

Islands Rocked

Thomas heard a loud "BANG."

Then another.

He couldn't believe it might happen.

The situation started innocently.

A box placed on a street corner.

Then another on a porch.

The American ambassador's home.

Thomas was a 23-year- Cayman Island Police Force veteran.

His mind SPUN.

Injuries?

Damage reports?

Suspects?

And what about home?

Any injuries or damage there?

WORD at the docks and bars was the explosions were "gang-related."

The ambassador's daughter Cayla was wayward, and a gang member.

Interviews revealed small-time and big-time people.

Thirty-seven-year-old-Luigi Lee was the first Interviewed.

Lee tightly ran organized crime in the islands.

He wasn't amused about being brought in.

"Fifth Amendment here, Fifth Amendment there," Thomas noted.

"WHAT A PAIN!"

Lee's eighteen-year-old son Rono was devoted.

Ambitious.

Aggressive.

Rono was his father's "right-hand man."

He would inherit the business on Luigi's death.

And oh yes, gangs.

Gangs permeated poor youths' lives.

Gang leaders had money.

Regular gang MEMBERS didn't.

Identifying gang leaders wasn't difficult.

They worked on fishing boats.

Fishing boats needed to be dock-side by dark.

Cars awaited gang leaders to take them to meetings, on errands, etc.

Thomas invited Clare Jones to join him walking the blast sites.

Jones was the islands' first-ever female prosecutor.

She had extensive experience prosecuting gangs.

Thomas (walking the street corner blast site) saw something curious.

A small box piece.

From THAT box?

Who knew?

Thomas and Jones collected it.

They built massive evidence.

Cayla was an "up and comer" in the islands' gang "world."

Her father wasn't pleased she was next to be interviewed.

Cayla was summoned to police headquarters.

She claimed to know nothing about the explosions.

Cayla said a shoeprint that matched hers was made days before while shopping.

She didn't win any points for credibility.

BUT A CASE?

Thomas and Jones (for now) shook their heads.

Back to the proverbial drawing board.

A New York-based forensics firm was brought in to finish collecting and assembling the box pieces.

American Forensics' work was tedious, but critical.

People finding pieces were offered \$50 per piece to return them.

Some pieces had become lodged in a large, heavily-wooded tree.

A "cherry picker" boom was used to pluck them out.

One company employee said he was tempted to use childhood tree-climbing skills.

The boxes started taking shape.

Fingerprint results would come from American Forensics' traveling lab.

MARCH 19: the fingerprint report arrived at police headquarters.

The contents of which could determine if someone spends life in prison.

Or even lead to an execution.

One person (after all) had been killed in one explosion.

Jones studied her copy in her office.

The report blindsided Thomas and Jones.

Fingerprints matched those of forty-five-year-old boat captain William Buckley.

Buckley's original prints came from a 2004 shoplifting conviction.

Research on Buckley's boat (the Santa Maria) showed he was behind on payments.

Thomas and Jones planned to argue Buckley was pressured by a gang member.

Fishing output for most boats in the islands was down.

Buckley was a slick con man.

But dealing with someone he couldn't fool.

Thomas and Jones continued interviews.

At least one key one remained: BUCKLEY.

He was also summoned to police headquarters.

Buckley was short and stout, with a perpetual cigar.

He also insisted knowing nothing about the explosions.

Which Thomas and Jones also didn't believe.

But the fingerprints?

How to explain them?

Where was he when the explosions occurred?

OBJECTIVE: get Buckley to talk.

And fast.

Fingerprints were the thread.

Buckley said he handled various boxes on his boat.

Thomas and Jones didn't doubt that.

But again the fingerprints.

Fingerprints meant they had a case.

"BOMBING CASE CHARGES FILED," a newspaper headline blared.

"Documents filed in island Superior Court say forty-five-year-old William Buckley is accused of

one count of manslaughter and multiple counts of destruction of public property in connection with..." the story began.

"An April 1 trial date has been set."

Thomas read the headline and accompanying story.

The jig is on, he thought.

Finding a fair jury wouldn't be easy.

Virtually everyone in the islands was affected or had an opinion.

Defense attorney James Simon sought a change of venue (location.)

The trial was delayed 60 days.

To give judge John McCallister time to rule.

On and on.

Tongues wagged.

May 1: McCallister granted the change of venue.

The three-day trial was moved to St. John (Virgin Islands.)

Upcoming trial date: June 1.

OPENING ARGUMENTS at the stately old St. John courthouse were punctual.

They started at one p.m. sharp.

The jury was seated.

They ranged from a fifty-eight-year-old truck driver to a thirty-five-year-old college professor.

Jones argued Buckley's fingerprints were irrefutable.

She gave a list of prosecution witnesses and stressed what the prosecution would try to prove.

Defense attorney Simon gave his witness list .

He spoke of undermining the prosecution case.

Luigi Lee was the opening prosecution witness.

Jones questioned him INTENSELY about tensions between gangs and organized crime.

Lee was sharp and detailed.

Accept for invoking the "Fifth Amendment".

Thomas and Jones hoped that would reflect badly on the defense.

Rono followed his father.

Jones questioned what he and his father had learned about the investigation.

Next prosecution witness: Cayla.

Did she work on Buckley's boat?

Or if not, did she know who did?

Prosecutors sought to prove Buckley carried and placed the boxes.

Did anyone pressure him?

Yes, she worked there, Cayla said.

Proving she pressured him?

THAT would be another matter.

Her duties were bookkeeping and helping secure the net.

"Bookkeeping" meant she knew enough to pressure.

But did that mean she did?

She testified for hours.

Charles Phillippi led the American Forensics team assigned to the bombing.

He described how the box pieces were assembled.

Along with the matching fingerprints.

All involved learned of fate or God's hand.

Buckley was the only defense witness.

He eagerly sipped water while fielding questions.

Buckley had an alibi.

He SWORE he was at sea when the explosions occurred.

Buckley insisted he too could hear them—even three miles out.

Would the jury be swayed?

Prosecutors prayed not.

Tension grew.

Buckley's testimony entered trial day three.

Jones resumed arguing that Buckley had been pressured.

Boat payments.

How far behind was he?

The jury learned he was six months behind.

Risked forfeiting the boat.

And sure enough.

A gang member who worked the books reported that.

Buckley testified the gang member was Cayla.

Some called it THE BOMBSHELL THAT REALLY WASN'T A BOMBSHELL.

The beginning of the end?

Jury deliberations began.

The hours ticked by.

A verdict came when prosecutors were eating dinner.

Guilty.