

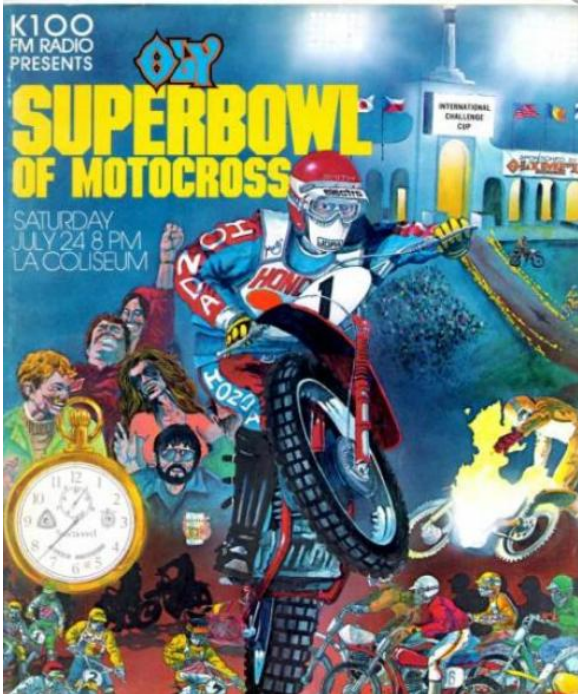
# Joe Scalzo's

## City of Speed and elsewhere

### MURDERER

#### Part One

“Let the spectator be king!” was what Michael Goodwin seemed to yell when he was inventing his “Super Bowl of Motocross,” the obscene burlesque which disgraced motorcycle motocross and made him a fortune. After blowing off his previous status as impresario promoter of rock ‘n’ roll concerts, including once holding the dying hand of the suicidal diva Janis Joplin, Goodwin had been open to fresh action and thought he was seeing it in stadium motocross. But he was wrong.



What his Super Bowl of Motocross was going to do instead was quite different: conviction for two of the cruelest, most cold-blooded, murders ever perpetrated, along with two life’s terms in prison. It was on March 16, 1988, when Goodwin was charged with setting a pair of paid assassins on Mickey Thompson, the Hall of Fame legend, and Trudy Thompson, Mickey’s young and

unlucky bride.

As the self-appointed friend of the fan and enemy of aesthetic tradition, Goodwin had moved professional motocross from the great outdoors to the cavernous insides of the Los Angeles Coliseum, so that Super Bowl spectators could sit down for a change, instead having to trample each other standing.



Goodwin left the trampling to his riders. Having his spectators seated and comfy, it was Michael’s ambition never to bore, confuse, or stretch their attention spans beyond endurance. So he’d had his headliners fighting it out on a confining and spectacular infield track where none of them could employ tactics other than the kamikaze.

Goodwin's obscene super-spectacle came close to selling out its inaugural; became standing-room-only with more obscene profits at all future Super Bowls; and money-mad Michael invested those profits in a lavish life style, including, among other trinkets, a Pacific castle smack in the middle of Laguna Beach's Top of the World, Laguna's most lush quarter. Then he began over-filling his castle with grabber exhibits, most strikingly the gigantic corpse of a trophy bear, a mammoth Kodiak he'd popped in the back – Michael had a thing for annihilating the biggest creatures of the kingdoms of the animal and the sea --and he also loved his den of big attack Dobermans.

And then Michael had next entered into a stadium-cross partnership with Mickey Thompson, which immediately deteriorated into The-Partnership-From-Hell. When Michael first brought to Los Angeles his Super Cross of Motocross, a lot us started naming it the Stupid Bowl of Motocross, but Michael was new to L.A. and we knew nothing about him. Mickey, by comparison, was so much a City of Angels racing icon that he required no surname.



