

Justice for Woody Records

2001-2005

3 boxes (2.5 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 444



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The organization Justice for Woody (JFW) was formed in December of 2001 in the weeks immediately following the death of Robert "Woody" Woodward, a political and environmental activist, social worker, teacher, and mountaineer. JFW seeks not only to honor Woody's legacy, but also to advocate for a fair and independent investigation. The collection consists primarily of newspaper articles from various New England papers as well as Attorney General Sorrell's Report and an independent analysis of it.

Background on Justice for Woody

Robert "Woody" Woodward was a political and environmental activist, social worker, teacher, and mountaineer who lived throughout western Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont. On December 2, 2001, Woody entered the All Souls Unitarian Church in Brattleboro, Vermont and requested political asylum from the congregation. He claimed that the CIA was following him and that his life was in peril. Despite the fact that Woodward made no threatening moves or statements, his extremely agitated

state raised concern with some members of the congregation. Many adult members of the church voluntarily left while all of the children were escorted from the building. Woody then threatened his own life by removing a pocket knife and vowing to kill himself if people continued to leave the sanctuary. Several congregants mutually decided that calling the police would be an appropriate course of action, and the president of the church phoned a dispatcher.

During this time, a number of parishioners voluntarily remained in the sanctuary after Woodward's threat to commit suicide. Some of these witnesses say they stayed because they didn't want Woodward to harm himself or others; some say they chose to remain because they wanted to help him. Woody continued to try to provide evidence to support his claims, and volunteered to call friends who could verify his story. One of the witnesses who remained in the church dialed several phone numbers on Woody's behalf, but no one at these numbers answered. The last phone number dialed was a call to an old friend, Mary Rives, whose answering machine picked up and captured the final moments of the scene in the church.

Before the officers arrived at the church they were informed that an unidentified man who had a problem with the police was preaching gibberish and threatening 60-70 people with a knife, however, no briefs to the outside witnesses were made by the incoming officers. Eyewitness reports vary concerning the events that followed. Some witnesses claim that Woody lunged toward the officers, while others say they are unsure what provoked the police to use their weapons. All of the officers on the scene stated that Woody rushed toward Officer Parker with the intent to kill him, and that they fired their guns to prevent this. It is clear, however, that within the first minute of the arrival of the officers at the church seven shots were fired at Woody. Medics arrived and transported Woody to the hospital, where he died later that night.

The 18 eyewitnesses from the congregation submitted written statements on December 2nd. All but three of them were interviewed by police detectives before their departure from the church that day. The EMTs did not complete and submit their statements until December 21st. The police officers, however, were directed to return to the station before being asked to fill out statements on December 2nd. At the station, they were permitted to fill out their written reports in the same room. The information on Woody's medical treatment and autopsy results were never released.

The organization Justice for Woody (JFW) was formed in December of 2001 in the weeks immediately following his death. The group's original members included individuals from Vermont and Massachusetts who believed that Woody's shooting was both preventable and unjust, and that the investigation that followed was incomplete and biased. (JFW) seeks not only to honor Woody's legacy, but also to advocate for a fair and independent investigation. To that end, the group has obtained eyewitness evidence from the Attorney General's office following the April 2nd release of the Woodward Shooting Report exonerating the shooters. Using this evidence, JFW created its own report, which provided a detailed account of the shooting, and exposed aspects of a cover-up in Attorney General Sorrell's report. The JFW report was presented at a press conference in September of 2002, which was reported throughout the Vermont media. JFW continues as an active organization fighting for a full and fair investigation of Woody's death, and increasing awareness throughout the community.

Scope of collection

The records of Justice for Woody document the reaction to Woody's death from late 2001 to 2005. There is little in the collection that documents Woody's life apart from the circumstances that led up to his death. The collection consists primarily of newspaper articles from various New England papers as well as Attorney General Sorrell's Report and an independent analysis of it.

One of the phone calls made by eyewitness Michael Italia reached the answering machine of Keith Carlson and Mary Rives of Amherst, Massachusetts ("Woody Evidence" cassette tape). The first sounds heard on the message are "get out" and "handcuffs," amidst a commotion of several voices, including the shouts and moans of the fallen Woodward. The recording preserves Woodward's final attempt to relay the urgent message which drove him to enter the church in the first place.

A volunteer citizen group created an active website in order to call for justice in his case and to align with other organizations to stop the excessive use of force by police and other abuses of power by American law enforcement. The site includes the JFW interpretation of Woody's case as well as their beliefs about cover-up conspiracies. The site is located at: <http://www.justiceforwoody.org/>.

Inventory

Audio and Video Recordings

2001-2002

Box 2

Cassette: "News" Vermont Public Radio

undated

Cassette: "Woody Evidence"

2001 Dec 2

Phone message from Mary Rives answering machine recording the scene in the church during and after Woody was shot.

Cassette: "Woody Critical Resistance Radio"
undated

Cassette: "The Woody Tree"

2002 July 28

Cassette: "Woody/WFCR" Radio Broadcast

Compact disc: WFCR News: Justice for Woody

2002 Aug 8

Video: JFW Press Conferences

2002 Sept 24

Video: Community Forum on Woody Shooting

2002 Jan 20

Video: Woodward Family Lawsuit Conference and "Woody Woodward and the Police State"

2002 Jan 21

Analysis of Events, Summaries, and Reports

2001-2002

Box 1: 1

Chronology: Official Actions

2001-2002

Report: JFW Deconstruction of Sorrell Report

2002

Essay: "Practical Criticism"

2002

Report: Justice for Woody

2002 Sept 24

Biographical Information

2002, undated

Box 1: 2

Photograph: Robert "Woody" Woodward

undated

Chronology: Family Settlement History

undated

News Statement: Paul Woodward

2002 Jan 15

Community Reaction

2001-2003

Box 1, OS: 3

Newspaper clippings, pamphlets, petitions, and letters.

Conspiracy Reports

2001-2002

Box 1: 4

Legal Documents

2001-2002

Box 1: 5

Letters relating to the investigation, a proposed bill, estate complaint, and press release.

Mental Health Injustice and Support

2002-2005

Box 1: 6

Pamphlets, a survey, and a hearing statement.

Photograph: journalists and demonstrators

2003 Dec 2

Box 1: 7

Police Corruption and Brutality

1998-2004

Box 1: 8

Pamphlets, letters, and news clippings.

Printed Articles

2001-2002

Box 1: 9

Articles relating to the shooting of Robert "Woody" Woodward and to the investigation that followed.

Scrapbook

2001-2002

Box OS

Programs, news clippings, and photographs.

Song: "The Woody Tree"

2002

Box 1: 10

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Mary Rives and Keith Carlson, September 2005.

Processing Information

Processed by Laila Garsys, November 2005.

Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

Please use the following format when citing materials from this collection:

Justice for Woody Records, MS 444, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

Brattleboro (Vt.)--Police Dept.

Law enforcement--Vermont

Police brutality--Vermont

Police discretion

Woodward, Robert, d. 2001

Wrongful death--Vermont

Contributors

Justice for Woody [main entry]



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