

Chittenden County Courthouse Chronicles #9

“Bad Cop”

The Paul Lawrence Affair

By Bob Boyd

The movie *Serpico*, released in 1973, became a big hit for Al Pacino, who played Officer Frank Serpico, a real-life undercover detective in New York who helped expose corruption in the N.Y.C. police department.

Coincidentally, during that same time period in Vermont, a series of events took place that oddly paralleled the *Serpico* movie. A young 21-year-old undercover police detective named Kevin Bradley played the Pacino-like role in a case that rocked the perceived unimpeachable integrity of Vermont, and challenged the local belief that something like that “couldn't happen here.”

Kevin Bradley – Seminarian Turned Undercover Cop

Kevin Bradley was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. He attended Cathedral Preparatory Seminary there, and Cathedral College in Douglaston, N.Y. He spent his summers at Clairvaux, a seminarian boys camp in Stowe, Vermont, where his love for the Green Mountain State began.

Although the priesthood was an early calling, by age 21, Kevin had no clear career choice other than working and living in Vermont. He met then Deputy State's Attorney Francis X. Murray at the Newman Catholic Center at the University of Vermont in 1973. Murray told him of an opening on the Burlington Police Department, but law enforcement was the last vocation on Kevin's mind, and he had no police academy training. Ultimately, Kevin decided to give law enforcement a try. That decision would have powerful repercussions for the future.

Paul Lawrence – the “Supercop”

Paul Lawrence grew up in the outskirts of Providence, R.I. After serving only seven-months in the U.S. Army (he was discharged due to character and discipline disorders), he entered the Burlington police force in August of 1966. Within a year, Lawrence had joined the Vermont State Police and was working as an undercover narcotics agent. Almost immediately, there were questions as to the veracity of his drug busts. But despite the history of his behavior in the Army, and issues with drug busts in Windham County that led to his inability to work there, Lawrence remained in the State Police force. He resigned after he was relocated to the police barracks in Bethel, which to him felt like a demotion.

On paper, there was no indication of a problem with Lawrence. With a clean record, and years of experience in law enforcement, he would be high on list of candidates for another job as an undercover cop. It didn't take long for him to find one. Beginning in August of 1973, a long-haired, mustachioed, hippie-looking character driving a new blue Mustang, began moving quietly through the street scene of St. Albans. No one knew where he had come from, except for

the city fathers of St. Albans, who had hired him as their undercover narcotics agent.

St. Albans – a Drug Haven in the Early '70s

In the early 1960's, St. Albans was a prosperous town, owing much of its financial success to the presence of the Central Vermont Railway headquarters. Then suddenly, the Canadian National Rail System, owners of CVR, pulled out of St. Albans and moved the headquarters to Montreal. This was a devastating blow to the economy and people of St. Albans, and many immediately lost their jobs.

By the 1970's, the city was in moral and financial decay, and the counter-cultural revolution was in full swing. For St. Albans, this meant a lot of unemployed hippies, looking for a good time that included alcohol and drugs. Beautiful Taylor Park on Main Street in St. Albans, once the pride of the city center, became a haven for stoned, burned out druggies.

Deeply concerned with situation, the city council decided to act on the drug problem. Paul Lawrence was hired to do help clean up the mess.

Lawrence appeared to be the right man for the job. By October, he had made many drug buys and had a list of names of the characters involved in selling drugs. He also made the shocking revelation that many were dealing in heroin. None of the city fathers or law enforcement officials ever suspected that hard drugs like heroin would be a problem in the small city of St. Albans.

Lawrence's information led to a famous drug bust on October 24th, 1973. In all, twenty-seven people were arrested that day. St. Albans city officials were impressed and surprised by the numbers of drug dealers in the city. The hiring of Paul Lawrence had been a great move. Most of the defendants boisterously proclaimed their innocence, but that was a common scenario for defendants, especially drug dealers.

When Lawrence testified in court, many defendants were shocked. Everyone had wondered who the undercover narc was behind the raid, and here, in court, was a man that few of the counter-culture defendants recognized from the St. Albans streets. Although defending attorneys had their suspicions about Lawrence, his charismatic personality and popularity among prosecutors and law enforcement officials seemed to keep any serious attacks on his credibility at bay.

Now that the face of Paul Lawrence was publicly known, thanks to his testimony in court, his effectiveness as an undercover cop in St. Albans was over. Although his cover was blown in St. Albans, drug culture was rampant throughout Vermont, and there were plenty of law enforcement agencies that could use the help of Paul Lawrence – the Supercop.

Paul Lawrence and David Demag – Trading Places

In the Spring of '74, Captain Richard Beaulieu of the Burlington Police Department was looking for a new undercover agent. David Demag, a young detective on the force, had been “burned,” meaning his face was now known to the city's drug dealers. By this time, Paul Lawrence was considered to be the best narcotics agent in Vermont, and he was willing to come to Burlington to

work while Demag took his place in St. Albans. Lawrence was partnered with young detective Kevin Bradley, who saw this was an opportunity to work with a proven and experienced undercover cop.

In the several weeks he had been with the force, Kevin had yet to make a buy. Yet, Paul Lawrence found immediate success. By late May, Lawrence had made more than a half dozen buys, but Kevin had not been present for any of them. Kevin was confused and curious. His confusion led to suspicion when, while working together, Lawrence failed to recognize a character on the street that he had told Bradley he had made a buy from. Although Lawrence's reputation as a supercop made many admirers amongst his peers, Kevin Bradley was just too smart and too level-headed to have any wool pulled over his eyes.