Racing bit Mickey early. He was born in Alhambra, a suburb of blue-collar L.A., and these were some of the good and notorious things Mickey accomplished even before reaching his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday: Graduate from renegade boulevard dragracing into hell-roaring professional dragging and invent one of the world's most dangerous racing cars, the AA Top Fuel sling-shot; Opened and manage his very own drag strip, Lions; Instigated disasters racing in the Mexican Road Race and Indy 500; Used his baby blue stream-liner, the quad V8 ball-buster Challenger, to exceed eight miles a minute, 400 mph, on the salt flats of Bonneville; Gone to Baja California to get in on the mauling game of day-and-night. off-road racing, even launching his own sanctioning body; And, in the 1980s using dune buggies and pachyderm pick-ups instead of motocross bikes, play copy-cat with Goodwin, go into L.A.'s Coliseum and - once his four-wheeled monoliths had finished bashing themselves around on the stadium floor -- ramped them to the top of the Coliseum rim, and, seven stories high,

catapulted them into space to crash-land onto the Coliseum bottom.



Mickey's formula for stadium success, was, much like Michael's, a winner, attracting enormous crowds. But the costs of stadium-sport were huge. Trucking in all those tons and tons of sod to construct a stadium racing track was causing Mickey and Michael to spend huge. So

they made the terrible decision to join forces and together go over Niagara Falls in a promotional barrel.

Odd that Mickey, vain about believing he could forecast the future, wasn't clued into the creature he had teamed up with – both Trudy and his baby sister Colleen had implored Mickey to avoid Michael Goodwin, because maintaining civilized behavior with other human beings was next to impossible for Michael.

“Obnoxious” and “jerk” were the two most frequently - overheard appellations describing Michael, who could be frightening, but not to Mickey, himself a disciple of the punch-first-and ask-questions-later academy. Unconfirmed Thompson family lore even had Mickey, following his daughter's abduction to Death Valley by the family of Charles Manson; beating Charlie senseless ; then dragging home his rebellious daughter.

And so, in no time at all, Mickey concluded that Michael was a pathological crook who was gulling him out of his rightful share of stadium gate receipts. And lobbed a big, fat, juicy, lawsuit at Michael. Michael, quite naturally, denied he was a crook - denied it most heatedly and profanely. Then the two of them did a swan dive into deepest lawyer swamp.



Both began hiring the most celebrated sharks going, to wit: high-priced barristers and solicitors; savage bulldogs and ambulance-chasers; and blood-hungry predators. The marathon waltz of the sharks morphed into a legal imbroglio that lasted four vicious years without getting anywhere.

Michael's mouth seldom was still, and he couldn't stop trashing Mickey to anybody who'd listen. He and Mickey made natural enemies because both of them really knew how to hate. Michael on Mickey: "Mickey Thompson doesn't know who he's fuckin' with - Mickey is fuckin' destroying me - Mickey is fuckin' trying to take everything I've got - I'm going to take out that fucker

Mickey!"

Mickey delineating all his enemies and Michael expressly: "I'm slavishly loyal to friends; but with enemies I know just one way to be, and that's ruthless!" Mickey escalated the rotten feelings by hiring away some of Michael's most choice help; he even set up for business as Mickey Thompson Enterprises in Michael's old offices in Anaheim Stadium.

**Who was winning all the litigation? Everything was so knotted up in paper work and endless legalese it was impossible to say. Mickey's sharks claimed that Mickey was, because Michael had declared personal and business bankruptcies. But Michael's sharks responded that Michael hadn't surrendered a cent so the winner had to be Michael.**

**The Thompsons lived in Bradbury, an exclusive gated compound on the western flank of the remote foothills of the San Gabriels. On the hideous dawn of March 16, 1988, when Mickey and Trudy had come out of their home preparing for the 45-minute commute to Mickey Thompson Enterprises, they found, standing in their driveway, waiting to assassinate them, a set of killers wearing hoods and carrying backpacks full of murderous weapons.**

**Realizing what was about to happen, Mickey had pleaded - his neighbors had overheard him - "Don't hurt my wife!" - but when Trudy had tried escaping down the driveway in a Thompson car, one murderer caught up to her and after shooting her more than once, delivered the coup de grace out in the street.**

