

EPILOGUE

Hello. If you're here, then I assume that you've finishing reading *The Round of Your Life* and just want to know more details about certain events in the book. I sincerely appreciate your interest. As stated in my book, a person's attention is the most precious resource that one has to give, so the fact that you're here is not something that I take lightly or for granted.

For multiple reasons, I had left out some key details in my initial manuscript of *The Round of Your Life*. The two most frequent questions I would encounter revolved around the fate and outcome of the shooter who killed Tommy and the drunk driver who caused Lan's death. In short summary, one was convicted and the other one was acquitted. I will briefly discuss both events below, but before moving on with the details, I will make a brief disclaimer here that I tried my best to do a full research of court and other public records from the trial for historical accuracy. However, due to the amount of time that has lapsed from then to now, the information still made available to the public was extremely limited. Thus, I had to be intentionally vague on some aspects of the case since I would rather omit certain information than be inaccurate.

The decision to publish further details of the shooting was certainly not an easy one. I battled back and forth for several weeks before settling on a "yes". It was a struggle between trying to keep a positive tone and upbeat message for the book, versus fulfilling the need to address the many unanswered questions my readers had. I felt I could only do one or the other, but not both. At least, these were my initial thoughts- adding an epilogue wouldn't necessarily increase value toward my goal of making a positive impact on people's lives. However, the deciding factor to write one was the realization that one day, my kids and my grandkids would want to know the answers to these very same questions as well.

With that in mind then, let me jump right in with more details around the night of the shooting that killed Tommy and paralyzed my mother. It's probably easiest for me to start by noting the suspected shooter was arrested in his home state of Florida on December 14, 1995- about one month after the actual shooting. He was finally indicted in May of 1996, and the trial itself was held in Mobile County, Alabama in September of 1996.

Since I was not present at the scene of the crime when it happened, I came into the trial with as much of an open mind as possible, regardless of the fact it was my family who were the victims involved. The suspect deserved a fair trial, and I was fully open to giving him one. I certainly didn't want anyone being sent to jail if he was truly innocent of the hideous crimes that he was being accused of committing.

As I sat there and listened to both sides argue their case in court, there was no doubt in my mind by the end of the three-day trial that the defendant was indeed the trigger man who had shot and killed Tommy and paralyzed my mom. I am confident even the limited amount of circumstantial evidence detailed below will be more than enough to convince anyone with any bit of common sense of this. However, when the jury came back with a "Not Guilty" verdict a few days later, we were all shocked and stunned, to say the least.

I will now recap with as much detail as I possibly can about the shooting that night, and let the reader draw their own conclusions. Here is my mom's version of the events as described to the jurors in court: on the night of November 15, 1995, at approximately 1:00 a.m., my mom and Tommy were suddenly awoken from their sleep by a relatively short Asian male (around 5' feet tall) dressed in a green jumpsuit. He had somehow managed to silently break into their home. He had a gun pointing directly at Tommy, and made some shaking motions with his head and hands, directing Tommy to get out of the bed. Tommy immediately realized he was physically much bigger in size than the intruder, so he sprung out of the bed and tried to grab a hold of the gun to wrestle it out of his hands.

My mother immediately followed behind to help Tommy. The gun went off and struck Tommy directly in the abdomen, puncturing his abdominal aorta. This caused the internal bleeding which would ultimately lead to his death. Mom was struck by the same series of gunfire, with one bullet partially piercing her spinal cord, and another grazing both her hand and lower jaw areas. They both laid there motionless as the shooter tried to make his escape the same way he had come in: through the front door. He heard my sister Lan rushing down from the other end of the hallway and quickly fired another round of bullets to keep her at bay, long enough to make his escape. He did manage to make it outside to the front of the house, where the getaway vehicle had been waiting for him.

A few minutes after the estimated time of the shooting, and less than a mile from the scene of the crime, a Mobile police officer pulled over a suspicious looking vehicle parked at a dark and deserted, broken down gas station directly across the street from the entrance to my parent's neighborhood. The car was described as a black Acura Integra with a Florida license tag. The officer questioned the driver and its two other passengers (another Asian male and female) what they were doing and why they were stopped there at such an odd time of the night. The police officer later in court described the driver as a short Asian male approximately 5' feet tall and dressed in a green jumpsuit- matching almost exactly the same description my mom had made of the person who had shot her and Tommy.

The driver gave an alibi stating he stopped at that particular gas station because he needed to use a pay phone. He was trying to call his brother who lived in town in order to borrow some money from him. Phone records later showed he was not actually making phone calls to his brother, but to another number linked to a "person of interest". The officer's quick search of the vehicle came up with a gun that later matched the same type of bullet shells that had been fired on Tommy and my mom. This amazing coincidence alone should have been enough to implicate the suspect, but back to that night:

Before the police officer could finish running a background check on the suspect's driver's license and car tag, he got a sudden dispatch order to respond to an emergency 9-1-1 call regarding a shooting that had just occurred nearby (which would of course, turn out to be the shooting at my parent's home). He was forced to let the three suspects go in order to tend to the more urgent matter at hand. Whether it was normal police protocol or not, I couldn't tell you. The rest of the story that night has been well documented in my book.

