

Investigators' efforts lead to conviction

By AL SPECK

Thomas Bianco's conviction came as no surprise to the two principal police officers involved in the five-year investigation.

"I'm glad it's over for both the Monsons and Mr. and Mrs. Bianco. My sympathies are with the parents of the kids," said Carmen J. Bertonica, assistant Auburn police chief.

"A just decision," said state police investigator Donald E. Brandstetter. "I'm happy with it. Maybe now we can put it to rest."

Bertonica was involved in the case from the day Julie Monson disappeared in September 1981 until her remains were found at the Montezuma Wildlife Refuge in April 1983 when the state police took over.

He befriended the Monsons during the search for Julie, commenting after months

of investigation "you felt like you knew her."

How does he feel today? "The same as before. Nothing we do is going to bring Julie back. I'm really not elated over the case. I sympathize with the Monsons. It's a no win situation. They lost their daughter. No amount of convictions is going to bring Julie back."

Bertonica said he expected Bianco to be convicted on at least one of the counts.

Why? "Based on my investigation, my feeling as a police officer... it was my feeling he would be convicted based on my part of the investigation."

Brandstetter said Bianco's conviction was anti-climatic because, "When you work with a case for almost five years, you know all there is."

He said there was no question in his mind Bianco was guilty, a feeling that came over

him a long time ago, in May 1982, when Bianco first started making admissions of guilt to his friends.

Later that month, Brandstetter had his first and only encounter with Bianco. Based on the confessions, Bianco emerged as the prime suspect in the case and state troopers impounded his car.

Bianco came to the state police station on Clark Street Road to get his car back. Police believed his 1972 green Buick Skylark was the car used to abduct Monson.

Police searched the car and found evidence that included a Wegmans grocery bag spotted with blood. Tests could not confirm the blood to be Monson's. The defense last fall successfully appealed to have that evidence suppressed in court.

Brandstetter said he spent about three minutes with Bianco, who became belligerent and was promptly escorted out

of the station. Brandstetter said Bianco's appearance was in sharp contrast to the close-cut hair and three-piece suit he wore during the trial.

He said Bianco had long hair when he talked with him and he "certainly fit the description of witnesses on Prospect Street." When state police arrested Bianco in July 1985, he was in a barbershop getting a haircut.

Brandstetter said the Monson homicide was the biggest, certainly the longest case he's worked on. It gave him and his family, he said, a lot of stress and caused him many sleepless nights.

Brandstetter said he didn't testify in the trial because it wasn't necessary. "If you bring out the evidence for the jury, there's no need to testify." He said the case was well planned by District Attorney Paul Carbonaro and assistant Dennis Sedor. "I

put the case together and they finished it." Bertonica called Carbonaro and Sedor the heroes in the case. "They came in on a cold case. It was all splintered. They made a good case out of it and won it."

During the interview, Brandstetter furnished a news release put out by the state police to counter defense comments during the trial alleging incompetence and less than ethical tactics by state police.

"As Mr. (William) Lynn said in his opening statement, the prosecutor's job is to seek justice, the defense attorney's job is to get his client off, at all costs, and has nothing to do with justice."

"When you're right on the law, you argue the law. When you're right on the facts, you argue the facts."

"When you are wrong on both, you attack the police and prosecution."

Victory boosts Paul Carbonaro's political career

By MINDY DONNELLY

Thomas Bianco's conviction will boost the career of the man who prosecuted him, Cayuga County politician Paul Carbonaro.

District Attorney Paul Carbonaro's victory in court Wednesday came against the odds caused by a lapse of more than four years between the crime and the trial. Some believe the win will mean political success — should he seek higher office — for the 34-year-old lawyer, first elected in November 1983.

But Carbonaro this morning said Wednesday's initial victory "doesn't change my plans at all one way or another. I take as much satisfaction for all the people who worked on this case with me as I do for myself."

As to whether a loss would have hurt his career, "that's just coffee shop talk. Things wouldn't have changed one way or the other, there would have been no subsequent effect."

The district attorney would not speculate on whether he plans to seek re-election. "I have no idea. We'll just wait until next year."

As far as the defense team's planned appeal, Carbonaro said, "We'll have to see what type of issues they raise and how those issues are viewed by the appellate division. We'll take each step as it comes. Some people would worry about things like that, but to me,

it's a waste of energy." Local politicians were more direct in their observations of Carbonaro's handling of the case.

"After five years, the trail gets pretty cold," said Legislator Ruth Sholes, R-6. "He did an outstanding piece of legal work."

Bianco was found guilty in the September 1981 kidnapping and death of Julie Monson.

Others believe Carbonaro, a Republican, would have remained unscathed if he lost. The case "had its origins before he became district attorney," said Legislator Herbert Marshall, R-3.

Monson's body was found in April 1983, during former District Attorney Ross Tisci's term. Carbonaro's post is up for election in November 1987.