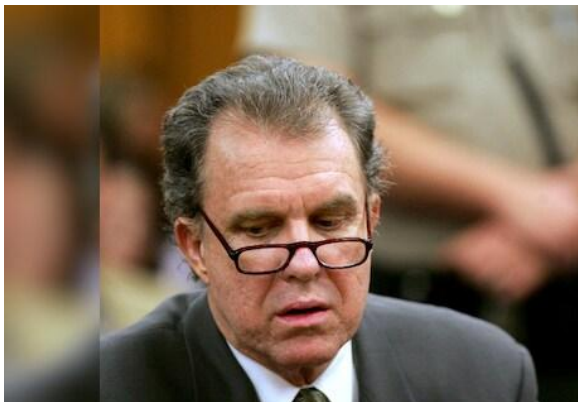


**Mickey received the same treatment, including the coup de grace, but, after what had already happened to Trudy, perhaps had welcomed it. The Thompsons had been deeply in love.**

**While a big German Shepherd, a pet of Mickey's and Trudy's continued barking inside the Thompson home, the murderers, their deadly mission completed, pedaled away on a pair of escape ten speeds. Meanwhile, upon listening to all the gunfire, a neighbor, who was a friend of Mickey's and Trudy's who also kept firearms, started up his SUV and chased after the killers, who escaped anyway, never to be seen or heard from again**

## **Part Two**

**Eighteen years afterward, when Michael, after pleading innocent on all counts, was escorted into Department E dressed in irons and facing maximum sentencing for double charges of murder, Alan Jackson, the lead barrister for the prosecution, addressed the jurors of People vs. Michael on the purported state of Michael's Intelligence Quota:**



**"Ladies and gentlemen," he had patiently explained, "Michael Goodwin is many things, but he's not stupid." As I would be every morning and afternoon of People vs. Michael Goodwin, I myself had been sitting inside Department E when Prosecutor Jackson had delivered his**

**opinion of Michael. And I'd almost jumped out of my chair in disbelief. Michael Goodwin not stupid? The prosecutor must have been being falsely flattering. He couldn't have been being serious, could he?**

**Assume, purely for the sake of argument, that you were somebody whom just about everybody in greater L.A. seriously suspected of orchestrating the plot of a sensational double massacre. Might anything have been more stupid – imbecilic – than skipping American jurisdiction and parking out in far international waters?**

**Off the Florida coast, close to some banana republic, Michael's ill-fated Caribbean canoe had gotten into some type of ship wreck. He'd abandoned her. Upon returning to L.A., and being tracked down by TV and newshound snoops, all demanding to know why he'd been in hiding for so long, his too-quick reply was that he'd been fearful that somebody out there might have had another murder-for-hire hit going, this one targeted at him.**

**Having already talked for too long, Michael had gone on and on, complaining that everybody had been libeling and slandering him for being the bloody executioner of Mickey and Trudy, complaining that he was innocent, totally innocent. And then he went on to excoriate Mickey at length for all his lawsuits; for being a poor partner; and being a washed-up old man.**



**Colleen Campbell, Mickey's sister, WAS Mickey. Mickey and Trudy dwelled in select Bradbury? Colleen and her husband Gary had maintained similar gated digs down south in San Juan Capistrano, on the posh seashore. Mickey once managed his very own Xmas tree drag-racing strip? Colleen once managed an entire community; Capistrano's first gal mayor.**

**As the 20<sup>th</sup> century arrived, Colleen become deeply concerned that the murder spoor had grown stale; the sheriff's investigation had grown stale; and Michael Goodwin still hadn't been incarcerated!**

**So, as Mickey himself might have done, she'd started taking matters into her own hands to shatter the stalemate Her term as Capistrano's mayor had acquainted her with powerful friends, including big politicos and major players from law enforcement. So she'd gotten appointed to state and Federal commissions; her influence might even have extended to the White House. And, being media savvy, she saw to it that Michael Goodwin's scowling puss became a staple on network crime shows.**

Michael felt the heat, and knew that Colene was all over him; had private gumshoes digging up dirt that the sheriffs missed; had political big shots and law bulldogs eye-balling him.

And Colleen's big manhunt reached the pay off, as Colleen had known it would, when Michael, who'd paid a visit to a neighborhood savings & loan to apply for bankruptcy relief, and requested and received a six-figure accommodation, landed up to his neck in trouble all over again. When the S & L changed its mind; decided that Michael had been fibbing on his credit application; and had him sentenced to a vacation of 30 months in the closest calaboose.

Colleen, naturally, was there to gloat – Michael had seen and purportedly snarled at her – although she'd been expecting a far stiffer sentence. To her great fury, Michael soon got paroled from his slammer dungeon and hit the bricks afresh.

