come to grips," a frustrated Morrison tells the judge. "I mean, I know this is a bombshell."

OCT. 04, 2011

Michael Morton is released from prison.



Michael Morton in court with his lawyers on Oct. 4, the day he was released from prison.

OCT. 12, 2011

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals declares Morton innocent.

OCT. 17, 2011

Bradley announces that Abbott's office will act as special prosecutor in a new investigation into Christine Morton's murder.

OCT. 25, 2011

Sgt. Wood, in a deposition, tells Morton's lawyers that his extensive investigative file would have been known to Anderson, the Williamson County DA, at the time of the trial.

OCT. 29, 2011

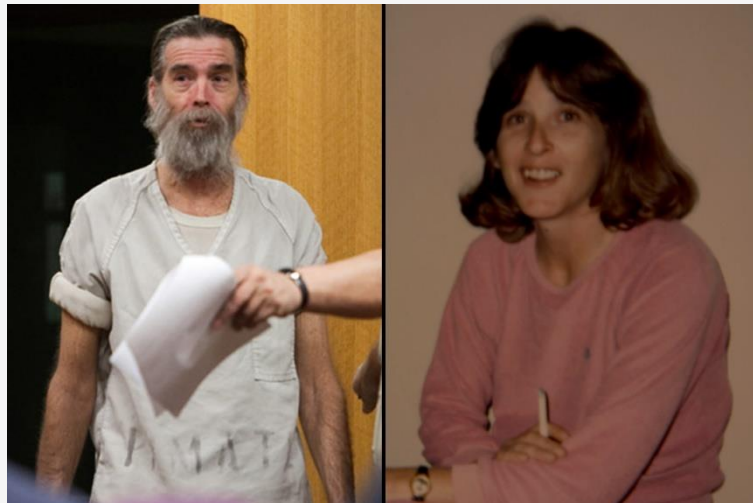
Former Assistant Williamson County DA Mike Davis, in a deposition, tells lawyers that Anderson was in charge of the Morton prosecution. "Any murder case was Ken Anderson's baby," Davis says.

OCT. 31, 2011

Anderson gives sworn testimony about his role in the Morton prosecution behind closed doors.

NOV. 09, 2011

Police arrest Mark Alan Norwood in Bastrop, and he is charged with capital murder in connection with Christine Morton's 1986 death. Austin police say Norwood is also a suspect in the 1988 Baker murder. Norwood later pleads not guilty.



Norwood and Debra Masters Baker

FEB. 16, 2012

Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson appoints Fort Worth Judge Louis Sturns to preside over an inquiry into Anderson's actions in Morton's case.

NOV. 09, 2012

A Travis County grand jury indicts Norwood in Baker's murder.

FEB. 04, 2013

A court of inquiry begins into Anderson's actions.

MARCH 09, 2013

Morton marries his second wife, Cynthia.

MARCH 11, 2013

"An Unreal Dream: The Michael Morton Story" premieres at South by Southwest in Austin, eventually going on to the Audience Award for Documentary Spotlight.

MARCH 27, 2013

Norwood is convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the death of Christine Morton.



Mark Norwood

APRIL 19, 2013

Sturns finds Anderson unlawfully withheld evidence and signs an arrest warrant for Anderson.

MAY 16, 2013

Perry signs the Michael Morton Act, which requires prosecutors to share evidence favorable to defendants.



Gov. Rick Perry ceremonially signs the Michael Morton Act.

SEPT. 24, 2013

Anderson resigns as state district judge in Williamson County.

NOV. 08, 2013

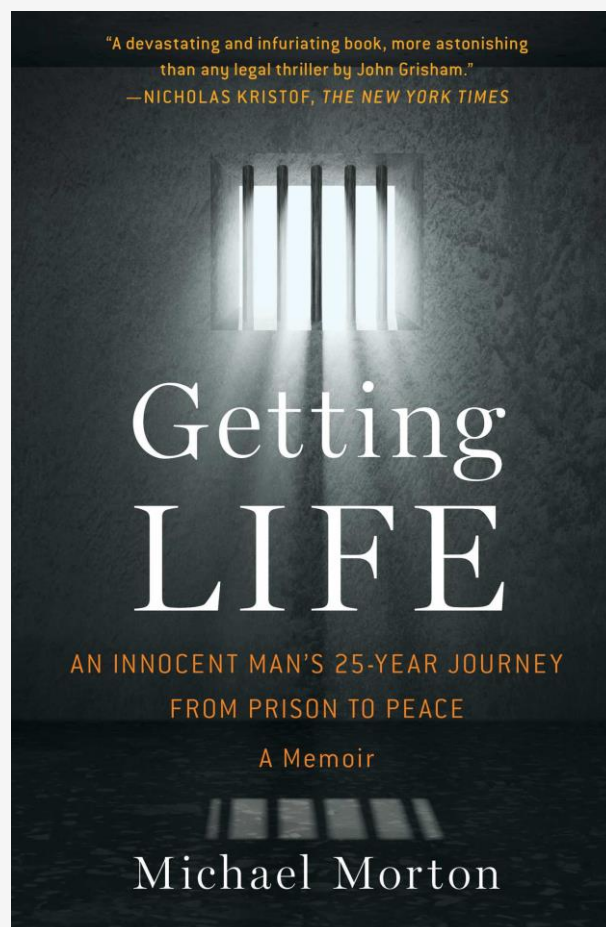
Anderson agrees to surrender his law license and is sentenced to 10 days in jail.



Former Williamson County State District Judge Ken Anderson in the courtroom on the day he was sentenced to serve 10 days in jail.

JULY 08, 2014

Morton publishes his memoir, "Getting Life: An Innocent Man's 25-Year Journey from Prison to Peace."



Morton's memoir

JAN. 14, 2015

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals declines to review Norwood's case in connection to the death of Christine Morton.

JAN. 12, 2016

Morton attends the State of the Union address as a guest of U.S. Rep. Sam Johnson, R-Plano. Morton's and Connecticut exoneree James Tillman's attendance helps mark a new law exempting compensation for wrongful conviction from federal taxation.

- Credit: Brandi Grissom, Johnathan Silver and Annie Daniel

Hear [new reflections from Michael Morton](#) on his wrongful conviction and read more of the Tribune's coverage on this issue:

- Texas has paid 101 men and women who were wrongfully sent to prison \$93.6 million over the past 25 years, [state data shows](#). The tab stands to grow as those wrongfully imprisoned individuals age and more people join the list.
- Freed after a decade on Texas death row for a murder he says he didn't commit, Alfred Dewayne Brown [thinks he's entitled](#) to compensation from the state, but Comptroller Glenn Hegar is saying no.
- Although a Dallas County district judge decided he was innocent eight years ago, Ben Spencer [remains behind bars](#) for a 1987 aggravated robbery he insists he did not commit.

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