

# texas tea newsletter

A home-brewed publisher devoted to exposing the secrets of the Texas Civil Commitment Center in Littlefield, Texas.



## in this issue

### What's Brewing This Month?

This month's tea includes two news articles; one that outlines the grisly murder of a convicted sex offender, and the other of the falsification of polygraphs. At the end of this issue, you will find an Insider News insert from a resident within TCCC.

### Want to Share Your Story?

Send any crucial documentation you want to share with us to [texasteanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:texasteanewsletter@gmail.com) or to P.O. Box 3226, San Marcos, Texas 78666 to allow us to enact change within the Texas Civil Commitment Center.

Greetings! Welcome to another issue of the Texas Tea Newsletter.

## let's spill the tea

By the Editor

We felt the need to reach out to try and set your minds at ease regarding concerns around family and peer involvement in meetings, protests, and events.

We, the two staff members of TTN, have only been contacted by one individual some time ago. They expressed their wishes to join our efforts and attend TCCO meetings but have yet to be involved. TTN has its own business email and Facebook page which are connected to our cell phones, ensuring that we get updates as soon as they are sent or posted. As you may know, we at TTN are also members of F.A.C.T.S.. But to the best of our knowledge, no one on anyone's behalf has reached out. Additionally, we cannot speak for the other members of the group and if they have knowledge of inquiries to join.

It isn't our intention to leave anyone out of our efforts or to take credit for everything. These meetings and trips come at an expense, as we must take off work, miss time with our families, pay for lodging, etc. We are actively sacrificing time and energy to better the situation for those in TCCC. So, please do not feel as though we are not on your side.

The hardest thing about this is that there are not instructions that come with making a change in the world. We hope that those of you that receive our newsletter keep your spirits up and know that we are here for you all. The tea is hot this month!



## Minnesota Man Allegedly Killed Sex Offender Using Moose Antler

By **Tristan Balagtas** with **People** | March 13, 2023

A Minnesota man who allegedly confessed to the brutal bludgeoning death of a convicted sex offender has been charged with second-degree murder, say authorities.

According to court documents obtained by PEOPLE, Levi Axtell was "covered with blood" when he turned himself in to police in Grand Marais, Minn., on Wednesday.

It's unclear if he has entered a plea to the charge. Axtell's defense attorney, Dennis Shaw, was not immediately available for comment.

Authorities say Axtell, 27, allegedly arrived at the police station and admitted to driving to the home of a 77-year-old man, entering the victim's residence, and hitting him over the head "15-20 times with a spade-style shovel" that he allegedly found on his front porch.

Axtell allegedly said he "finished him off" by striking him on the head several times with a large moose antler, the documents state.

While the documents referred to the victim as "LVS," the *Star-Tribune* identified him as Lawrence V. Scully.



Citing Cook County Sheriff Pat Eliassen, the outlet reports Scully was convicted of the sexual assault of a 6-year-old girl in 1979. In 1982, he was released from prison. Court documents state Axtell believed Scully had

"sexually offended children in the past" and observed him "parked in his vehicle at locations where children were present and believed he would reoffend."

According to the *Tribune*, Axtell is the nephew of former St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell.

"I love my nephew and my entire family, a family that has been deeply impacted by this heartbreaking incident," Todd Axtell told the paper. "I'm also thinking about the amazing Grand Marais community during this difficult time. I have always believed in, and supported, the criminal justice system — a system that will now do what it's designed to do."

Axtell remains jailed on \$1 million bond. He will reappear in court April 10.

## Lie Detectors Are Junk Science, But We Keep Using Them

By **Katrina Gulliver** with **Reason** | March 7, 2023

You've probably seen a lie detector in a movie or TV show, its stylus scratching an ink line across a scrolling page and jumping when the subject lies.

Sometimes the polygraph is presented as infallible; sometimes its scrutiny can be evaded. In a spy thriller, the hero might put a pin in his shoe: Stepping down on a sharp point, the theory goes, will cause sufficient stress to spike his blood pressure, disguising false statements. In other tales, talented operatives can simply meditate their way down to a state of calmness and therefore appear not to be lying.

Even in the early days of the lie detector, the device's advocates seemed dimly aware that simply being questioned by the police might make a suspect flustered or nervous and, thus, perhaps give the impression of being untruthful. Whose blood pressure wouldn't spike when faced with criminal charges? Sure enough, police quickly found that people

who were given polygraphs tended to panic. They also tended to confess: to all sorts of offenses, from card games to illegal alcohol, separate from the crimes under investigation.

Amit Katwala, a reporter at *Wired*, tackles the lie detector's early history in *Tremors in the Blood*. He focuses on its origins in Berkeley, California, in the 1920s and on some cases that both brought it to prominence and raised questions about its validity..

The machine attracted controversy right from the start. Katwala covers the case of Henry Wilkens, who was (probably) guilty of killing his wife but managed to get away with it. This was a front-page news story in San Francisco in 1923, and it was an opportunity for the lie detector to prove its value. Unfortunately for the prosecution, when he was subjected to a test in front of a crowd of onlookers, Wilkens passed. In the eyes of the polygraph boosters, the device had failed—or was failed, in being applied incorrectly. Wilkens was acquitted and the San Francisco Police Department swore off lie detectors.

