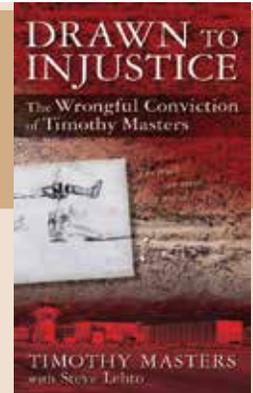


# Drawn to Injustice: The Wrongful Conviction of Timothy Masters

By Timothy Masters with Steve Lehto, published by the Penguin Group, Berkley Books (2012), paperback, 448 pages, \$9.99

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Reviewed by Frederick Baker Jr.

In 1987, 15-year-old, 115-pound Timothy Masters took a shortcut through a field behind his house to catch his school bus. He saw something lying in the field that looked to him (and to the man who later reported it to police, and to the first officer on the scene) like a mannequin or a Resusci Anne CPR simulation doll. Unable to believe it might actually be a dead body and determined not to be fooled by whatever practical joker had posed it there, he hurried to catch his bus, mentioning what he had seen to no one. That choice became the defining moment of his life. For the next 10 years—through the remainder of his high school career and eight years of naval service in the states and abroad—he would remain the prime suspect in the killing of Peggy Lee Hettrick, the victim Masters mistook for a mannequin. His failure to report what he had seen to police, and their discoveries that he was a loner (his mother died when he was 11, and his ex-navy father, a strict disciplinarian, put an end to most of his social life); that he sketched morbid scenes inspired by the combat and horror movies he loved, like *Rambo*, *First Blood*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street*; and that he possessed a survival knife collection persuaded Fort Collins Police Lt. James Broderick, the villain in this drama, that he had “found his man.”

Reading this book will anger you because you will encounter stereotypes of police, prosecutors, and “expert” witnesses that we like to reassure ourselves exist only as heavies in overdrawn Hollywood screenplays. But they were all too real for Timothy



Timothy Masters at 15

Masters. He and co-author Steve Lehto, the Michigan consumer law attorney who has become more or less a book-a-year man, combed through the thousands of pages of documents relating to the prosecution’s investigation (about 90 percent of which were withheld from the defense) and transcripts of his trial to produce a chilling portrait of what happens when one man becomes obsessed. Broderick saw to it that evidence that would have discredited his case against Masters was concealed or destroyed. Most incredibly, despite the surgical skill with which Hettrick’s body was mutilated—something Broderick knew, from an expert opinion he concealed from the defense, that a 15-year-old could not have done in the dark with a survival knife—the evidence withheld included items obtained at the home of a *surgeon* who committed suicide after he was arrested for surreptitiously videotaping female guests while they used bathroom facilities at his home, *which adjoined the field where Hettrick’s body was found!*

Not a shred of physical evidence connected Masters to the crime. The prosecu-

tion concealed evidence conclusively establishing that Hettrick was killed elsewhere, driven to the field, and dragged and carried by two men wearing shoes of a different size than Masters wore to the place where her body was found—things a lone boy with no car or driver’s license could not have done. And the “expert” testimony against him consisted of selective “interpretations” of his boyhood drawings that were so speculative and fatuous it is hard to believe any judge on earth would have allowed the testimony. When Masters describes one of the prosecutors, Jolene Blair, sharing a fist pump with Broderick in the hallway outside the courtroom after the jury convicted him in a case she knew was built out of a tissue of lies, and the two of them laughing as Masters’ aunt chastised them for convicting an innocent boy, you wonder how in the world he could ever be exonerated. That story makes this a worthwhile, even inspiring, read.

One by one, a number of people, including one of the officers involved in the investigation that led to Masters’ conviction, decided not to turn away from an injustice but to do something about it. Toward the end, as the prosecution’s deceptions unravel, the story takes on the feel and accelerating pace of the final thrilling minutes of Costa-Gavras’ film, *Z*, when, with the help of the defense team that assembled to reopen his case, Masters succeeds in exposing the travesty of justice committed against him.

I admit I began the book with a skepticism borne of having reviewed hundreds of applications in which defendants have proclaimed their “innocence”—or at least

the possibility of it—unpersuasively, in the face of weighty testimony and forensic evidence. But one cannot read this book without concluding that Timothy Masters was and is, indeed, innocent, and that the people who convicted him *knew* it and yet went ahead to convict him anyway for reasons that apparently had more to do with ego and personal ambition than the cause of justice they were sworn to uphold.

Not a shred of physical evidence connected Masters to the crime.

I will not reveal all of the outcome that is gratifying, but I will say that, in addition to Masters' belated vindication—he served a decade in prison for a crime he did not commit—two of the prosecutors who made their reputations by convicting Masters, and were subsequently elected to the bench, were voted out of their sinecures when voters learned of the shameful parts they had played in convicting an innocent man. Good.

If you would enjoy a story that restores your faith that terrible injustices will be righted when good people refuse to ignore a wrong—and perhaps being able to say the book was better than the movie when it becomes the next *Shawshank Redemption* (a movie deal may be in the works)—this would be a good selection. ■



*Frederick Baker Jr. served 28 years on the State Bar Publications and Website Advisory Committee, the last 24 as its chair. He continues to contribute occasional reviews of books by Michigan authors or on*

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