



Paul Vincent Cortez was born in March of 1980. He grew up in a rough, low-income neighborhood in the Bronx.



As a child, Paul worked tirelessly on his academics and artistic pursuits hoping to one day support his family.



In the sixth and eighth grade, Paul earned academic scholarships to the prestigious Buckley School in Manhattan, and Poly Prep Country Day School in Brooklyn: a feat extremely rare for a youngster from the Bronx.



At age 16, a Comparative Religion course piqued Paul's interest in Eastern scriptures. He was spiritually drawn to Buddhism and Hinduism. Paul then began to incorporate meditation and yoga into his life.



In 1999, Paul accepted a scholarship to Boston University's Theatre Arts Program, which only admits 40 students per year. He also performed in numerous Boston University theatre and dance productions.

Upon graduation from BU in 2002, Paul returned home to New York in hopes of chasing his musical and theatrical dreams.



In 2004, Paul formed a rock band named Monolith. The band performed at many hot Manhattan venues such as Arlene's Grocery, Don Hill's, and The Continental.

At the time of his arrest in December 2005, Paul was in the midst of auditions for the Broadway Show, Rent.



On March 23, 2007, an unimaginable, horrific injustice took place: an innocent man was sentenced to 25 years to life for a crime he did not commit. It is impossible for each of us to imagine the terror of being accused, tried and convicted of a crime for which we are innocent.



ABOUT US:

We are not long-time friends nor family members of Paul. We are not radical protesters, trumpeters, or hopeless romantics. We are hard-working, responsible, well-educated citizens who could not sit idly by and assume someone else would step in to help this innocent man fight for his life.

The Paul Cortez Defense Fund, Inc. is a not-for-profit corporation formed under the laws of the State of New York by a group of young professionals who were independently moved to action after witnessing Paul's terrifying ordeal.

Please visit, www.freepaulcortez.org to learn about volunteer opportunities and the latest news.

imagine

YOUR BROTHER

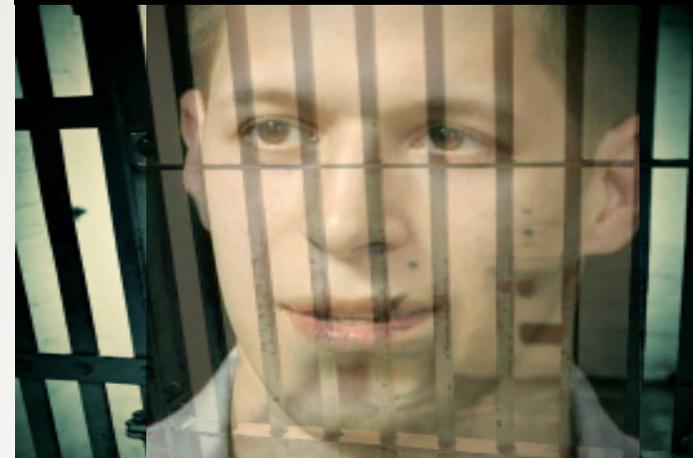
YOUR SON

YOUR HUSBAND

YOUR FATHER

YOUR FRIEND

condemned to an 8x6 cell



for a murder he absolutely did not commit

would you walk away?

www.freepaulcortez.org

THE MURDER

On November 27, 2005, Paul Cortez endured an unthinkable devastation: his girlfriend, Catherine Woods, was found murdered on the floor of her Upper East Side apartment.

NO EVIDENCE FOUND

The first three weeks of police investigation did not yield any relevant witnesses, DNA, surveillance videos, or any other illuminating evidence.

Authorities were left with no explanation for the gruesome death. Desperate for police to find Catherine's killer and hoping that even the smallest detail might prove illuminating, Paul freely opened himself to hours of interrogation.

AT THE STATION

Despite his candor, police informed Paul that because of his relationship with Catherine, he would necessarily be considered a prime suspect.

Certain that his innocence would inevitably clear him in the investigation, Paul continued to cooperate with police without legal representation. He endured six hours of intense interrogation, allowed his hands and body to be photographed, volunteered his DNA, and permitted the police to search his apartment without a warrant.

THE ARREST

Three weeks into the police investigation, Paul was arrested on grounds that a single bloody fingerprint surfaced at the crime scene. These "grounds" were not only shocking because throughout Paul and Catherine's thirteen-month relationship, he had left fingerprints throughout the entire apartment, but also because the bloody fingerprint on the wall went "unnoticed" for such a long period of time and after several investigation sweeps of the apartment.

DEFENSE ATTORNEYS

Believing in the legal system and naively thinking the truth would be sufficient to ensure his exoneration, Paul and his family underestimated the importance of adequate legal representation. Paul's assumption was that no attorney could botch the truth.

