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## On the wrong side of the ‘good ol’ boy’ system?

One of two people central to one of Lonoke County’s most notorious cases echoed claims that Larry Cook, current candidate for Lonoke County Circuit Court Judge, allowed social and political pressures to affect his decisions as prosecuting attorney. Heath Stocks, serving life-without-parole in the Arkansas Department of Correction (ADC) maximum-security unit at Tucker, in an interview with this newspaper Friday, also added new information to his controversial case.

Stocks said that when he shot his father, Joe; mother, Barbara; and sister, Heather on Jan. 17, 1997, Charles A. ‘Jack’ Walls III accompanied him to “make sure the job got done,” affirming a suspicion held by many involved with the case of Walls’ involvement in the killings. “It wouldn’t have ever happened if [Walls] hadn’t been there,” Stocks said. Until now, Stocks avoided saying that Walls was at the scene.

Stocks echoed the claim made by Charles and Karen Knox of Lonoke that Cook tried to either cover up or minimize the part played by Walls in the sexual abuse of a large number of boys. The Knoxes and Stocks say Cook let social, political or professional influences, specifically that of Walls’ father, the late Charles A. Walls Jr., a past circuit judge, affect his decisions as prosecutor early in the case.

Cook did not seek re-election in 1998 and has since practiced as a private attorney.

Cook, replying to a request for a response for an article April 24, released a statement. “Almost 17 years ago our community was devastated because of the shocking crimes committed by Jack Walls that came to light. I was the Lonoke County Prosecuting Attorney at that time and filed two rape charges against Jack Walls while continuing to review the file for additional charges

before deciding to recuse. I made that decision to allow an out-of-county attorney to take over the prosecution to ensure there would be no question of prejudice,” Cook said.

On Tuesday, Cook was forwarded questions concerning Stocks’ claims, his responses are included.

The request to be recused was made by Cook on Oct. 18, 1997, accounts from the time are that the investigation of Walls began in early August.

In the interview, Stocks detailed why he believes it was Walls’ connection to his own case that caused Cook to shy away from questioning him about being raped by Walls. Cook, he said, had been a longtime friend to both Wallises, attending functions at the Walls family farm, and working at Walls’ law firm.

On Tuesday, Cook was asked, “Did you perform duties for or work with Charles A. Walls Jr. at his law firm prior to becoming prosecuting attorney?” Cook replied, “No, I did not.”

Cook was also asked, “Did you attend social, political or professional functions at the Walls farm prior to or after becoming prosecuting attorney?” Cook replied, “No, I did not.”

While the investigation of Walls was ongoing, and after Walls’s arrest in October 1997, Cook refused to speak with him, Stocks said. “[Cook] didn’t send anybody to talk to me... I do not remember having any conversation with him.”

On Tuesday, Cook was asked “Did you or any of your deputies speak with Heath Stocks in the course of the 1997 investigation of Jack Walls?” Cook replied, “No, I did not.”

Cook was biased in applying the law, Stocks said. “If you do something wrong the law should apply to you whether or not you are from a prominent family. You don’t need somebody like that being a judge.”

“[Cook] did not want what happened to me to come out,” Stocks said. “If he did, it would have changed my whole case, and it would have been bad for Jack.”

Stocks said investigating his abuse meant the likelihood of many more victims as well as Walls’ participation in the killing of the Stocks family being brought out if charges had been pursued related to him, Stocks said.

On Tuesday, Cook was asked, “Did you meet or speak with Charles A. “Jack” Walls III concerning the arrest of Heath Stocks in the shootings of Joe, Barbara and Heather Stocks? If so, when and where were the meetings?” Cook replied, “No, I did not.”

It was not just in his case, but in at least three others, Stocks said. “[Cook] filed only two charges after two months with the case. Just look at what Betty Dickey did in just a couple of days with the same information,” he said.

Stocks was later identified as one of the six minor “John Doe” victims of Walls.

When the Walls case broke, only then-Lonoke Chief of Police Charles Peckat spoke with him

about Walls, Stocks said. Some family members also questioned him concerning one of the other victims, Stocks said.

Stocks said that Walls had been molesting boys “for a long time.” In the small-town atmosphere of Lonoke, there had to be people who knew about Walls but did nothing because it was the Walls family involved, Stocks said. “There’s a lot of families with sons that Jack messed with that they want it kept quiet. They don’t want their names tarnished.”

It took an “outsider,” in Peckat, to break the cycle of protection for Walls, even though Cook “balked at doing it,” Stocks said. “Peckat is the one who forced it.”

A copy of an Oct. 17, 1997 letter from Peckat to then-Circuit Judge Lance Hanshaw, claims that Cook was balking on pressing charges. Peckat also said that Cook told him rape charges for one victim would not be sought because of a “gut feeling” that the “victim would steal the spotlight.”

Cook asked to be recused Oct. 18, 1997.

Peckat has not responded to requests for comment.

Stocks said Walls used his courthouse connections, name-dropping to intimidate impressionable boys. “Jack was the first one to visit me in the county jail. He told me he was going to talk to the prosecutor. He was going to help me all he could. For me to be quiet,” he said. “He took care of me, all right. He got rid of me.”

It was during the prosecution of Walls for the rapes that Stocks divulged that he had killed his family at Walls’ direction; by that time Stocks had been imprisoned for about a year.

Walls is serving three, concurrent, 40-year terms, and three, concurrent, life sentences on in ADC for the rapes; he pleaded guilty on five counts and no-contest to the sixth. The sentences are levied for the life sentence to be served after the 40-year term.

Stocks said he is seeking a re-sentencing. “My main thing is I never claimed complete innocence. All I want for them to do is look to see what is there.”

Stocks said that in the family’s rush to avoid the death penalty, he had been told to plead guilty. “So, a lot of the abuse that would have been mitigating circumstances was not heard.” Life-without parole is still a death penalty, “just slower,” he said.

There are many reasons why he has waited to speak about Walls’ presence at the shootings, but much has to do with lack of evidence, Stocks said. “It’s just my word against [Walls]. Without evidence, it’s just conversation.”