

Preface to the 2016 Edition

TWENTY YEARS LATER

It's been a quiet twenty years for me. Occasionally, I receive a call from a college student writing a paper about the Menendez case, or something of that sort, and I don't mind answering a few questions. On five- and ten-year anniversaries, I get calls from television producers wanting me to participate in story updates, which I decline. The fact that I was a juror and wrote a book once upon a time seems like ancient history to me. But this year is different. It's the twenty-year anniversary of the second trial and the corresponding first-degree murder convictions, which means heightened interest and a resurgence of true crime stories in the media.

When I was on jury duty for seven months, everyone I knew was aware of it. But since 2005, when I moved from Los Angeles to Albuquerque and started my professional organizing business, virtually none of the hundreds of new people I've met—friends, neighbors, book club members, co-volunteers, local business contacts, clients, potential clients, and organiz-

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ing colleagues—have had any clue. What was I supposed to do, go around introducing myself by saying, “Hi, I’m Hazel Thornton, owner of *Organized for Life* and author of an out-of-stock book from 1995 about the controversial first Menendez trial”? It just doesn’t come up in everyday conversation, and for months at a time I completely forget about it myself.

One reason I don’t bring up the subject is that you never know how someone might react. I think people have forgotten just how controversial the trial was. Remember “the abuse excuse”? Remember that there were two juries on the first trial, one for each brother, and remember how unpopular the jurors were because we couldn’t agree on a verdict? I still take comfort in the fact that 60 percent of those who followed the first trial closely on Court TV—those who were essentially in the room with us—were sympathetic to the brothers, far more than those who relied on traditional media coverage and hearsay alone. Discussing the trial can be like discussing politics or religion. And I certainly don’t want to argue about it. Besides, who wants to keep rehashing the Menendez case forever?

So, then, why am I talking about it now? As it happens, just recently, after a month of uncertainty, I was officially released from serving on the jury for one of Albuquerque’s highest-profile murder cases: the trial of two police officers in the on-duty fatal shooting of James Boyd, a mentally ill homeless man who was camping illegally in the Sandia foothills. What are the odds? I was so relieved to be excused from jury duty that I posted a Facebook confession revealing that I had previously been a *Menendez* juror and had written a book about it. This was news to almost everyone who read it, and many asked where they could buy the book.

So we come full circle.