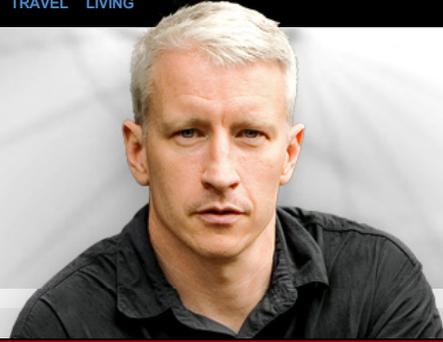


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July 30, 2009

Fake scent-tracking dog sends man to prison for 26 years

Posted: 06:28 PM ET

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Randi Kaye | Bio
AC360° Correspondent

A Florida man who was convicted of murder in part because of the work of an allegedly infallible scent-tracking dog, is free now, because the dog and the dog's owner has been exposed as a fraud. Unfortunately for Bill Dillon he had to spend 26 years in prison before the error in his case was rectified.



Bill Dillon was sentenced to life in prison in 1981, at the age of 22.

Bill Dillon, was 22 when he was sentenced to life in prison in 1981, for killing a man in Canova Beach on the eastern coast of the state.

During the trial, Dillon was adamant that he had not committed the crime. But a man named John Preston testified in court that he and his scent-tracking German-Shepherd connected Dillon to the killer's bloody t-shirt. Preston said his dog, "Harrass 2," even tracked Dillon's scent repeatedly in later tests.

Dillon expected to remain in prison for the rest of his life – all because of "Harrass 2," and his handler, Preston, who billed himself around the country as a so-called scent-tracking expert.

But nearly three decades later, in 2007, DNA testing proved that Dillon's DNA did not match the DNA on the killer's shirt. The dog was wrong. Just eight months ago, after 26 years behind bars, Bill Dillon walked out of prison a free man.

"Supposedly the dog got my scent three times," Dillon told CNN, "and I never saw freedom again." Dillon also said he remembers the dog's "huge" head from the trial and that he looked like a "bear."

In 1981, DNA testing wasn't used in criminal investigations so authorities relied simply on the presumed legendary nose of Preston's German Shepherd. Preston testified that his dog had tracked Dillon's scent to a piece of paper he had touched, and had even tracked Dillon to a room he was in at the courthouse.

Preston and his dog had a track-record – he had convinced juries more than a hundred times of his dog's miraculous talents. In Dillon's case, Preston even told the court his dog had the ability to track a scent under water; to actually smell below the water. CNN consulted tracking dog experts in Florida about this. They told us "no way, that's not possible."

In 1984, before Preston was exposed as a fraud, he told ABC News that he believed he was never wrong. Tim McGuire, a dog-tracking expert with Florida's Volusia County Sheriff's Department, said it was implausible that a dog could have picked up Dillon's scent back in 1981 eight days after the murder, and just after a massive hurricane had blown through the area.

McGuire viewed videotapes of Preston's dog, Harrass 2, at work. In the tapes, there are multiple times when the dog urinates on evidence. "The dog should work methodically." But McGuire said he did not consider what Harrass 2 was doing, "work."

Preston was exposed by a Florida judge in 1984, who became suspicious of Preston and set up his own test for Harrass 2. The dog failed terribly.

Documents obtained by CNN show he could not even follow a scent for one-hundred feet. The judge determined the dog could only track successfully when his handler had advance knowledge of the case.

Dillon thinks Preston and his scent-tracking dog were part of a larger conspiracy.

"Preston could lead the dog to the suspect or the evidence," alleges Dillon, but "any cases that were weak,

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not good enough to go to the jury, they [the prosecution] fed Preston information, paid him good money to come and lie."

Florida's Attorney General told CNN it is not aware of any evidence of a conspiracy involving John Preston and his dog.

Preston and his four-legged so-called expert were discredited in 1987. But the state of Florida never reviewed cases on which he'd testified. And nobody ever told Bill Dillon – who sat in prison another 20 years before he ever knew a thing about it. It wasn't until 2006 that he heard Preston was a fake.

