

= Joseph Mitchell Parsons =

Joseph Mitchell " Yogi " Parsons (July 22 , 1964 ? October 15 , 1999) was an American who was executed for the August 1987 murder of Richard Lynn Ernest . Parsons hitched a ride with Ernest in California and stabbed him to death at a remote rest area in Utah . After assuming Ernest 's identity , Parsons continued to insist that he was Ernest when he was later arrested .

Parsons , who called himself the " Rainbow Warrior " , pleaded guilty to the murder . During his sentencing hearing , Parsons said that he killed Ernest to fend off a homosexual advance , but was unable to present any evidence to support this claim in his defense . The jury sentenced him to death . In 1999 , Parsons stated that " it 's time to move on " and dropped his appeals , allowing his execution to proceed . Discussion was later raised whether " Rainbow Warrior " was a reference to homosexuality or Parsons ' favorite auto racing team .

Parsons chose to die by lethal injection , and he shunned attention , describing himself as " Utah 's forgotten inmate " . His 1999 execution at Utah State Prison was the first to be carried out in a new chamber designed for both lethal injections and firing squads .

= = Background = =

Joseph Mitchell Parsons was born on July 22 , 1964 to Joseph Michael and Marie Parsons in New York City . Joseph Mitchell spent the first five years of his life without his father , who was incarcerated in jail . His parents worked odd jobs from sewing fuzzy dice to construction . Joseph Mitchell 's half @-@ sister Dinah said that his father beat him frequently until he wet himself . After Joseph Michael left the family , Marie took Joseph Mitchell and Dinah to Florida , where Marie met and married Lawrence Gordon . Dinah met a drug dealer nicknamed Yogi , who Parsons admired . Parsons later adopted the nickname and had " Yogi " tattooed onto his right arm .

After a year in Florida , Parsons was caught stealing cash from an apartment management office . He ended up with three burglary convictions during his four years in the state as a minor . He graduated from high school with a C average and sold shoes in a shopping mall . When Parsons ' stepfather refused to buy him a motorcycle , Parsons took one for a test drive from a dealer in Fort Lauderdale and did not return . He went to New Jersey to see his biological father , but was rebuffed . Parsons ' sister @-@ in @-@ law Theresa Gomez said , " He rejected him ... Who knows what went through his mind ? " Parsons then rode the motorcycle west to Las Vegas , Nevada .

= = = Imprisonment in Nevada = = =

On the night of October 16 to 17 , 1982 , Parsons met David Wood in Las Vegas and took a cab to the Strip in search of marijuana . Near the destination , Parsons pointed a .22 @-@ caliber revolver at the driver 's neck to rob him . After stealing the driver 's taxi , the two were caught in an alley and placed under citizen 's arrest by Charles Conant and his brother @-@ in @-@ law Ronald Maske , who were both armed with guns . During trial , Parsons characterized himself as an orphan who stayed out of trouble and testified against Wood . The court did not have access to Parsons ' juvenile record , and was unaware of his parents on the East Coast . Parsons later stated that he provided false testimony against Wood in a plea bargain for a lighter sentence . Wood was convicted and spent 13 years in prison . No visitors came to see Parsons during his five years at Nevada State Prison . In August 1987 , Parsons was paroled to a halfway house in Reno . He walked out of the facility before his release date and fled on a stolen motorcycle .

= = Death of Richard Ernest = =

On August 30 , 1987 , Parsons was hitchhiking along Interstate 15 near Barstow , California . He was picked up by 30 @-@ year @-@ old Richard Lynn Ernest , a concrete laborer from Loma Linda , California on his way to a construction job in Denver , Colorado . Ernest did not know that Parsons was a fugitive . At about 3 a.m. on August 31 , Ernest was too tired to drive and stopped at the Lunt

Park rest area near Cedar City , Utah to get some sleep . Parsons stabbed Ernest to death and drove off in his blue Dodge Omni .