Bradley decided to confide in his friend, David Demag, who was now working Lawrence's former beat in St. Albans. Demag confirmed Bradley's suspicions due to information he had collected working in St. Albans. Both did not want to believe that Lawrence was a bad cop, but both felt it was time to talk to someone.

Bradley decided to meet with Francis X. Murray, the Deputy State's Attorney who had set Bradley on his road to a career in law enforcement. Murray listened to Bradley's story, but had already heard suspicions about Lawrence from others. He decided something needed to be done. Murray told Bradley to go to Captain Beaulieu with his information. Paul Lawrence was about to fall from grace.

The “Rabbi” Sting

In late June, the drug unit of the Burlington Police Department – Harold Miles, David Demag, Kevin Bradley, Captain Richard Beaulieu, Deputy Wayne Liberty and Deputy State's Attorney Francis X. Murray – met to discuss how to deal with Paul Lawrence. This eventually led to a meeting with then Chittenden County State's Attorney Patrick Leahy. At this meeting, a decision was made to lay a trap for Lawrence.

Leahy had Murray contact Eugene Gold, the district attorney in Brooklyn, whom he was acquainted with. Gold's office agreed to send a “professional decoy” to Vermont to use as bait to catch Lawrence. They were surprised to find that the decoy, Michael Schwartz, looked more like a stockbroker than a drug dealer. Nevertheless, they set him up with the nickname “The Rabbi,” and a false story was spread around the police station that he was a known heroin dealer from New York who had once sold drugs in Burlington and had returned for more action. The news was leaked to Lawrence.

Schwartz was set up in City Hall Park under the hidden surveillance of several Burlington detectives including Bradley. Soon Paul Lawrence was observed slowly cruising the streets surrounding the park in his blue Mustang staring down the Rabbi. Lawrence never left his car and never personally engaged Schwartz. However, he came back to the police station with heroin wrapped in tin foil. “I made a buy from the Rabbi,” said Lawrence. Paul Lawrence's days as a bad cop were over. After a lengthy trial Paul Lawrence was convicted of perjury and sent to prison. All pending cases that required his testimony were dismissed. Seventy-one of the

convictions that depended on his testimony were pardoned by then governor Tom Salmon.

The Legacy of Kevin Bradley

Paul Lawrence's shady character and questionable drug buys seemingly followed him wherever he worked, from Windham, to Addison, to Chittenden County. Yet he continued to be employed as an undercover narcotics agent and even gained a reputation as "Supercop."

Perhaps no one in law enforcement wanted to face the reality of corruption within their own community. A breach of trust in law enforcement shakes the foundation of justice, and a false accusation could be a deterrent to career advancement. Yet young detective Kevin Bradley found the courage to act upon his suspicions that Lawrence was corrupt. He made the honorable and correct decision in bringing his suspicions to his superiors.

Kevin eventually left the police force to earn a law degree from Suffolk University in Boston. He returned to Vermont to work privately for the Desautels and Bergeron law firm. But a continued interest in law enforcement, and a chance to prosecute criminal cases, motivated him to run for Chittenden State's Attorney in 1983. He was successful, and held the position from 1983 -1988. From 1988 to 1997, Kevin was employed as Sector Counsel for the United States Border Patrol. In 1997 he was appointed Immigration Judge with the U.S. Immigration court in Miami, Fla. He served in that capacity until his death as a result of cancer at the young age of 58.

After the Lawrence case, Vermont law enforcement changed the way that drug buys would be handled. It would take two officers to corroborate a buy, eliminating the possibility of another maverick bad cop like Paul Lawrence. Today, justice is better served, thanks to the character and courage of Kevin Bradley.

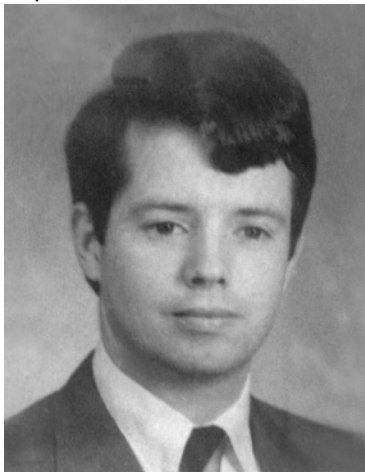
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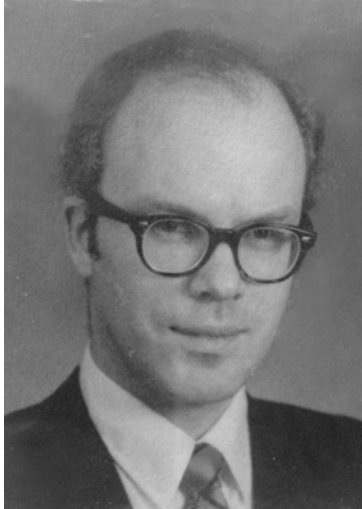
Judge Kevin Bradley, courtesy Karen Bradley Officer Kevin Bradley, courtesy Karen Bradley



Captain Richard Beaulieu, Courtesy Karen Bradley



1973 Chittenden County Deputy State's Attorney Francis X. Murray, 1970 Bar Association Photo



1973 Chittenden County State's Attorney Patrick Leahy, 1970 Bar Association Photo

Clover, Bob has a photo of Dave Demag with Kevin Bradley
Courtesy of Dave Demag