"This is a very big win for him," Marshall said. "It puts him in a position of being known and in the position of having respect from people in his field."

The win may help Carbonaro overcome dissent about whether he deserves a full-time job. In January, the legislature extended Carbonaro's part-time position to full time, with a \$40,837 raise. Carbonaro opposed opposing legislators with the promise the state would reimburse most of the added expense.

But the state has come through with a fraction of the money. It will take the state Legislature's approval to ensure future funding.



Bob Karp/The Citizen

Victorious Paul Carbonaro talks to media.

County legislators who opposed the full-time status have demanded that Carbonaro revert to part time.

Most legislators called said the conviction will underscore the need for a full-time district attorney.

But one doubted the victory will quiet a few lawmakers who are adamantly opposed.

"I don't think it's going to change their minds," said C. Kenneth Bevea, R-9. "Not one bit."

Jurors offer few comments on their deliberations

By ANDREA FUSCO

Jurors remained tight-lipped after convicting Thomas Bianco of murder and kidnapping.

"I have nothing to say," jury foreman Raymond Miner told a Citizen reporter Wednesday. Miner, of Cato, refused to answer further questions or elaborate on the verdict, which took 18½ hours to reach.

Jurors were instructed by Judge D. Bruce Crew III to be careful about making comments to the press. One juror, Rise Jones of Jordan, said they were handed a written statement that said their comments could be misconstrued and used if the case is appealed.

Jones would not comment on what she thought was the most convincing piece of evidence, nor whether the jury decided to disregard the testimony of key prosecution witness Thomas "T-Bird" Calescibetta — an option given by Crew since Calescibetta had been charged with perjury. The charges were eventually dropped.

She did say, though, that the jury's unanimous decision was reached after one vote.

Harold F. Morris of Moravia said there was "no doubt" in his mind that Bianco was guilty, "otherwise I wouldn't be here." He did not comment further, except to say he found the trial "interesting."

Crew, before announcing the verdict just after 3 p.m., told a packed courtroom he was "fully cognizant of the strong feelings on both sides." The jury, he said, made a decision "they believe is fair and just. Whatever the verdict is, I don't want anyone in this room to denigrate them."

None of the jurors later would comment on the fact that they could legally have disregarded Calescibetta's testimony. Calescibetta, who testified Bianco had "joked" about killing Julie Monson, confessed lying to a 1984 grand jury investigating Monson's death.

Jurors also had requested, several hours before rendering their verdict, a reading of all charges against Bianco.

Some jurors Wednesday had other family members answer the telephone once the proceedings were over, most likely to discourage an expected barrage of media calls. A man answering the phone at the residence of Elizabeth Jedra said, on learning the identity of the caller, "I'm sorry, she has no comments for

Trial notes

About 9:30 Tuesday night, Thomas Bianco, his mother, father and their lawyers sat in the bar at Duminick's Restaurant.

Bianco sat silently without a drink as the four others talked among themselves in the dining room on the other side of the wall, a few people ate, including members of a television news staff just finished covering jury deliberations at the county courthouse.

The lounge was dark and empty except for the Biancos (co-owner Dominic Commesso, a friend of the family, brought over a tray of cheese and crackers. He didn't ask about the trial).

Frank Commesso stood behind the bar. "It looked to me like they were exhausted, the mother especially," he said Wednesday afternoon, an hour or so after Bianco was found guilty in the death of Julie Monson. "They were just trying to relax."

Their faces showed no signs of expected victory or defeat the night before the verdict came down, only the strain of living through a four-week trial and placing their future in the hands of 12 jurors.

After about 45 minutes, they walked out. "I don't think they even finished their drinks," Commesso said.

State police investigator Donald E. Brandstetter had a two-fold reason to celebrate Wednesday.

The Thomas Bianco case, the longest investigation in his 28-year career, ended with the jury returning guilty verdicts on three counts.

Balloons and banners of congratulations decorated the Brandstetter home, but not because of the trial. There was a party in the making.

St. Patrick's Day is also Brandstetter's birthday. He turns 49.

Other jurors were said to be resting after the lengthy deliberations, and did not want to be disturbed.

"I'd rather not make a comment," said Jones in response to questions about the verdict. She did, however, make one about her lengthy role as juror. "I'm finally home," she said with a sigh.

Correspondent Nancy Ward contributed to this story.

Biancos face ordeal courageously

The interview with the Bianco family was the most difficult of my career.

They admitted me readily to their home as a one concerned for their well-being and saddened by the troubles they are experiencing.

They knew I also was there as a reporter, and the family has not discussed the case with the media. Nevertheless, they gave me coffee and cigarettes and talked, realizing, without my saying it, that my heart went out to them as it does to the Monson family.

I shook hands with Carm Bianco, Tom's father, and then embraced a tearful mother "Bi-Bi." Their dog "Rocky" snuffled all over me, seeking to ascertain my identity. He simmered down once that was established and nestled by my feet, happy for an occasional pat.