At about 5 a.m. , Parsons stopped at a Texaco service station 23 miles to the north . He was wearing Ernest 's clothes and had assumed his identity . Parsons told the station attendant he needed to hose out red construction paint from the car 's interior and offered to give him Ernest 's construction tools . The attendant said that he observed Parsons throwing away clothing , books , posters and carpentry tools into a dumpster . Parsons asked the attendant about the distance to Denver and spoke of Ernest 's 9 @-@ year @-@ old son as his own . He purchased cigarettes and food with Ernest 's MasterCard credit card before leaving . At 7 : 23 a.m. , Parsons used the credit card to check into a Quality Inn at Richfield , Utah . He used the card again at about 10 a.m. to purchase seat covers and floor mats from Kmart to cover up the blood stains in the car . A clerk called the Richfield Police Department after Parsons attempted to purchase \$ 300 worth of items at 12 : 34 p.m. and the credit card was found to be over its limit . The attendant back at the Texaco station called the Beaver County Sheriff 's Office after discovering bloody items in the dumpster . Deputy Raymond Goodwin found Ernest 's bank statement and Parsons ' bloody clothes in the dumpster . After calling Ernest 's wife Beverley , the officers concluded that the person who visited the service station was not Richard Ernest . At about 4 : 25 p.m. on August 31 , a Utah Highway Patrol officer found Parsons sleeping in Ernest 's car at the Red Creek rest area on Interstate 70 , west of Salina , Utah . When Parsons was brought into the Richfield police station where the bloody clothes were gathered , he continued to insist that he was Ernest . When officers asked for his street address , Parsons asked for a lawyer . Sheriff Kenneth Yardley recalled that Parsons asked if he could keep his book to read .

On September 1 , 1987 , Ernest 's body was discovered underneath a sleeping bag dumped on the east side of Interstate 15 , about a mile north of the rest area where he had been killed . He had been stabbed nine times , including in the heart and throat .

= = = Trial and sentencing = = =

Iron County prosecutor Scott Burns stated that he had witnesses from three different states and crime scenes in three different counties . While awaiting trial in the county jail , Parsons became afflicted with a severe case of crab lice . Lieutenant Matt Yengich told investigators that Parsons likely contracted the lice from " some type of homosexual interaction " .

During a court hearing for the murder , Parsons said , " Why are we doing this ? I did it and everyone knows I did it . " He pleaded guilty to motor vehicle theft , aggravated robbery and first @-@ degree murder on September 18 , 1987 . Parsons ' sentence was decided by a jury . Parsons said that he was defending himself with a four @-@ inch knife when Ernest grabbed his leg and thought that Ernest 's multiple wounds were " superficial . " Parsons was unable to present evidence to corroborate his claim of a sexual advance by Ernest . Ernest 's family and friends stated in court that Ernest was not gay or bisexual . Prosecution witnesses testified of Parsons ' homosexual activity in jail . According to forensic psychiatrist David Tomb from the University of Utah , the descriptions of Parsons ' sexual history indicated that he " may have been the one initiating the contact and became angry when [Ernest] turned him down . " A medical examiner testified that Ernest appeared to have been stabbed while sleeping and was unable to defend himself . On February 18 , 1988 , a jury of six men and six women sentenced Parsons to death . He was sent to Utah State Prison .

= = = Appeals = = =

Parsons filed an appeal disputing the constitutionality of his first @-@ degree murder conviction with the Utah Supreme Court . His attorney argued that Parsons had already been convicted of another charge for the crime , making his murder conviction a violation of double jeopardy . On October 16 , 1989 , the court unanimously upheld the conviction and rejected his appeal on the grounds that Parsons should have raised that objection before he waived his right to a trial with his

guilty plea . On March 5 , 1990 , District Judge J. Philip Eves rejected Parsons ' complaint that he was denied his right to legal counsel while in prison and set his execution date for April 30 , 1990 . A new team of attorneys , which included Gregory Sanders and Ronald Yengich of the Rocky Mountain Defense Fund , took up Parsons ' appeal that he had ineffective counsel during his trial . On January 12 , 1994 , the Utah Supreme Court rejected Parsons ' petition for a writ of habeas corpus .

