

The Strange Death of Terry Yeakey

Unanswered Questions Haunt Family of Oklahoma City Bombing First
by Wendy S. Painting, October 2, 2009

On May 11, 1996, the New York Times ran a story with the headline “A Policeman Who Rescued 4 in Bombing Kills Himself.” Sergeant Terrance Yeakey, Oklahoma City Police Department, was 30 years old and was about to receive the police department’s Medal of Valor for his heroic rescue efforts the day of the Oklahoma City bombing, which occurred on April 19, 1995.

Yeakey was the first to arrive on the scene that terrible day and saved the lives of countless people from the rubble of the building and the horrific effects of the explosion. The article says Yeakey committed suicide, claiming that he was living in emotional pain because he could not do more to help the people injured in the bombing, and that he was suffering from intense survivor guilt which he was unable to manage. But others in Oklahoma City, including the family of Terrance Yeakey, claim that his death was not a suicide at all, but a brutal murder, and indicate that local law enforcement were complicit in covering up this murder.

On September 26, 2009 the Yeakey family spoke out for the first time on video for an interview with journalists from Radio Free Oklahoma and an American Studies PhD student from the University of Buffalo who is writing her dissertation on the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. What these researchers found was that the facts surrounding Yeakey’s death are quite disturbing, and that the treatment of the Yeakey family in the aftermath of the death was beyond appalling.

[Terry Yeakey and family. 1995]

It is important to note how, exactly, Yeakey is supposed to have killed himself. He was said to have slit his wrists and neck, causing him to nearly bleed to death in his car, and then miraculously climbed over a barbed wire fence. He then was purported to have walked over a miles distance, through a nearby field, eventually shooting himself in the side of the head at an unusual angle. Startlingly, no weapon was found at the scene of the body, no investigation was conducted, no fingerprints taken, and no interviews with family members or friends were had to try and determine why Yeakey would have been suicidal, or if he had, in fact, been suicidal at all. Instead, the conclusion that Yeakey’s death was a suicide was reached immediately, without an autopsy. Yeakey had witnessed things during his response to the bombing which did not agree with the ‘official version’ of events touted by the national media and law enforcement at that time. Yeakey was in the process of collecting evidence which supported and documented the inconsistencies he witnessed the morning of the bombing at the scene itself.

Far from being suicidal, Yeakey was in the process of achieving some major life goals. He had just been offered a job with the FBI in Dallas and was planning on

taking the job and moving there with his sister and brother in law. Yeakey, a military veteran who had served in Saudi Arabia, was also a seven year veteran of the OKC Police Department and had just been promoted to Sergeant in the OKCPD. Just prior to his death he had been awarded the Key to the Oklahoma City for his heroism during the bombing. Additionally, Yeakey and had reconciled with ex-wife. Despite all of this, Yeakey was living under constant scrutiny for his refusal to go along with official versions of events, and because of his refusal to change his story about what he saw the day of the bombing, causing him to suffer great persecution from his brothers in law enforcement.

Although he was looking forward to his new job with the FBI, Yeakey is described by his family as a man who was also living in great fear at this time, and who was preoccupied with the harassment he was being subjected to on a daily basis. When Yeakey showed up to his oldest sister's home one evening he was physically ill. When she attempted to take him to the emergency room, Yeakey would not allow this because, he told her, "they can find me there." Yeakey never told her who "they" were in an attempt to protect her. Yeakey left his sister's house that evening, and was found dead the next day in a remote field in El Reno, Oklahoma.

Immediately after his family was notified of Terrance Yeakey's death they insisted that they did not believe Yeakey had killed himself. Their conclusion was based on the manner of death, Yeakey's personality, his recent statements about the future, and the lack of investigation and autopsy. At first they tried to get answers. Why wasn't there a proper investigation? Where was the weapon he shot himself with? Why wasn't an autopsy allowed? As they asked questions in the following days, they would sometimes be approached by others in the police department, who told them in no uncertain terms, but off the record, that Yeakey had been murdered. As a result of their inquiries they were harassed and followed by Oklahoma City police and others. Unmarked cars sat in front of their homes for hours and this stalking was caught on video by the family. Shortly after his death, Yeakey's ex-wife had her home broken into and a balloon was left in her house. Written on the balloon in black marker were the words, "we know where you are." This harassment and surveillance had a chilling effect on the surviving Yeakey family and on their inquiries into Terrance's death, which were in effect shut down... until now, fourteen years after the fact.

[The Yeakey Family, 2009]

Yeakey's 92 year old grandmother, Mary Kuykendalla, says that it is important that she knows who killed her grandson and implores anyone who can help her, "From my heart I want something to happen to show he had no right to be killed. His life was taken away for nothing."

His oldest sister, Vikki Yeakey, speaking out again after all of these years, states that she knew as soon as she was told by the OKCPD that Yeakey had committed suicide that it untrue, "I screamed out 'He didn't take his life. Someone murdered him.'" Yet detectives told her that she was crazy and that she watched too much

television. "I had just seen him the night before. He was mentally fine...I wanted answers that night." But, she says, they rushed her through the paperwork all the while telling her she was "crazy." She asks, "Who was he running from? Who was he trying to protect?...I am doing this interview to reach out to the world, to anyone that can help."

Another sister, Leshawn Hargrove says, "He was an awesome older brother. He was always all about his work. He was serious about being a cop." When she received news of his death she says she dropped the phone and "began to sob." She felt nauseous. She needed to get to her family. Later OKCPD would approach her and say "sorry for your loss," but soon after, she says, the family was told that they needed to "keep our mouths shut," and were continuously told that the death was a suicide. She feels that her brother's death deserves answers and an investigation that were never provided, "I want justice for his life. He needs to have his story told. I wish I had him back."

When Yeakey's mother, received a call notifying her of the death she was told by the OKCPD not to drive anywhere and that a car would come to pick her up. This was around 10 PM, but by 1 AM the promised transportation had not arrived. In fact, they never showed up for Yeakey's grieving mother, "No one ever came." Yeakey's mother says that for the last fourteen years she has been "going over and over something I don't believe to be true. I believe it to be murder. I don't know who did it. [That's] why we need answers...you need to put your child to rest and without knowing what happened [we can't]...I vowed I will never give up. I need answers. If there's ANYONE who could help I would appreciate it."

The family says that the death of Yeakey is a taboo subject in Oklahoma City. There is a saying "if you don't want the Terry Yeakey done to you...keep your mouth shut."

Yeakey is not the only suspicious death which has occurred do to the attempt to find answers about the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and it is not the only one to be called a suicide, the strange and grisly death of Kenneth Trentadue being another. The suspicious death of Kenneth Trentadue at the Oklahoma City Federal Transfer Center in August 1995 would be ruled a suicide despite the opinion of the Medical Examiner. After examining the body of this brother, it became clear to attorney Jesse Trentadue that his brother had been tortured and murdered. Jesse had received chilling information from Timothy McVeigh (convicted and executed for his role in the 1995 bombing) that his brother's murder was related to the bombing and its subsequent (mis)investigation. Subsequently, Jesse began a quest to determine why exactly his brother had died, leading him to file many Freedom of Information Act Requests about the bombing and related matters. After filing a wrongful death lawsuit the Trentadue family was rewarded \$1.1 million for emotional distress caused by the authorities mishandling of the death. On September 28, 2009, attorney Jesse Trentadue made national news when portions of surveillance tapes of the bombing were begrudgingly released by the FBI under the orders a federal judge.

Like Jesse Trentadue and those who lost family members in the Oklahoma City bombing, the surviving family of Terrance Yeakey also seek answers which they feel will help them achieve closure, justice and peace of mind.