Florida's Innocence Project believes dozens of inmates around the country may have been wrongly convicted as a result of John Preston and his dog. It is calling for an investigation of those cases. Meanwhile, Preston, the dog's handler, died last year. He was never charged with perjury or convicted of a crime.

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Donna Wood, Lil' Tennessee July 30th, 2009 6:47 pm ET
Wow, that is truly amazing Randi. But, even though the dog handler has died, will these cases still be investigated? What happens now? And what happened to the dog since his owners death?

Donna Wood
Lexington, Tennessee

Annie July 30th, 2009 6:52 pm ET
I'm almost relieved the poor guy is white, had he been black all the liberal victimologists would be screaming bloody racism.

I hope Dillon sues and gets some compensation for his troubles and his life being ruined by that fraudulent man. How do people sleep at night knowing they've destroyed an innocent person's life? I don't get it.

April July 30th, 2009 6:59 pm ET
Annie,

Quit with the generalizations. You are making things worse.

Davetesh.com July 30th, 2009 6:59 pm ET
WOW this is shocking, I really feel bad for the guy who spent his years in prison for nothing! That's such a shame

Annie Kate July 30th, 2009 7:01 pm ET
I hope no one was put to death on the basis of this dog's "work". That would be horrible – this is bad enough that this man was robbed of 28 years of his life for something he did not doI hope someone will go through the past cases and be sure there are no more people in jail because of this dog's "expert" talents.

Brieanna July 30th, 2009 7:04 pm ET
How sad is this? Day after day too many innocent people are sitting in prison for no reason other than a mistake. Now what is this man supposed to do just go on with his life? Something is horribly wrong with the way i justice system works.

Broken Hearted Mom July 30th, 2009 7:04 pm ET
This is an amazing story. My son was also given life without the possibility of parole at the age of 23, based on "Dog Sniff Evidence".This story gives hope to the millions of individuals locked in cages without compassion. God Bless AC360 for continuously keeping the nation informed. I believe that my son will be freed, Prayer changes thing, and the truth will set him free!!!

DANNI July 30th, 2009 7:11 pm ET
LoI, donna the case happened in 81 so a good assumption is that the dog died a long time before the owner 😊

Larissa July 30th, 2009 7:18 pm ET
Randi: Good article! I find it appalling that even after the dog and its owner were outed as frauds, the courts did not review cases in which the dog's nose was the primary factor in sentencing.

On another note—your intro paragraph needs work. The very first comma in the

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article is unnecessary. You've listed two nouns exposed as frauds, therefore you should use "have" rather than "has." Also, the last sentence would read better if it were written as such:

"Unfortunately, Bill Dillon had to spend 26 years in prison before the error in his case was rectified."

In addition, the first comma in the second paragraph is unnecessary.

Sincerely,
A freelance copy editor who wishes she could have made her suggestions in a more private forum

PadderdaySaint

July 30th, 2009 7:19 pm ET

I think it is appalling that a man lost 26 years of his life over corruption in our justice system. I believe the prosecutors in those cases should be held accountable for their parts more than the Handler and his dog. I think this man is owed some sort of compensation!

Aaron

July 30th, 2009 7:24 pm ET

I think this is a testimony to the massive failures of our judicial system.

Tami

July 30th, 2009 7:27 pm ET

uh, Donna, I think the dog is dead....probably a good 10 years ago or more.

A.J.

July 30th, 2009 7:38 pm ET

This is a prime example of how our Judicial system don't work. The most appalling thing is that they let the man sat in jail an additional 20 years after Mr. Preston was exposed. I know you conservative airheads like Annie would disagree and state the system worked, because Mr. Dillon was finally released from jail, proving the superiority of the system. How do you compensate a man for 26 years of his life?

By the way Annie, I'm sure Black men were convicted by Mr. Sniff and his amazing crime dog. I guess we have to wait for the judicial process to work its self out to satisfy your racist view.

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