

Biography

My name is Robert Webster. I am forty-five years old and have served twenty-eight years on a sentence of fifty years to life for a crime someone else committed. Although I was ignorant of the law, I unequivocally asserted my innocence back then as a teenager, and I maintain that position today as an adult. This is my experience.

According to the Queens County District Attorney, I fit the description of one of the perpetrators who allegedly fire bombed the house of a Guyanese immigrant named Arjune on November 10, 1987 at 4:29 a.m. and 6:20 a.m. Allegedly, I fire bombed the house in retaliation for Arjune twice calling the police and giving information that led to the arrest of three low-level neighborhood drug dealers whom Arjune accused of selling drugs on the corner of 107 Avenue and Inwood Street on November 9, 1987.

These are the facts: On November 9, 1987, at approximately 5:55 p.m., an unidentified caller with an African American accent called 911 to report that two black males were selling drugs on the corner of 107 Avenue and Inwood Street in South Jamaica. One of the men was described as wearing a beige jacket and the other a black snorkel coat.

Police Officers Angelo Carbone and George Repetti responded to the 911 call, searched the two men, found no drugs, arrested no one, and then processed to drive from the area.

At the same time the search was being conducted (6:14 p.m.), Arjune [for the first time] called 911 and told the operator that the men being searched by Carbone and Repetti had hidden the drugs in a bag in a tree.

At 6:20 p.m., in response to Arjune's 911 call, Officers Carbone and Repetti returned to the area, detained the two men again, searched the tree, found the drugs, and then arrested only Yusif Abdul-Qadir (wearing a tan jacket) for possession of six vials of crack cocaine. The black male wearing the black snorkel coat was not arrested.

On November 10, 1987, at approximately 4:31 a.m., Sahadeo Harding called 911 and reported that some people had just fire bombed his house at 107-05 Inwood Street. Harding did not see the perpetrators.

Police Officers Mark Gallagher and Micheal Pala responded to Harding's 911 call. Upon arriving at the scene, the officers interviewed Arjune who provided them with [o]nly a clothing description consisting of one perpetrator being a male [b]lack, and other one wearing a black hat, black jacket with yellow stripes, and grey pants.

After canvassing the area with the police, Arjune identified Claude Johnson as the male black perpetrator.

At 6:20 a.m., another 911 call was made from 107-05 Inwood Street reporting a second arson. The unidentified caller was unable to provide the operator with a description of the perpetrators.

Sergeant Al Heyman and Police Officer William Foley responded to the second arson 911 call, and after interviewing the complainants, informed the dispatcher that the complainant(s) did not see the perpetrators.

On November 11, 1987, at approximately 10:51 p.m., I was arrested by Police Officers Angelo Carbone and George Repetti for two counts of arson, I was seventeen years of age, I owned a burgundy two door Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, and I wore a pair of all black Adidas sneakers, a pair of light blue acid washed Levi jeans and a grey "down" coat.

My cousin, Dwayne Curry, and I were walking westbound on the north sidewalk of South Road between Inwood Street and Pinegrove Street, when Carbone and Repetti in a patrol car approached us in the middle of that block and order me to come to the car. I complied. Carbone, who was sitting on the passenger side, said that someone had identified me as a witness to a rape. He asked if I could join them around the corner so that I could identify the person. Although I hadn't witnessed anyone being raped, I was seventeen years of age, naive and scared. In my mind, Carbone's question was an order. I had no choice. So I entered the car.

The officers brought me to the house at the corner of Inwood Street and 107 Avenue that belonged to Arjune. They had been assigned to guard Arjune's house. As I was sitting in the patrol car, a man who would become known to me as Arjune's nephew, Herrick Khan, came out of the house and spoke with the officers about someone's house being fire bombed. At the end of their conversation, Khan looked at my face and said adamantly that I was not the person who fire bombed his uncle's house. I did not understand what had just happened. A few minutes earlier the police put me in their car under the pretext that I was a witness to a crime and now I was obviously a suspect in another crime.

Immediately after Khan's statement, Carbone opened the back door of the patrol car and told me, "You are free to go." I was relieved, confused and scared. As I walked around the patrol car and westbound on 107 Avenue between Inwood Street and Pinegrove Street, I noticed that the officers continued to speak with Khan. I then turned right on Pinegrove Street and headed toward Sam's Convenience Store to look for my cousin. When I reached the store at the corner of South Road and Pinegrove Street, Carbone and Repetti in the patrol car with Khan seated in the back seat stopped me. Now Khan was saying that on two different occasions I tossed Molotov Cocktails into his uncle's house. My fear and confusion grew even more. I just could not believe Khan accused me of committing arson.

The second time that Carbone and Repetti picked me up, they arrested me and read me the Miranda rights. After I was handcuffed without resisting arrest and seated in the back seat of the patrol car next to Khan, Repetti told me that he and Carbone just wanted to see what my friends would do in retaliation, and that I would only receive a six-month sentence in prison. I had no idea what he was talking about. They then took Khan and me to the 103rd Precinct, where I was logged into the command log book, finger printed, asked my name and place of residence, given a telephone call, and photographed in a black jacket. Less than three hours later, Carbone and Repetti brought me to Queens Central Booking, and an official NYPD photographer took the arrest photograph (mugshot) of me wearing my grey coat.

At my initial meeting with my trial attorney, Joseph Justiz, and throughout his representation of my case, I had always unequivocally stressed my innocence. I told him that the police fabricated their account of my arrest.

Carbone reported that I was walking westbound on 107 Avenue between Princeton Street and Inwood Street heading toward the Arjune residence when he saw me and recognized that I fit the clothing description of one of the perpetrators wanted for firebombing Arjune's house. Carbone reported that I was wearing a black jacket with yellow stripes on its shoulders and grey pants, and that I fled on foot when he tried to apprehend me. Carbone also reported that Arjune saw him chase me and apprehend me, ran down the street, and identified me as the perpetrator wearing the black hat, black jacket with yellow stripes, and grey pants. None of this account is true. That day I wore light blue acid washed pants and a grey coat, and Dwayne Curry and I were together when Carbone and Repetti approached us. I told Mr. Justiz that Dwayne would testify to what I wore that night. I told him that a woman named Donna Scott, who lived in an apartment building at the corner of Pinegrove Street and South Road, saw the officers arrest me while looking out of her front apartment window. She too would have testified not only about what I wore, but also about the arrest. I told him that I was home, and that my mother and friend were at home with me. They were my alibi witnesses. He said that the prosecutor would discredit them because they were my mother and friend. I told him that I was not present during the arrest of Yusif Abdul-Qadir for allegedly possessing six vials of crack cocaine near Arjune's house, and that Abdul-Qadir could testify to that fact. Mr. Justiz only elected to use the testimony of a fire expert for my defense. He refused to interview and to call as alibi witnesses all the people who could have helped to prove my innocence.

I am in the process of attempting to find some assistance in my fight for freedom. I am presently serving time at Green Haven Correctional Facility in Stormville, New York. My contact details are:

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Thank you for your attention in advance.