

## John Rutherford Speaks!



I sincerely appreciate the support of the Justice Coalition during my campaign for Sheriff, and I am extremely grateful to everyone who helped me. My election victory was a humbling experience and I am honored to be able to serve as your Sheriff.

The Justice Coalition's strong commitment to protect the rights of crime victims, as well as helping to curtail criminal activity in our community, has had a profound impact on criminal justice in Jacksonville. I am proud to have enjoyed a positive and solid working relationship with the Justice Coalition as a member of its Board of Directors and I thank Sheriff Nat Glover for selecting me to represent him on the Justice Coalition Board during my tenure as the Director of Corrections.

I look forward to working with the Justice Coalition on an even closer basis. Together we can further address the needs of victims and their families. As your Sheriff, I will commit the resources and services of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office to aid in their recovery from victimization.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office cares about the people who suffer from the consequences of crime. We are working everyday to support victims of crime and their families and to protect others from becoming victimized. The Justice Coalition has demonstrated that it is completely committed to making our city a safer place and for that I am grateful.

By: Cathy Sumner, Editor – Dick Braendle, Chief Courtwatcher

Veteran police officers said it was the worst crime scene they had ever encountered!

On September 15, 1990, Marilyn Vest went out to dinner with a friend and returned around 11:30 p.m. Marilyn was a 59-year-old grandmother who lived alone in Mandarin. She was discovered brutally murdered by a neighbor the next morning. The telephone lines leading into the home had been cut, and a screen pushed out of the kitchen window to gain access. The Medical Examiner found that she had been viciously raped, stabbed some twenty-two times with a knife and scissors, had a broken jaw and was beaten about her head and face with several items, including a metal bar, a candleholder, and a glass bottle. The official cause of death was ligature strangulation by using a belt, an electrical cord and finally a web belt. Marilyn Vest was tortured and then murdered.

Gerald Murray and Steven Taylor, the perpetrators, were both found guilty in separate trials of first-degree murder, burglary of a dwelling, and sexual battery. Both were sentenced to death following jury recommendations of 11 to 1 and 10 to 2, respectively.

Since their convictions in the early 90's, Jennifer Coble, the victim's daughter,

and her family have already lived through three trials because of remands by the Florida Supreme Court, based principally on technicalities involving DNA evidence. Actually, the DNA evidence played a small part in Murray's first two convictions, as shown by the fact that in his third conviction this May, the jury heard no DNA evidence. A chronology of the court proceedings follows:

1. Steven Taylor was convicted and sentenced to death in 1992.
2. Murray was first convicted and given the death penalty in 1994.
3. In 1997, following a direct appeal, the Florida Supreme Court remanded for a new trial because of questions about the DNA testing.
4. The first retrial in 1998 ended in a hung jury, 10 to 2 for conviction, after some 12 hours of deliberation.
5. In 1999, a jury again convicted and recommended the Death Penalty 12 to 0.
6. In October 2002, the case was sent back for retrial the second time on direct appeal. Again, DNA testing procedures were cited as the principal reason.
7. Murray was convicted again on May 22, 2003, and in the penalty phase hearing on June 19th, the jury recommended death, 11 to 1 for the third time. Circuit Judge Charles Arnold conducted a most fair and efficient trial, bending over backwards in favor of Murray on close rulings.

Steven Taylor had one direct appeal, which was denied in 1994. A motion

for his collateral appeal was filed in 1995, but is still pending today. Collateral appeals involve such issues as whether his attorney performed effectively at trial and whether Florida death penalty law is constitutional.

Meanwhile, this family has to sit and suffer the pain of this never-ending nightmare, one appeal and one trial at a time. Is this justice? Yes it is, if you're the murderer on trial. But, if you're the family of the victim, this proves that the criminals have more rights than the law-abiding citizens of Florida.

Let's walk in the shoes of this family for



Marilyn Vest

Vest... Continued on page 2



Jennifer Coble with her children, mother Marilyn Vest and grandmother

By: Jennifer Coble

Alice "Marilyn" Vest, was many things to many people, but most of all, she was my Mom. I would like to tell you about her, what an impact her life had on my family, her friends, co-workers and what impact her death has had on this community.

My Mom was a businesswoman. She was the office manager at an accounting firm for the last five years of her life and was proud of her accomplishments there. She was a hard worker her whole life and each job meant more to her than just a job. She always went beyond the scope of her duties. Because of her love for animals, her colleagues adopted a Jaguar named "Onca" at the Jacksonville Zoo, which is a living memorial to her.

She was a neighbor, and a very caring one! Whenever her neighbors were away, she would keep an eye on things for them, feed their animals, pick up their mail, etc. They would do the same for her when she was away.

Mom was a gardener. She found so much joy in planting and watching things grow. She loved to mow, she could be found "push" mowing her 3-1/2 acre lawn.

My Mom was an active member of her church. She loved singing in the choir and did so for many years. She traveled with them

## Marilyn Vest was Loved By Many...

*I am so proud she was my Mom*

performing in various churches throughout the state.

She was a daughter. My grandmother depended on her so very much and like she and I, they were equally close as mother and daughter. My grandmother lived in Orlando. Mom was always there for Nana during each illness and surgery to care for her during recovery. As a result of mother's death, my grandmother at age 90 had to relocate to Texas to be near my uncle who could take up where mother left off. The tragic loss of her only daughter and best friend was something she never recovered from.

My Mom was a sister, the middle child with an older and younger brother. She was always protective of them, when it really should have been the other way around, but that never bothered her. At the time of her death, she was extremely involved in helping one of her brothers through a divorce and was on the phone long distance daily with him, giving encouragement and making sure emotionally he was ok. Right in the middle of this healing process, Mother was murdered, and he lost absolutely everything.

She was an Aunt. She was always "Aunt Marilyn" to my childhood friends as well as to her four nieces and three nephews, even a "second mom" to some of them. She aided both my

Loved by many.. Continued on page 7