The Wilkens case shows more about why police forces (and the public) *wanted* the lie detector, or something like it. A young woman had been shot to death. It was the sort of violent crime that was on the rise in the early 1920s, panicking suburbanites and leading authorities to grasp at any technique to catch perpetrators. People wanted answers and security.

In the preceding decades, new policing techniques had become standard (from mug shots to fingerprints) and the "science" of law enforcement had been growing apace. The lie detector looked like yet another leap forward. The era had already brought the telephone and the radio; what new magic would be next? It was the same mindset that led people to embrace the eugenic ideas of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso—that there were criminal "types," detectable by their appearance. If some people were just undesirables, the thinking went, wouldn't it be all the better to flush them out with scientific proof?

The only "lie detector" available up to that point was a sharply wielded



nightstick, so the mirage of an accurate, efficient, and peaceful truth finder held an understandable appeal. The same impulse led investigators to try and then abandon various versions of "truth serum" over the decades.

But the lie detector is just the 20th-century version of witch pricking, revealing a "truth" that isn't there. The National Academy of Sciences has dismissed the polygraph's validity, and the American Psychological Association says there is "little evidence" that it works.

The technology also quickly faced legal challenges. In *Frye v. United States* (1923), the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia held that any scientific methods deployed in the courtroom had to be widely accepted by experts, which polygraphs were not. But this inadmissibility didn't stop it from catching on, or from gaining acceptance in the public mind. Millions of tests are given in the United States every year, and it is used on anyone from suspected criminals by the FBI to suspected baby daddies by Maury Povich.

Those who use the test clearly believe it has some probative value—and at one remove, the threat of a polygraph might at least lead suspects to be forthcoming. In his 1991 book *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, David Simon detailed how Baltimore police fooled suspects by claiming a Xerox machine was a lie detector: They preloaded it with paper saying TRUTH or LIE and just hit the print button when their target answered a question. The rattled suspect thought the jig was up.

False confessions were an issue even in the earliest days of polygraphs, and nothing its developers tried could remove the risk. Disillusionment both with the technology's limits and with law enforcement's ability to solve crime is a thread through the lives of three major figures in Katwala's book: Berkeley police chief August Vollmer, Berkeley physiologist turned police officer John Larson (who invented the device), and Larson's teenaged assistant Leonarde Keeler (who later developed it further). Keeler became the machine's keenest

advocate, eventually hoping to patent and market it to law enforcement and civilian organizations. Nonetheless, even he came to see its flaws and potential for abuse.

That leaves the lie detector in a kind of gray area. Its advocates believe that it has now been sufficiently tweaked to be effective. Critics regard it as junk science. One of those critics is Katwala, who states firmly that the polygraph "does not work." In the final chapter, he explores modern lie-detecting variants, based on eye movement tracking or fMRI scans. None of these can be shown to really work either, but the market for them continues.

The underlying problems here extend well beyond the polygraph, affecting even legitimate technologies. Attorneys today talk of the "CSI effect," with fictional high-tech detectives shaping how the public expects the police to work with advanced, completely accurate technology. Juries like blue light photos and DNA evidence, the more "sciency" the better. As forms of supposedly scientific proof—such as handwriting analysis—have come under suspicion for being more speculative than we were told, the desire persists for a technique that reveals the truth in the human heart. The polygraph and its modern variants won't be going away any time soon.

## Insider News

### MTC – Parallel Offending?

By **Gerald B. Wilson**, a TCCC Resident

As most of us know who have gone through a Civil Commitment "Trial", one of the State Attorney's favorite attempts to sway the Jury is to say, something to the effect, that when it comes to "change", a Leopard cannot ever change his spots.

MTC has come under serious scrutiny for allegedly billing Texas (Tax Payers

millions of dollars for therapeutic treatment program hours in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Prisons for which they never provided to their Clients. Supposedly, they were substituting the actual therapeutic group hours with homework assignments pertaining to related subjects of the therapeutic group work. MTC would give the "Clients" credit for the hours they missed in group therapy by completing the homework assignments.

Hey, wait a minute!!! This sounds very familiar? I recall us, here at TCCC, for months and months, in place of going to our therapeutic groups, we got homework assignments in our housing areas during the COVID quarantines and also when MTC was short on Clinical Therapists and not able to provide therapeutic groups to the Clients at TCCC. Also, during these times, Clinical Therapists were "working" from home and not even present at the facility. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree!" It would appear that MTC gave the same "Training" to therapists in TCCC as they gave to the Therapists in TDCJ. I even recall documents coming to the housing areas to be signed by Clients to receive credit for attending "Study Hall" while Clients never went to the Study Hall nor even studied, but were still given the credit for it! There was no oversight and it appeared intentional!

Maybe there needs to be an investigating in MTC's acts here at TCCC of MTC over charging the State millions of dollars for therapeutic services that has not been given and falsifying documents that allege Clients received therapeutic treatment which they were never given?

I suggest that MTC in TDCJ or in TCCC, they can never change their stripes!

