

# **SWEET FREEDOM AFTER ACQUITTAL LAWYER SAYS POLICE TARGETED WRONG MAN**

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John Wilson sat on a couch in his grandmother's home in Hazel Park, surrounded by relatives and friends, savoring his first night of freedom in nearly a year.

Just a few hours earlier Monday, a jury had acquitted Wilson in the murder of Priscilla Ricketts. "I'm so sorry something like this happened, but I didn't do it," he said.

Wilson's lawyer, David Steingold, insists that Oakland County authorities targeted an innocent man.

Police and prosecutors say that isn't so. And though the jurors' decision to absolve Wilson initially stunned them, they say they understand why the jury was unable to convict him.

"They needed that one little bit more, that one little bit more that would push it over the top ...so they could live with a first-degree conviction," said Capt. Dane Slater, a Troy police officer who handled the case.

Slater said he based his conclusions on what jurors said after the verdict.

Steingold, however, said he is upset that prosecutors and police will not concede Wilson's innocence.

Wilson, 22, was tried with co-defendant Thomas Enfield, 23, in front of separate juries. Enfield of Warren was found guilty of first-degree murder -- the same charge Wilson faced.

Enfield stunned the courtroom last week when he testified that Wilson had nothing to do with Ricketts' death. Enfield admitted that he stole Ricketts' purse in the parking lot of a Troy supermarket in October 1997 and hit her with his car as he fled.

"Even without Enfield's testimony, they failed to bring in enough competent evidence to link John Wilson to the crime," Steingold said.

Even before Enfield admitted his role, the case against him appeared solid. Witnesses placed him at the Kroger at Livernois and Long Lake, desperately trying to cash a check at a bank inside to get money for a heroin addiction. Other witnesses said he lost and searched for a rare, silver Tiffany pen that belonged to Ricketts.

Less clear was the case against Wilson.

Prosecutors and police contend that Wilson was driving.

Although Enfield said he hit the victim with his car, Oakland County Medical Examiner L.J. Dragovic testified that Ricketts' injuries likely were not caused by that type of vehicle.

Dragovic said the injuries were caused by a vehicle with a bumper height and style more consistent with a truck. Wilson sometimes borrowed a red truck from a friend, according to testimony.

But Steingold said Dragovic's testimony was inconclusive.

Friends and acquaintances of Wilson testified that he told them about Enfield's role in the attack. However, the defense lawyers attacked the credibility of those witnesses, many of them young people with legal troubles or drug and alcohol problems.

Steingold said Wilson is considering a lawsuit for wrongful prosecution.

Paul Walton, the assistant Oakland County prosecutor who tried the case, accused Steingold of getting "on a soapbox to hear David Steingold talk."

Walton noted that the charges were brought by a grand jury and approved by a judge. "If he can show me who lied," Walton said, "he should come forward, say he can prove it and offer a perjury charge."

Wilson, meanwhile, has catching up to do. While behind bars, he turned 22 in July and missed his sister's wedding in May. He's looking forward to Thanksgiving.

"This," he said, "is the best holiday I could ever have."