We sat at the table which engulfs the middle of the tiny kitchen, and talked for nearly two hours, interrupted by phone calls and visitors all offering consolation and hope.

Everyone, myself included, cannot help but be affected by the tragedy that has struck this town.

Katy Frank

The disappearance of Julie Monson about five years ago, the discovery of her remains in Montezuma in 1983, the arrest of Tom Bianco last July and the resulting trial have been on all our lips.

As a parent of a daughter and a son, I could sympathize with the ordeal the Monsons suffered valiantly — the loss of a daughter that can't even be expressed adequately. I also care deeply for the suffering of the Biancos, and admire the way they are standing behind their son 100 percent, and continuing to do so.

Carm Bianco said he was waiting for 9 p.m. when he would go to county jail to visit Tom and return to reassure his wife.

Fire, police reports

Auburn court

• Kenneth M. Lillie, 30, 11 West St., charged Tuesday with third-degree criminal possession of a .22 caliber revolver and possession of marijuana. Possessing the gun was illegal because Lillie has a previous conviction for petit larceny. He was committed to county jail in lieu of \$2,500 bond or \$500 cash bail.

• An 18-year-old boy, granted youthful offender status, was charged Monday with buying and possessing the revolver that Lillie later took from him. Bail was set at \$500 bond or \$100 cash and he was transported to county jail.

• Robin A. Orasi, 17, 111 Osborne St., pleaded guilty Tuesday to unlawfully possessing marijuana, and was fined \$25.

• Willie J. James, 30, 4 Garfield Place, was granted adjournment for possible dismissal for a trespass charge.

• A shoplifting complaint against Eddy M. Williams, 26, 509 Melone Village, was withdrawn by Fay's.

• A harassment complaint against Sammy Swift, 32, 46 Jefferson St., was withdrawn by his wife, Lenora.

Woman fingers ring thief

A woman who bought 28 rings from a man for \$5, later turned him into the police after she realized the jewelry had been stolen.

Police arrested Adam Baez, 22, 30 Howard St., and charged him with stealing 28 American Indian and Mexican rings from the Shoe Repair and Leather Boutique on Genesee Street. Baez was arraigned in city court Wednesday and committed to county jail in lieu of \$2,500 bond or \$500 cash bail.

The store was broken into Monday night or early Tuesday morning. Police said someone broke the plate-glass window on the front of the store and took the rings. The store was locked the night before and an employee found the window broken when she went to open the store Tuesday morning, police said. The actual value of the stolen rings was not given.

Police said Weedsport resident Dorothy Doty bought the rings Tuesday from Baez near the side of a house on James Street. Doty later learned a store on Genesee Street had been broken into Monday, so she contacted police Wednesday morning and brought the rings to headquarters.

She identified the man as Baez and police were able to pick him up near the house where he sold Doty the rings.

Auburn police reports

• Ellen G. Minechelli, 39, 318 Boston Road, Mattydale, charged Wednesday with selling a marijuana pipe to an undercover police officer.

• Glen L. Saunders, 38, U-122 Oak Creek

Apartments, charged Wednesday with using obscene and abusive language.

• Jason E. Teeter, 17, East Genesee Street, charged Thursday with public lewdness.

Auburn fire, rescue calls

• 8:43 a.m. Wednesday, rescue, assisted a 73-year-old woman, checked her vital signs, and transported to Auburn Memorial Hospital by Eastern ambulance.

• 11:40 a.m. Wednesday, rescue to North Seward Avenue to assist a 90-year-old woman who fell, complained of hip pain, transported to AMH by Eastern ambulance.

• 5:21 p.m. Wednesday, rescue to East Genesee Street to assist a 67-year-old man, refused transport to the hospital.

County fire, rescue calls

• 11:21 a.m. Wednesday, Weedsport ambulance to Utica Street in Port Byron to assist a 63-year-old man, transported him to AMH.

• 2:15 p.m. Wednesday, Cato ambulance to the medical center to transport a 70-year-old man to AMH.

• 4:18 p.m. Wednesday, Poplar Ridge ambulance transported a 96-year-old man to AMH.

• 9:14 p.m. Wednesday, Weedsport ambulance to a motor vehicle accident on Route 31-B, no transport.

—Caller—

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The woman asked Weinstein to pass the information along, knowing he represented numerous people in connection with the investigation.

Weinstein said no connection exists between his clients and the mysterious caller. The attorney represents Thomas Calescibetta, the friend who heard Bianco's 1982 confession. He also represented Angela Colvin, another close friend who heard admissions of guilt that year.

He found the call "very strange," but immediately called then-District Attorney Ross Tisci. "I thought the authorities did everything they could with the information they had."

Attorney Paul Carbonaro, who spearheaded a 10-month grand jury investigation of Monson's death, was elected in fall 1983.

But, said Weinstein, the tip was no more or less valid than hundreds of others police were receiving. "Again, the information lacked the punch it would otherwise have had because I didn't know who she was."

