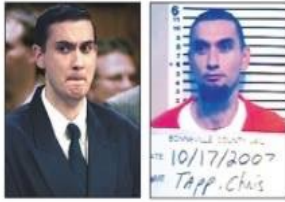


Tapp seeks more DNA testing

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RIGHT: Christopher Tapp reacts to his guilty verdict during his 1998 trial. Tapp was sentenced to 30 years for the 1996 murder of Angie Dodge. Post Register file

By **BRYAN CLARK**
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Prisoner Chris Tapp is petitioning district court to allow DNA testing of a number of pieces of evidence left at the crime scene, including several items never before tested.

In 1998, Tapp was found guilty of the murder of 18-year old Angie Dodge two years earlier. The only evidence against Tapp was his own confession. He maintains the confession was false and coerced by Idaho Falls detectives, a contention recently supported by three national experts in interrogation techniques, crime scene analysis and false confessions.

Tapp hopes the new tests will help him win his release from prison in Kuna.

"The hope is that this new petition will prove that I lied," Tapp said in a phone interview Tuesday.

"It will disprove everything I said during that so-called confession. It will prove that I was never

there the night the murder happened, and I was never involved in this crime in any way, shape or form."

Tapp is hopeful the appeal filed Thursday will be more successful than past appeals because it relies on physical evidence rather than argument.

"Science can't lie," he said.

Some of the testing, if a judge orders it, would involve a new technique that hadn't yet been developed at the time of Tapp's conviction — so-called "touch DNA" testing. The process examines genetic material derived from cells left on an object when it is touched with bare skin. For example, such DNA evidence can be found on a door handle that has been opened with an ungloved hand.

John Thomas, Tapp's public defender, said he hopes previously untested swabs taken of Dodge's hands — Tapp originally confessed to holding down her hands while she was attacked by others — along with other untested crime scene evidence will prove his client's innocence.

"The DNA will speak for itself," Thomas said. "If it's not on the hand swabs ... it's obvious that Chris Tapp wasn't there."

Greg Hampikian, a Boise State University geneticist and head of the Idaho Innocence Project, submitted an affidavit that said touch DNA tests could provide scientific evidence Tapp was not involved.

"As the victim's shirt and teddy bear were not tested prior to (Tapp's) trial, it was not — and could not have been — established at trial via scientific evidence that the attack was perpetrated by a lone, unknown man," Hampikian wrote. "The testing currently sought has the scientific potential to prove as much."

Last year, three experts associated with national wrongful conviction organizations produced reports arguing Tapp's innocence. Two reports were by former FBI supervisory special agents who trained agents in proper investigative procedure at Quantico. The third came from a law professor and expert on false confessions and the interrogation tactics that lead to them.



It has been more than six months since the Bonneville County Commission approved \$25,000 for then-Prosecutor Bruce Pickett to hire an outside expert to review the extensive reports. No expert has yet been hired.

Last week, Bonneville Prosecutor Danny Clark said a committee tasked with appointing an expert still is reviewing candidates.

Many pieces of evidence found at the crime scene already have been tested. All match a common, unknown man, but none matched Tapp.

Earlier this year, additional DNA testing was undertaken at the urging of Carol Dodge, Angie's mother, who has searched tirelessly to find the identity of the unknown killer. Those tests were compared to a DNA database maintained by Ancestry.com, where a partial match was found. That proves the DNA donor, and presumed killer, belongs to the same patrilineal line as the man who donated to the database — and so the killer's last name may be Usry.

Police interviewed New Orleans filmmaker Michael Usry earlier this year, but testing absolutely excluded him as the DNA donor. He has said he is considering a documentary about the case.

Despite numerous appeals and motions for post-conviction relief having failed, Tapp said the new petition perhaps offers his best chance of winning his freedom. But after spending some 6,661 days in jail or prison — nearly half his life — Tapp is used to waiting.

"I'm hopeful, but things will happen when they happen," he said.

Reporter Bryan Clark can be reached at 542-6751.

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