With extreme financial limitations, Paul made the mistake of his life by bargain-hunting for legal representation and underestimating the District Attorney's hunger for a conviction.



Defense Attorneys Laura Miranda and Dawn Florio

During the trial, Paul's attorneys failed to refute the most fundamental facts and flawed circumstantial case presented by the prosecution. Paul's attorneys were also cited for contempt of court for failure to appear for the first three days of the trial. Also, during her representation of Paul, Florio was indicted on drug smuggling charges and had the matter pending in the same court.

Consider some of the details that were not addressed in the limited defense of his attorneys:

- Despite such a gruesome murder, not one drop of Paul's blood was found in the apartment, and not one scratch was present on Paul's body when it was examined.
- Clumps of bright blond hair were intertwined in Catherine's fingers at the murder scene. Neither the District Attorney nor the defense attorneys ordered these hairs to be DNA tested.
- Catherine's roommate, a former boyfriend, discovered her body after he had been gone from the apartment for a short time. Many questions still remain about that.
- Paul's attorneys inexplicably did not call an expert witness to explain how Paul's fingerprint could have been found in the apartment. Had this been done, an expert could have explained that since Paul had been all over the apartment in preceding months, the blood could have splattered on any of his pre-existing prints.
- Despite the media circus, Paul's attorneys did not request a sequestered jury. Each night the jurors would return home where they could subject themselves to the sensationalized media stories, including extreme fabrications published daily by the New York Post about Paul and the "evidence."

The Media



In the days following the murder, "anonymous police sources" began to leak Paul's personal information to the tabloid media. So began the demonizing of Paul by the New York Post, Daily News, and other sensationalized media. Their stories, based on false allegations and fabrications, began to create the image of an obsessed ex-lover.

Paul's life was turned upside-down as these tabloid stories pervaded New York City. He was villainized and unable to go out in public. Reporters stalked him and his family. His photo was plastered across newspaper stories and television news programs. He felt tried and hung before he was even arrested.

Unfortunately, few reporters actually have/had credible sources or first-hand knowledge of evidence. And once an inaccurate statement is printed in one newspaper, it often spreads to subsequent newspapers or websites. As a result, many false allegations have been circulated.

Common Misconceptions

Video Surveillance

America's Most Wanted claims that there was video surveillance of Paul outside of Catherine's apartment just before the murder. This is 100% factually inaccurate. No such video ever existed.



Cell Phone Records

Many news sources printed that Paul "was in the neighborhood" at the of the murder, and must have been the killer because he called her several times prior to the murder, but never again after the alleged time of the murder because he knew she was dead.

Paul's cell phone records indicate that he placed a call to Catherine at 5:53 p.m. and then placed phone call to Catherine at 6:33 p.m. – during the theorized time of the murder. Catherine was scheduled to leave for work at 6:30 that evening. Catherine had earlier told Paul that she was contemplating skipping out on work that evening. However, since he did not hear back from Catherine, he assumed that she had, in fact, made the decision to go to work. Paul did not phone Catherine again because as a stripper, she was not allowed to keep her cell phone with her and was consequently unreachable until 4:00 a.m.

Paul made three phone calls from ten blocks north of the murder scene 13 minutes after the alleged time of the murder. If Paul made phone calls during the murder and shortly thereafter, one would assume that there would be some traces of blood from the very bloody, gruesome murder on the cell phone that Paul voluntarily handed over to police the next morning.

"The Killing Machine"

The police seized 22 journals at the time of Paul's arrest – a collection of thousands of love poems, music lyrics, sketches of comic book characters, cartoons and his deepest emotional feelings, which he had been composing since high school. At trial, the prosecutor isolated one song, "The Killing Machine," to show the jury that Paul was filled with anger and violent thoughts towards women. He ignored hundreds of soft poems about love and goodness and inflamed the jury by manipulating the journal entries. These lyrics and other journal entries were leaked to the media prior to the trial and helped fabricate the construction of Paul Cortez as a madman.

In actuality, the song, "The Killing Machine" was written in collaboration with one of Paul's band members during a period of artistic differences with the band's guitarist. The guitarist wanted the songs to get darker, and Paul's yoga-inspired persona seemed to contrast with the band's hard rock sound. The song was a commentary on the society's morbid fascination with sex and violence.

Size 10 1/2 Boots

A size 10 ½ bloody boot print, determined by the police to be a certain style of Skecher brand boots, was found at the crime scene.

Spencer, an acquaintance of Paul's, testified at the trial that he was out with Paul the night of the murder and that Paul was wearing Skecher boots. The District Attorney used this very suspect testimony in an attempt to further link Paul to the crime.

Six months previously, Spencer told "48 Hours Mystery" that he had no recollection of what Paul was wearing that evening, but in trial, fourteen months after the night in question, Paul's footwear came into greater focus.