More years passed. Colene went back to her manhunt of Michael, but now she was on her own, because even Trudy's family members had abandoned the hunt. Ring! Went my telephone one evening. It was one of my scribbler friends from several time zones away.

“Hear about Michael Goodwin?” “No.” “Well, what kind of bird doesn't sing?” “He's in jail for Mickey and Trudy?!” “Colleen finally got him.”

I telephoned Colleen asking if there'd been an estimate of the length Michael's trial and she replied that she'd been told about two or three. “Weeks?” “No, months.” I groaned.

### Part Three

Now what I sensed was coming was another of those cultural scandals which regularly turned Los Angeles into a national – international – embarrassment: A Los Angeles High-Profile Murder Trial! People vs. Michael Goodwin, in other words, was going to be an inquisition lasting two to three interminable months, a six-fold horror show:

- 1) Over-crowded hemicycle buzzing with a matched set of ego-tripping prosecutors; -almost always smug males with over-sized but under-used brains, twirling their briefcases like shillelaghs, and confronting an opposition matched set of flamboyant flammers working the razzle-dazzle for the defense;

- 2) An outrageous fiasco marked by all sides clouding the issues by trying to lead their witnesses and asking carefully coached questions that they already know the answers to;



3) Endless extrapolating, bull-crapping, and flap-doodling with both prosecution and defense fiercely insulting each other in a swamp syntax of fantastic legal jargon well spiced with bizarre utterances in a dead language comprehensible only to the prosecution and defense;

4) One side or the other deliberately gumming up the works howling "Objection!" to the conflict's umpire, its honorable judge, just when things are were becoming interesting;

5) A heavy fog of endless and clumsy pontificating to confuse and mislead the dozen jurors;

6) All the judicial buffoonery and legerdemain achieving horrific conclusion with the jurors so perplexed and beaten down that they hang or vote to

acquit the high-profile defendant.

I wondered: Had Colleen really considered all the ramifications and consequences of dangerous No. 6?

#### Part Four

In any event, when I headed over to Pasadena, to the trial preliminaries, I found Department E's courthouse, where *People vs. Michael Goodwin* was to be adjudicated, to be nothing but a gray and grim lump of concrete and smoked glass, half a dozen forlorn floors steep, with Department E on floor five, And these trial preliminaries were grueling legal powwows and incredible judicial side-shows. All the indictments, affidavits, sidebars, depositions subpoenas, pleadings, and rebuttals had me transfixed.

The best thing about attending all of Department E's prelims was that they let me get to know the power-players of *People vs. Michael Goodwin*, and there were plenty of them, with the Honorable Judge Teri Schwartz ringmaster. The court's Madame Torquemada, she had a train of obedient slaves attending to her every need: variously clerks, assistant clerks, a bailiff, and a terrific little court reporter who, dark eyes bulging, slapped the keys transcribing 350 words per minute.

Judge Schwartz, however, wasn't the only one with a slave team of caterers, Arriving daily with their own harem of fierce-looking young women were two well-blooded sharks from L.A.'s District Attorney's office, one the dashing prosecutor Jackson and the other his elder teammate Patrick Dixon. Their slaves came clattering into court on stiletto heels pulling legal

trolleys, fetching briefs, and squabbling among themselves to supply their sultans with everything from bottles of mineral water to ego massages

With all his Super Bowl income long gone, and existing in a state of deepest bankruptcy, Michael couldn't afford a defense lawyer of his own so, for relief, had turned for relief to the county of L.A.'s defense lawyers. The defense advocate assigned to Michael as his protectoreaux was Elaea Saris, a tiny woman in a court full on tall men, including Michael.

One of the trial's big moments for me was the first morning when Judge Schwartz's bailiff escorted Michael, all trussed up in iron bangles, and dressed in the scrubs of Guantanamo orange, into Department E. He was just off the prison bus from Twin Towers, and he looked like a broken homeless man: some sad fellow with untrimmed ravaged hair.

