

# PEOPLE V. DARNELL CARTER

On the night of March 20, 2009, Robert Biggs was leaving his apartment on Pierce Avenue in Niagara Falls and going to his car parked in the adjoining lot. A recent transplant to Niagara Falls from the Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans area, Mr. Biggs did not know that he was being watched. As he was approaching his car, he was confronted by a man dressed in purple clothing who attempted to rob him at gunpoint. Mr. Biggs ran. The robber, later identified as Darnell Carter, fired at Mr. Biggs as he fled, a bullet striking him in the arm and severing a major blood vessel. Mr. Biggs died from the gunshot wound in the backyard of a neighbor. When his body was found the next day, valuables and jewelry had been removed from his body. Tragically, although a number of individuals were in the parking lot at the time the shots were fired, when the police arrived on the scene for a “shots heard” report, nobody stayed to tell what had actually happened.

A thorough investigation by the Niagara Falls Police Department led to video surveillance from the adjacent convenience store, and persistent efforts to locate and interview reluctant witnesses led to the identification of the shooter as Darnell Carter.

When this case came to trial, Assistant District Attorneys Brian Seaman and Doreen Hoffmann were entrusted with the task of bringing justice for Robert Biggs. The trial was challenging in many ways. Witnesses were reluctant to come into court and tell what they saw, particularly since associates of the defendant attended the trial each day and were an intimidating presence. Some witnesses wavered and one contradicted previous sworn testimony, but undeterred, ADAs Seaman and Hoffmann painstakingly presented the evidence that proved Carter’s guilt.

The culmination of the case came when Brian Seaman delivered the closing argument for the People. The jury deliberated, then returned a guilty verdict against Carter on charges of Murder in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Weapon, and Robbery in the First Degree. Carter was sentenced to a term of 40 years to life.

# PEOPLE V. ADAM HAMILTON

Every day the men and women of Niagara County's police forces put their lives on the line to protect us. This reality came into sharp focus the night of February 7, 2009. On that night, a man by the name of Adam Hamilton set out to confront his estranged girlfriend in Niagara Falls armed with multiple loaded weapons.

After secreting himself in the trunk of his ex-girlfriend's car, Hamilton suddenly appeared as she was walking toward her residence. Hamilton shot his ex-girlfriend multiple times at close range with a small caliber rifle, and then as she ran toward the house, he shot her multiple additional times with a shotgun. As she lay on the porch of the house, Hamilton approached her. Meanwhile, members of the Niagara Falls Police department were speeding to the scene responding to neighbors' 911 calls. When the first officer arrived on the scene Hamilton turned the shotgun on him and fired into his chest. As the wounded officer attempted to crawl away, more officers arrived and exchanged fire with Hamilton. A second officer was shot in the face and head with a shotgun blast. Hamilton himself was eventually struck by a bullet and was subdued. Miraculously, nobody died that night.

As this extremely important criminal case neared trial, Assistant District Attorney Brian Seaman was asked to handle the prosecution along with ADA Robert Zucco. Brian considers it one of the highest honors of his career that he was selected for this particular duty. It was an emotionally-packed trial as the three individuals who were shot by Hamilton, two of which would have died had it not been for immediate life-saving medical care, took the stand in turn to testify. Hamilton himself took the stand in an attempt to explain his conduct that night as a combination of accident and self-defense. In a cross-examination, which the Niagara Gazette characterized as "withering", Seaman dismantled Hamilton's claims one by one. The jury had little difficulty reaching a guilty verdict on two counts of Attempted Murder in the First Degree and one count of Attempted Murder in the Second Degree. Hamilton is currently serving a sentence of 75 years to life.

## **PEOPLE V. PRISCILLA GUMPTON ET. AL.**

What started out as a routine shoplifting incident at the Lockport Walmart ended with the takedown of a prolific shoplifting ring based out of Rochester. When the Niagara County Sheriff's Department was called to a shoplifting incident at the Lockport Walmart, they discovered thousands of dollars worth of DVDs and video games in the perpetrators' vehicle. Three arrests were made that day for relatively minor charges based on the initial shoplifting incident.

Investigators were called in and were able to trace some of the merchandise in the vehicle to other retail establishments in Niagara and Orleans Counties. Criminal histories were run and it was found that the apparent ringleader, one Priscilla Gumpton, had an extensive record. Literally dozens of arrests and convictions appeared under several aliases for larcenies and other crimes. Most of these previous arrests were plead down to low level misdemeanors and non-criminal dispositions resulting in short jail terms before Gumpton was back out committing the same crimes.

The Investigators brought what they had to Brian Seaman at the District Attorney's Office. When Brian looked at Gumpton's criminal history he thought, "She's not getting off with a 90-day sentence this time." After a number of separate larcenies were identified in Niagara County, Seaman presented the whole matter to the Grand Jury and obtained a multi-count indictment against Gumpton and her co-defendants, charging several counts of Grand Larceny and Criminal Possession of Stolen Property. Seaman held a hard line through pre-trial proceedings, and on the eve of trial Gumpton plead guilty to each and every count in the indictment. The end result was convictions of 4 members of the crime ring, 3 of which were sentenced to State Prison, including a lengthy sentence of 7 ½ to 15 years for Gumpton.

