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Paul Scrimo acquitted of murder in strangulation death of Farmingdale woman after federal appeals court tosses 2002 conviction



Paul Scrimo embraces his son, Anthony, at the Nassau County Courthouse in Mineola on Thursday after a jury acquitted him of murder in the strangulation death of Ruth Williams in 2000. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By **Grant Parpan**[@grantparpan](mailto:grant.parpan@newsday.com) Updated September 28, 2023 2:21 pm
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A Farmingdale man who spent more than 18 years in prison for a murder he said he didn't commit was found not guilty in Nassau County Criminal Court Thursday after standing trial for a second time.

Paul Scrimo, 66, who won an appeal of his 2002 conviction four years ago but was again tried for the alleged murder of Ruth Williams, said his acquittal gives him an opportunity to make up for lost time with his family.

"I missed all of the graduations, all of the weddings," Scrimo, a married father of three, said. "The kids always loved me. They never said 'Dad, you weren't here.' With my wife ... she's been hurt by this. But she's a good girl, and I'm gonna make it up to her forever."

The retrial began Sept. 18. Jury deliberating took about six hours Wednesday into Thursday, about the same amount of time the previous jury spent to arrive at the opposite verdict.

Scrimo was accused of strangling the 48-year-old Williams to death inside of her apartment in Farmingdale in the early morning hours of April 12, 2000, following an evening of playing darts and drinking with friends at downtown bars. Prosecutors at his trial in 2002 and this past week alleged Scrimo killed Williams out of jealousy and anger after she hooked up with a friend of his and made disparaging remarks about his wife.

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Scrimo has long maintained that it was the friend, John Kane, a key prosecution witness at both trials, who killed Williams.

Scrimo has admitted being in Williams' apartment with Kane after midnight on the morning she was killed, but said he left after picking up cigarettes and beer at a convenience store and dropping it back off to Kane. The prosecution's version of events has him getting angry shortly after returning from the store.



Paul Scrimo appears at the Nassau County Supreme courthouse in Mineola Wednesday during closing arguments in his second murder trial. Credit: Jim Staubitser

Scrimo said he initially lied to police investigators about what happened that night, as Kane admitted on the witness stand to doing as well, to protect his friend.

Scrimo said Thursday that "knowing who did it," made serving his 25-to-life prison sentence more difficult, but that he only blames himself for spending so much time at bars when he had a wife and kids at home in the apartment building where he served as a superintendent, just a couple miles from the murder scene.

"I put myself in a position to be wrongfully convicted," said Scrimo, who was 42 years old at the time Williams was killed. "If I was at home, back where I belonged, none of this would have happened."

Brendan Brosh, a spokesperson for Nassau County District Attorney Anne Donnelly, said in a brief statement, "We respect the verdict." The case was tried by Assistant District Attorney Daryl Levy of the Major Crimes Bureau.

Defense attorneys Earl S. Ward and Julia P. Kuan of Manhattan, who specialize in civil rights cases, said they believed in Scrimo's innocence from the time they read the Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals decision to overturn his conviction and first met with him while he was in Nassau County Jail waiting to learn what might happen to him next.

Scrimo was released from prison in 2020 as he awaited trial and has spent the past three years reconnecting with family, including three grandchildren.

"We always believed him," Ward said after the verdict was read. "We're just so delighted."

"This is justice for our client," Kuan said. "Twenty-three years too late."

Two of Scrimo's sons were among the nearly dozen supporters who applauded when the verdict was read Thursday. His brother and other family members could be seen wiping away tears. Scrimo looked at the jury as the verdict settled in and mouthed the words "thank you."

"He's gonna be here for the rest of our lives," said youngest son Thomas, who was 8 years old when his dad was arrested. "I can't put it into words. It really is great."

Scrimo's conviction was overturned on grounds that he was denied his right to a "complete defense" when he was barred from calling several witnesses at his first trial.

Those witnesses testified at the latest trial that Kane sold drugs, and one woman told the jury he once threatened to strangle her with a phone cord to settle a drug debt, a similar manner to which prosecutors allege Williams was killed.

A graduate of Farmingdale High School, Williams worked as a florist in Bethpage. She lived alone following a divorce 25 years before her death. Her family was not present at trial. Scrimo put his arms around his sons before leaving the courthouse Thursday. He said he spent "many years on a cot" thinking about the events of that night and the regrets he has over his decisions. Now, he said, he'll look toward the future, including the upcoming wedding of one of his son's, the first he's been free to attend. His lawyers said they plan to be there, too.

"Today, I'm a sweet old man who tends to spoil his granddaughters," Scrimo said with a smile.



By Grant Parpan

[@GrantParpan](mailto:grant.parpan@newsday.com)

Grant Parpan covers Suffolk County courts and federal courts for Newsday. A Long Island native, he joined Newsday in 2022.

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