He was a new Michael Goodwin from the old one who, from all his hunting and spear-fishing and massacring of wild life in general, had been layered with muscle, plus bronzed from Laguna's sun. But this new Michael Goodwin was stooped and packing a gut; his complexion was as gray as Department E,s; his lower back was imprisoned in brace because he'd sprained it; he was limping because he'd jammed a knee; and he was wearing granny glasses because one of his eyes had blown out. Michael also was missing choppers – Twin Towers offered no dental plan. making his smiled a macabre Jack-'O-Lantern grin. I wondered, too, if he might be medicated. Michael supposedly had high blood-pressure.

Legal wrangling lasted the rest of that morning, until Judge Schwartz called a noon recess, and Michael, Colleen and Gary, and myself, all evacuated Department E to eat lunch, each in our preferred way:

After holding up his wrists for the bailiff – his name was Darren Stevens, and he was a tough ex-cop -- to re-cuff them, Michael disappeared into the felony holding tank where the prisoner luncheon menu always was the same, peanut and jelly on white, eat it or don't;

Inside their parked car out on the courthouse lot, Colleen and Gary went the economical brown bag route because bringing to justice. Michael Goodwin had been hard on their pocket book;

And I, in turn, rode the elevator down two floors to Sharon's Good Eats, the court cafeteria, where the coffee was hot and strong, and you were allowed to drink as much of it as you wished. But I'd gotten myself into a state of high excitement! People vs. Michael Goodwin was to begin at last at ten o'clock A.M. the coming Monday!



Judge Schwartz's frozen sneer was preparing to slither to life; bailiff Darren looked ready to exercise his powerful set of lungs; and, from my front row center perch in the peanut gallery, I scribbled down what Department E looked like the morning *People vs. Michael Goodwin* began.

It was the same dismal and decaying hole of dilapidation it had been throughout the prelims. Maintenance budgets throughout L.A.'s justice system were stark, and there'd been one bitterly cold session when everything had been as frosty as Judge Schwartz's sneer, and you could nearly see your own breath. And while the rest of us froze and grumbled, our sadistic magistrate kept a small private heater hidden behind her bench, meanly warming herself alone.

Meanwhile, back in Department E during that freezing prelim, the heat had finally come on. Brawny bailiff Darren, with his fists and hard cop eyes, at last had grown fed up and, throwing up his beefy arms in despair, hauled off and landed a smashing left hook to the system's neurotic thermometer, and the antique appliance had grudgingly begun warming Department E with waves of tepid stale air.

So I could better snoop on all of *People vs. Michael Goodwin's* major players, I tuned my ears to so fine a pitch that they no longer were ears at all but more like sound-trapping vacuum cleaners. And I was fortunate to have three of the antagonists I rated most important seated so close to me I almost could reach out and touch them.

At the defendant's table, barely three feet away, with his back to me, sat Michael. Throughout the prelims, dressed in his bangles and Guantanamo scrubs, he'd badly needed shaving and a haircut. But now he'd had his shave and a bad haircut. Some friends of his steadfast public defender, Elana Saris, had donated a threadbare suit. Somebody else had coughed up used treaders and a second-hand necktie.

One peanut gallery row behind me sat Colleen and Gary Campbell, who were always dignified, quiet, well-dressed, and sitting patiently and waiting the revving up of the prisoner carriage to start Michael on his one-way safari to Wasco. Why Colene and Gary always looked so cool and composed I never understood. All the decades of chasing Michael, plus their daily round-trip haul of pulverizing freeway deadlock, from Capistrano to Department E, five days a week ought to have exhausted them. Then things had begun for another morning.

Michael's mouthpiece, public defender Elena Saris, already had manifested courtroom savvy and courtroom savvy. She'd gone head-to-head with prosecutors Jackson and Dixon, once had nearly got into it with Judge Schwartz, and, second-rated only to Michael Goodwin, had become the enemy most loathed by Colleen. Catching me chewing the fat with Elena on this particular morning. Colleen had erupted, "Why are you foxing this broad? She's a little wuss!"



To Colene's great disappointment, trial attendance had been falling off and today's session drew another sparse audience. Throughout its opening days, People vs. Michael Goodwin was packing in talking-head pundits from TV as well as a celebrated snoop from L.A.'s last big newspaper. Now the action seemed to have moved elsewhere; the mainstream no longer was present; and some mornings and afternoons the peanut gallery was so vacant that I saw nobody I recognized except Colleen and Gary.