# PEOPLE V. MATTHEW DAVIS

When the family of Antoine Bradberry were unable to contact him, his father went to Antoine's apartment building and, with the assistance of the building maintenance man, got into his apartment. No father should have to experience what Mr. Bradberry did upon entering. He found his son dead on the floor, and the blood all around indicated that there was a violent struggle. The Niagara Falls Police Department sprung into action and secured video surveillance footage of two females entering the apartment building with Antoine, then one of them leaving Antoine's apartment to let a masked man into the building. The two female suspects were quickly identified and apprehended. It was determined that the two women had conspired with the masked man, identified as Matthew Davis, to rob Bradberry. When Bradberry resisted, a prolonged violent struggle ensued that resulted in Bradberry's death. Before Davis could be apprehended, he fled the state.

Assistant District Attorneys Brian Seaman and Doreen Hoffmann handled the case for the DA's office from the outset. The two women accepted serious felony pleas with agreements to cooperate in the prosecution of Davis. After presentation to the Grand Jury, an indictment was obtained against Davis. Davis went into deep hiding in West Virginia, drastically changing his appearance and assuming a new name. Seaman worked hand-in-hand with a task force charged with apprehending individuals evading violent felony warrants, and after many months Davis was found, apprehended, and returned to Niagara County for trial. A second round of tragedy hit the Bradberry family during the pre-trial proceedings. Mr. Bradberry, Antoine's father, passed away from a heart attack on the morning of one of the pre-trial proceedings. Each court appearance had been particularly hard on Mr. Bradberry, a Vietnam Veteran, as they caused him to revisit the experience of finding his son in a manner he described to Seaman as "like a flashback."

The trial itself contained many practical and legal challenges. Since Davis had been a fugitive for so long, both women had since been sentenced to State prison, making them challenging witnesses. One refused to testify. A legal issue that had to be overcome was the fact that the medical examiner ruled that

Antoine had died of a heart-related issue and ruled the cause of death “undetermined.” The prosecutors had to convince the jury that although heart failure may have been the medical reason for his death, the violent attack at the hands of Davis was, as far as the law is concerned, the cause of death. Brian Seaman delivered the closing argument for the People. He meticulously walked the jury through the video surveillance and cell phone evidence, and convinced the jury that Matthew Davis was the masked man that had burglarized and robbed Antoine Bradberry. Seaman’s arguments also convinced the jury that Davis’ criminal conduct in robbing and attacking him met the legal standard and was the cause of Antoine Bradberry’s death. The jury convicted Davis on all counts and he is currently serving a sentence of 25 years to life.

# PEOPLE V. CHARLOTTE DENNY AND CANDACE BRADLEY

While at the DA's office, Brian Seaman prosecuted a large number of cases involving financial crimes, including financial exploitation of the elderly. Sadly, the case of Charlotte Denny and Candace Bradley is a typical case, although the amount of money involved was extraordinary. Both defendants were relatives of a Niagara County widow who had no children. This elderly woman and her spouse had worked in blue collar jobs their entire lives, and as was common among their generation, had saved most of what they earned through the years. They lived simply, each bought a savings bond with every paycheck, and put much of the rest of their earnings in CDs. Unfortunately as her health began to fail, this elderly woman sought the assistance of family members who thereby learned of the savings their elderly aunt had amassed. In short order, the two defendants completely emptied the accounts of their rich aunt. By the time Adult Protective Services was called in by concerned individuals, their aunt was still living at home, but was in danger of not having enough money to stay there. This case was investigated by the Niagara County Sheriff's Office and Assistant District Attorneys Brian Seaman and Heather DeCastro. In a case like this, the prosecutor takes a big role in the investigation, subpoenaing bank records, analyzing financial records, and following the money trail. By the time all the records were obtained in this case, it was learned that the two defendants had stolen over \$1 million from their aunt. Brian and ADA DeCastro presented this case to the Grand Jury and obtained an indictment against Denny and Bradley charging Grand Larceny in the First Degree, as well as other crimes. The end result was a guilty plea to felony Grand Larceny by each defendant, and the return of what remained of the victim's money. This allowed her to afford the in-home medical care she needed so she could remain in her home for her final years.

# PEOPLE V. RAKEEM GOLSON & ANTONIO CLARK

This was the case of a violent home invasion that occurred in the city of Lockport. Some young people had rented an apartment on Locust Street in Lockport. Unfortunately, a friend of those young people and frequent guest at the apartment had a reputation for being in possession of drugs and money, and caught the attention of the defendants in this case. One night, three men with their faces covered forced their way into the apartment, displayed a gun, and started going through the apartment looking for drugs and money to steal. One of the residents of the apartment, a young woman, was pistol whipped, opening a nasty gash on her head, and then forced into a bathtub while the Intruders rifled through her belongings. The three men found some items to steal and left. Officers and detectives from the Lockport Police Department arrived on the scene and an investigation ensued. The police were able to track down a woman who had been present during the planning of this violent burglary, and had also assisted in the crime. Two of the three assailants were identified as Rakeem Golson and Antonio Clark, and were charged with various crimes including Burglary in the First Degree and Robbery in the First Degree.

As this case neared trial, Assistant District Attorneys Brian Seaman and Peter Wydysh were assigned the case. The prosecution presented substantial practical difficulties. The young girl who had been assaulted in the apartment was not able to identify the perpetrators. The prosecutors had to rely on the female accomplice and the guest at the apartment, both of whom had substantial criminal records, for the identifications. Juries are often reluctant to trust witnesses who are themselves involved in criminal behavior, and additionally one of the defendants had substantially changed his appearance by the time of the trial, further complicating things.

Despite these issues, Brian was able to convincingly argue in his closing statement that the prosecution's witnesses, although not admirable, were credible. Brian argued that the witnesses' accounts of what happened that night were corroborated by each other's testimony, as well as by the rest of the evidence. The jury agreed,

convicting both defendants on all counts. The judge sentenced each defendant to a lengthy state prison sentence.