It took the Mobile Police Department and its homicide investigators nearly a month to piece together all the evidence and track the same suspect back down in Florida to arrest him. By then the suspect, whom I will only refer to from here on out as "Q" for legal and privacy reasons, had completely shaven his previous full head of hair off in what they thought was an attempt to throw the investigators off his trail.

During the inquisition after his arrest, the suspect amazingly told the officers that he could not recall the name of the other male that

had been in the vehicle with him that night. Furthermore, he reported that the gun found in the vehicle that night had also been lost or misplaced. Amazingly, he didn't know what had happened to it.

Credit card records also showed he had been staying at a motel in Mobile about a week prior to the shooting. This was completely incompatible with his alibi that he had driven to Mobile specifically to visit his brother that week.

His story had so many other holes in it that did not add up at all. Detectives in the case suspected he was probably a hired "hit man" stopping at the pay phone that night to make a phone call to inform someone the hit job had been completed. This was the most logical explanation for why he would have been making a call from that specific pay phone so close to the scene of the crime instead of the two or three other pay phones that would have been closer to the exit had he truly been coming from that direction.

Again, some obvious questions that just didn't make any sense at all:

How could anyone not remember who was in the car with him at 1 a.m. in the morning? (The female was reportedly his girlfriend).

And how did he suddenly just lose or misplace the handgun that was in the car that night? The same type of gun that matched the bullet shells found in the house that night!

How could the juror explain away the fact my mom and Lan had both made the same exact descriptions of the shooter that matched that of the person the police officer stopped less than minutes later in the same vicinity of the crime, at such an odd hour of the night?

Crime Scene evidence showed there was no forced entry. How was the shooter able to enter through the front door so easily? Furthermore, all the phone lines had been cut so that emergency calls could not be made from the house. This was the reason why Lan had to run across the street to a neighbor's house to call me and the police. This was clearly the work of a pre-planned job of a hit man intended to kill quickly and silently.

In an earlier deposition, Lan had reported to the police that on the same day of the shooting, while driving home that morning, she had noticed a black Acura Integra coming out from the end of their cul-de-sac street. The car had caught her attention because the driver was an unrecognizable Asian male. This was highly unusual to her because they were the only Asian family in the whole neighborhood. She also noted the car had a Florida tag after looking in her rear-view mirror. However, because Lan unfortunately died in the drunk driving accident a few months after her deposition, her testimony was ruled to be inadmissible in court because she obviously could not be cross-examined by the defendant's attorneys.

What about motive, you ask? This was perhaps one of the possible reasons the jurors acquitted the guy, but as I had noted earlier, both the lead detective and district attorney in the case believed he was nothing more than a hired hit man. Unfortunately, they were unable to find enough of a money trail back to the person who may have actually hired him. There were several "persons of interest" they were tracking based on his phone log, but nothing they could reasonably prove in court.

Why would anyone be motivated to kill Tommy? Mom believes there were definitely a few people who had been extremely jealous of the financial success of their seafood shop, namely a rival competing business Tommy had been employed with just prior to him opening up his own business. Tommy was not known to be a very humble person by any means, so his braggadocios nature may have led to envy and hate from others, resulting in a possible motive behind the shooting.

For the safety of my sisters, my mom and I were the only two people on our side present in the court room for the entirety of Q's trial. On the other side, the defendant had his girlfriend and newly born infant child and several other family members show up in the courtroom every day to support him. I can see how this may have had prejudiced and influenced the jury's perception of the suspect and possibly their decision. In the end, I don't know all the reasons the jurors had for acquitting the man, but my family and I have all since moved on from the whole thing. It actually did not take us long, for we all saw no reason or purpose to hold on to such a negative event in our lives.

Even a conviction of the guy probably wouldn't have changed our lives very much. Mom would have still remained a paraplegic for the rest of her life, and I would still have had to shoulder all that new responsibility of taking care of my mom and sisters mostly by myself. That was where our energy and focus needed to be at the time, regardless of the outcome of the trial.

The same can pretty much be said for the case of the drunken driver that hit and killed my sister that one fateful evening on a Good Friday Easter weekend. In this case, we did get a favorable outcome as the defendant pleaded guilty without a trial in return for a lesser sentence of five years in prison as a first-time offender and several more years on probation. He was also ordered to make restitution to our family upon his release. However, the financial restitution from him is something we have not received nor plan to pursue. We have just simply moved on, and do not spend much time nor energy thinking about the man, other than for the writing of this book. He will certainly have his own guilty conscience to deal with for the rest of his life. I just hope that he had enough time in jail for remorse, to think about what he did, and hopefully change enough to never drink and drive and put anyone else's life at risk ever again.

This about sums it up for most of the major questions from the book. Of course, there were a few other minor ones here and there, such as more information and detail regarding my first return trip to Vietnam to visit my paternal grand-mother, but I am not sure if there is enough interest there to include it here in this epilogue. Perhaps one day I'll re-visit the topic and add more details on this site if there's enough interest, but for now, I wish to thank you all once again for taking an interest in my book and my family.

My main wish and hope is that you all received some personal inspiration on the power of being resilient from my story. I also hope that you're able to come up with some new perspectives of your round of life by reviewing your scorecard, and will be able to play the rest of it with a new sense of energy and appreciation that you may not have had before!

All the best,

Andre Huu