Meanwhile, every day, Jackson, the lead prosecutor, continued berating Michael with highly destructive circumstantial evidence because it was what he got paid for. As they'd been programmed to do, all of the witnesses but one delivered devastating testimony. The exception was the female catastrophe with four aliases who was being hunted by several states as a prison escapee and looking to cut a sweetheart deal with the prosecution in exchange for testifying. During prolonged, hostile cross-examination, Elena Saris forced the catastrophe to concede that Michael had truly loved his dogs, those violent attack Dobies.

### Part Seven

The next morning in Department E brought big doings: having at last run out of subpoenaed witnesses who could lash out at and verbally assassinate Michael, and with their circumstantial evidence stacked in drifts, the prosecution team of Jackson and Dixon announced the People's case against Michael Goodwin was concluded, and I imagined I saw their harem enjoying a frenzy of celebration.

### Part Eight

It would have cost me my health had Colleen caught me again foxing Public Defender Saris, and I knew it. But on the morning she was to open her defense I invited her to early morning coffee at Sharon's, in hope of getting her to preview what theories she'd be hypothesizing for Judge Schwartz's approval. Well, tell me she did, and she made my hair stand on end:

**Mexican drug lords for whom Mickey had been transporting product from his Baja 1000s into L.A.; or professional hitters hired by loan sharks from whom Mickey had borrowed big and couldn't repay; or a gang of hoodlum bikers connected to the killers of Colleen's and Gary's son who'd been sent to prison on account of Mickey's testimony...**

**And just that same evening, a website called Justice on Trial was offering another scenario which even Public Defender Saris found ridiculous: Mickey and Trudy had been assassinated by rogue elements of the Israeli military! It seemed that Mickey had hoodwinked the Mossad with orders of Mickey Thompson High Traction Tires that were defective. Huh?**

### **Part Nine**

**Public Defender Saris was a short woman and Department E was a courtroom full of tall men, led by Prosecutors Jackson and Dixon and another short woman, Judge Schwartz. Public Defender Saris seemed skilled at her job, but her savvy and intelligence weren't getting her anywhere because the instant she voiced any of her theories Jackson and Dixon both would bay, "Objection, your honor," and then Public Defender Saris and the two prosecutors would parade to her honor's bench where Judge Schwarz always seemed to uphold the prosecution's objections**

### **Part Ten**

**Colleen had called it correctly. She'd predicted that People vs. Michael Goodwin was going to take two or three months and so it had, I forget which. "I am TERRIFIED," Public Defender Saris told me on the day Department E's verdict was to be delivered.**

**The courtroom filled to capacity, then over-filled some more. Department E hadn't been this packed since People vs. Michael Goodwin opened Talking-head pundits, sharp-shooter newshound scoops all were here, and more.**

**And here had come Judge Schwartz and her bailiff Darren, bringing with him Michael, who wasn't wearing his standard Jack 'o 'Lantern grin but wasn't appearing bugged, either**

**Jackson and Dixon were standing side-by-side, and Public Defendant Saris and Michael Goodwin were standing side-by-side. Michael's back was to me. Public Defendant Saris was facing me. The jury door opened and in filed the jurors.**

**Public Defendant Saris looked them over. She'd been smiling but the smile faded. She sharply looked up at Michael to whisper – I could read her lips clear from the peanut gallery**

– “We’re dead.” Judge Schwartz was either going to cut Michael Goodwin free or memorialize him into maybe L. A.’s first high-profile murder celebrity – think O.J., think Robert Blake -- sentenced to two life terms without parole.

**Judge Swartz spoke: “Michael Goodwin, the verdict is guilty.”**

Judge Schwartz spoke so fast that at first I thought I thought it was some new bit of legal lexicology. One row behind me in the peanut gallery I overheard Colleen gasping in ruthless revenge and vindication.

Michael Goodwin later had summed up his opinion of the verdict; “I can’t apologize because I’m not guilty of this crime,” he pontificated, continuing, “and this may be a never-ending story because I will not let this go until the day I die.” Colene had riposted. “Well, let’s hope he does die.”

**Colleen WAS Mickey.**