

## **KINGPIN'S HIGH LIFE TO END BEHIND BARS - T. STUCK HAD MANY ROLES: DRUG BOSS, KILLER, RAPPER**

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, December 15, 2004

Author: JOE SWICKARD

**Thelmon Stuckey** III was big, bold, brash and bad.

But **Stuckey** - who styled himself as rapper T. Stuck with blue and orange mink outfits and passed a cash-packed Burberry shopping bag to a Super Bowl star - was not an uncaring man, even though his CDs and lyrics offered death to suspected snitches, weaklings and rats.

In fact, after he shot disgraced ex-Detroit Police Officer Ricardo (Slick) Darbins 11 times in 1996, a witness recalled how **Stuckey** took time to explain himself to his lifeless partner in the cocaine business.

"I love you, man, and I'm going to take care of your family," **Stuckey** said, kissing the slain Darbins on the cheek. "But, you talk too much."

For years, much to the consternation of law enforcement, **Stuckey** was almost fireproof. That's the kind of reputation he got by beating a charge of assault with intent to murder and then collecting \$150,000 in a civil suit for getting wounded in a shoot-out with officers trying to arrest him. Witnesses said he fired an SKS assault rifle at the police in the 1997 incident.

All that ended Tuesday in the Detroit courtroom of U.S. District Judge Gerald Rosen.

**Stuckey**, 35, was sentenced to life in prison without parole for Darbins' murder and drug conspiracy, 20 years for money laundering and 10 years each for firearms violations and witness-tampering. The sentences will be served concurrently. He was convicted of the charges this summer.

But **Stuckey** didn't go quietly, arguing that he'd been railroaded and that eventual vindication awaited him.

"I'm going to rely on the appeals court and the Lord to look out for me," he told Rosen. "You set me up. You all in this room set me up. I'm an innocent man."

"This ain't what the Lord planned for my life to be," he said.

But Rosen said **Stuckey** convicted himself with his own tearful testimony: "It was one of the greatest acts of self-destruction I've witnessed in a courtroom in 25 years."

Calling him "a very dangerous young man," Rosen told **Stuckey**, "Indeed, you're one of the most dangerous young men I've ever seen in 15 years as a judge."

Outside court, federal prosecutor J. Michael Buckley said the case is a model for local, state and federal cooperation in taking down a murderous drug boss. Officers from Detroit, Dearborn and the State Police teamed up with four federal agencies to build the case against **Stuckey**.

"We can do good things together, and that's what happened here," Buckley said.

Defense attorney Anthony Chambers said **Stuckey** was "a very enterprising young man" convicted by snitches steeped in drugs and murder.

**Stuckey**'s five-week trial gave jurors a glimpse of the gaudy gangster life, complete with homes in Atlanta and Detroit, multiple Mercedes-Benzes, a \$21,000 crocodile skin wardrobe and \$169,000 in gold and jewelry.

During the trial, **Stuckey** swapped his minks and croc skins for subdued suits and studious eyeglasses.

He testified that he was a tender-hearted guy, but managed to boast: "Hey, I'm T. Stuck."

The jury delivered a guilty verdict in three hours.

The lyrics yielded clues

In a perverse tale of personal ambition, **Stuckey** rose from membership in the notorious Puritan Avenue Boys drug gang to running his own operations and throwing himself an elaborate ball at Greektown's International Marketplace. He also manipulated an unwitting Detroit Central graduate and Tampa Bay Buccaneer Dwight Smith, a star in Super Bowl XXXVII, to hide ownership of a Mercedes-Benz 500 CL.

**Stuckey** gave Smith \$40,000 cash in a Burberry shopping bag for the 2000 luxury coupe. Smith, who holds the Super Bowl record for interception touchdowns, testified that he thought the car was his even though he drove it just a few times, never spent any of his own money and didn't see the title until it was mailed to him after he got a grand jury subpoena.

**Stuckey** also ran a clothing company. One of the products was a shirt with "SNITCHES" slashed with the international "no" symbol.

He also produced a rap CD, "The Motor City Compilation," and kept busy writing lyrics.

At his trial, his lyrics and the CDs were matched up with federal wiretapped conversations. Prosecutors said they were blunt and brutal blueprints for murder.

One rap on "Compilation" reminds potential snitches they could "wind up stuck in T. Stuck's trunk."

And when arrested in Georgia, agents found piles of lyrics - some of which matched closely with Darbins' slaying - that taunt federal authorities:

"I never been scared of ya, stay one step ahead of ya, kill your witnesses instead of ya."

His lyrics also say:

"I expose those who knows, fill their bodies with holes, wrap 'em up in a blanket and dump their bodies in the road."

That, according to testimony, is just what happened to Darbins after **Stuckey** denounced him as a "fake ass" for not killing a suspected informant.

An associate, Steven Felder, testified that **Stuckey**, driving a customized 1995 Chevrolet Impala, took Darbins to a house in Highland Park and shot him to death.

After the farewell kiss, Darbins was wrapped in a comforter and plastic sheeting and carted away in the trunk of **Stuckey**'s 1991 Caprice Classic, Felder testified. Darbins was dumped in the alley of the 9500 block of Russell in Detroit. Darbins was "Unknown Male 107" until he was identified.

Felder pleaded guilty to drug charges and was recently sentenced to 9 years in prison.

A message to the court

**Stuckey** gave a scary demonstration of his reach in 2001 when he walked into a visitor's booth at the Wayne County Jail where Felder was meeting his mother and brother. **Stuckey** wasn't on Felder's approved visitor's list but got in thanks to a compliant deputy. Felder's relatives quickly left and **Stuckey** stayed to deliver his message that Felder and his family were dead if he testified.

"It's a small world," **Stuckey** said as he explained Felder's situation to another associate, and "it can get real small fast."

On Tuesday, **Stuckey** had one last message for Rosen and the team that took him down.

"I ain't dangerous," he said. "I'm a man."

"I'm going to rely on the appeals court and the Lord to look out for me." **Thelmon Stuckey III**, after his sentencing Tuesday

Contact JOE SWICKARD at 586-469-4913 or [swickard@freepress.com](mailto:swickard@freepress.com).

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Caption: Trial evidence photos

**Stuckey** had a clothing line that also served as a warning. Judge Gerald Rosen told **Stuckey** he was one of the most dangerous men he's ever encountered. Orange minks and fancy cars were the norm for **ThelmonStuckey III**, who was sentenced to life in prison without parole for, among other things, the murder of his drug-dealing partner, who he then kissed and told "I love you - but you talk too much." **Stuckey** produced a rap CD and also wrote lyrics for rap songs. Many of the songs matched details of crimes **Stuckey** was accused of committing.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 1B

Index Terms: biography ; Thelmon Stuckey III ; crime ; homicide ; drug ; rap music

Record Number: 0000061887

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