On July 6 , 1999 , Parsons abandoned a federal appeal of his sentence to the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals , stating that he preferred execution than waiting for years on death row . He complained that he was bored in prison , which he called " torture , plain and simple . " The last visit Parsons had received was two hours with his mother in 1996 . On August 16 , 1999 , District Judge Philip Eves signed a death warrant and scheduled Parsons ' execution for October 15 .

= = Execution = =

Parsons submitted a last request to walk under the stars , play basketball , and watch science @-@ fiction films to prison warden Hank Galetka . Parsons also asked for his remains to be cremated and turned over to his family . Prison spokesperson Jack Ford said that the requests would be granted , but that Parsons would only be allowed to shoot some hoops in a fenced recreation area instead of a game of basketball in the prison gymnasium . The authorities were concerned that an injury could delay the execution . Parsons was permitted to walk outdoors at night to the place of execution .

On the evening before his execution , Parsons watched The Mummy and was visited in his death watch cell by his brother and his cousin . They shared his last meal of Burger King hamburgers , French fries , milkshakes , root beer , and chocolate chip ice cream . Parsons ' attorney said he believed his client chose this meal because the Burger King slogan " Have it your way " was a reflection of him taking control of his life . After playing a game of Uno , he asked for the score of the 1999 American League Championship Series game . Parsons was permitted to call his mother Marie Gordon Rivera in Florida and his sister .

Parsons would become the first inmate to be executed in a new chamber that was built in 1998 at Utah State Prison for use in either firing squads or lethal injections . Two people , whose identities were withheld , were selected to administer individual injections , of which only one was lethal so that neither would know with certainty who executed the prisoner . The prison selected among paramedics or nurses because the American Medical Association prohibits licensed physicians from participating in executions . A mild sedative was delivered intravenously to calm Parsons before the deadly drugs were administered .

At 12 : 10 a.m. on October 15 , 1999 , Parsons was executed by lethal injection . Seven minutes later , a physician checked Parsons ' stopped heartbeat with a stethoscope and pronounced him dead at 12 : 18 a.m. Parsons ' last words were : " Love to my family and friends . And Woody , the rainbow warrior rules . Thank you . "

Parsons had mentioned to attorney Greg Sanders a hatred of homosexuals , and after the execution , prison spokesperson Jack Ford said that " rainbow " may have been a homosexual reference to the victim . Fellow inmate Doug " Woody " Lovell stated " Rainbow Warrior " was instead referring to the colorful racing car of NASCAR champion Jeff Gordon .

= = = Public reaction = = =

Although Parsons requested that no one protest his death , the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah planned to organize a candlelight vigil in opposition to the execution . A group of less than 50 people gathered outside the prison , mostly criminal justice students from Weber State University .

Unlike the previous execution of John Albert Taylor in 1996 (or Ronnie Lee Gardner that would follow in 2010) , Parsons ' execution attracted little media attention , with representatives from only 12 news organizations . Spokesperson Jack Ford called the level of interest virtually " nonexistent " . Deputy attorney general Reed Richards presumed that the media apathy was a result of Parsons ' choice of lethal injection , which was more broadly adopted in the United States than execution by

firing squad , which was unique to Utah . Parsons ' court @-@ appointed attorney Greg Sanders said that his client called himself " Utah 's forgotten inmate " . Ernest 's widow Beverley , who attended the execution , said that she was grateful for the lack of media scrutiny . Ernest 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Jonathan Woods stated , " The world is less for having lost Richard . I hope , for Parsons ' sake , the world will be less for having lost him , but that is not how I feel . "