Paul was playing in the early morning hours at the front of the house. The house was like most in those days... your basic shotgun house. From either the back or front you could see clear threw the house. "The sun had risen from the horizon and everybody had began going about their everyday chores. Barbara, Helen, and Marjorie were laughing, chatting about old times... talking about their kids and whatnot that young black women talked about in that day... her crying his eyes out for he had come to realize that his mother was hurt. A day that had started as usual turned into a nightmare. One that many would remember until their dying day."

Paul Gipson wrote those words in a rough attempt at an autobiography. Marjorie was Paul's mother. Edgar was her boyfriend. And Paul was five years old.

I first read Paul's story when he asked for my assistance with his book. He hoped to help some other young boy understand how an All-American football player stumbled of Texas jails. A history of street fights, knifings, shootings, gambling, and drug abuse—what he didn't sell, he used.

That August day in 1984 at the Ferguson unit near Huntsville, when he showed me the first two chapters of his book, The Long and Winding Road, the impact was an emotional one. But Gipson had run into me once before, years earlier—and that encounter was strictly physical.

In the fall of 1967, I played free safety for Wake Forest. On September 29, I walked onto the floor of the Astrodome to play against the University of Houston only a week after the Cougars had dismantled Michigan State, second-ranked nationally in 1966, 37-7. Houston looked frightening, particularly Gipson.

As it turned out, I had ample cause for concern. The Cougars destroyed our team. 50-6. It seemed every time they gave the ball to Gipson, he came right at me. And every time he came, it hurt. In the second half, when the Wake Forest defense was tiring and cracking wide open, Gipson seemed to get stronger. And bigger. A year later, Gipson was to stomp through the University of Texas defense for 173 yards and three touchdowns in a 20-20 tie, moving Longhorns coach Darrell Royal to say, "That Gipson. He's got muscles in his hair."

I knew what Royal meant. I had been there. Trying to tackle guys like Paul Gip-

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son is the reason playing college football was never enjoyable for me.

Gipson's story? A brief pro football career with Atlanta and Detroit. A knee injury, many arrests, illegitimate children, violence, crime, gambling, and drugs.

Death.

They found Paul Gipson face down in a drainage ditch in a sleazy, drug-and-hooker infested neighborhood within 100 yards of the University of Houston football practice field. The autopsy concluded he'd been felled by a massive heart attack, dead when he hit the ground. But Gipson's sister, his only surviving relative from the gruesome day in Conroe in February of 1952, scoffs at the pathologist's findings. She believes Paul was murdered by drug dealers he had failed to pay off. Typically, he would pocket the proceeds from his drug sales and not pay his suppliers.

In December 1984, just after his parole from prison, he'd been knocked down by a shotgun blast that did only superficial damage—a calling card from a drug dealer. Today, his sister (who insists upon anonymity) argues that Gipson's fatal coronary in January 1985 was induced by doctored or forcibly administered drugs. Another calling card from the dealers.

Gipson's sister's anguished pleas for help, coupled with her background as an ICU nurse at a major Texas hospital, and Gipson's two meetings with me—once on the field, again in prison; and finally, the autobiography—full of rambling, disjointed thoughts, misspellings, and alien syntax—but nonetheless brimming with poignancy; hooked me.

It was a first-rate mystery story. Part of it was a recruiting story. How and why did Paul Gipson get into a major university, except for his ability to run with the football? What happened? Did witnessing the brutal murder of his mother inexorably set his life on a course toward self-destruction? Or did he simply choose one wrong path after another? Are the claims of his sister accurate? Or is she just a passionate, caring relative who can't accept the truth? Was he murdered? Or did he fall from a heart attack, induced not by a killer's hand, but by years of neglect of his body, compounded by his abuse of alcohol and drugs?
I realize that I didn't play the hand [I'd been dealt]. I fell [behind] what I did best and started trying to deal [drugs] with people. That was a very tragic mistake on my part. It’s a pity [what happens to you] when you’re messing with that dope... 

"Don, please be advise to let that go what I said about the dope owners. There's death in it, I assure you."

The one certainty about Gipson’s life and death is that the street killed him. Whether the coup de grace was a murderer’s work or a heart attack, Paul’s existence on the bottom rung of society’s ladder was what finally closed the book on this man’s life after only 38 years. As a Conroe teenager, his hangout was a desolate, miserable piece of land called the “Hole.” Dirt roads, dope, hookers, gambling joints, with pimps as the role models for young men. When he came to Houston, Gipson’s turf was the toughest part of the Third Ward, called the “Bottom.” Except for paved roads the Bottom was the Hole’s counterpart in Houston. It at first appeared that the bad guys in the streets-uneducated, untrained, and for-reprehensible way possible—dealing drugs. Sure, his formative years were accented by a shotgun blast and death. But along the path of his decline and fall, his family, friends, coaches, and teammates struggled with him, trying to help set his life on a more positive course. Yet at each crossroads, Paul turned and took the wrong path.

All that notwithstanding, Paul’s story, written in his own awkward hand, was gripping. Almost from the first word, it was obvious that Paul was not well-versed in rules of English. But he was not stupid. He knew how to put his feelings on paper.

I suggested he write his life story after our initial meeting in the summer of 1984. We corresponded and Gipson frequently asked for advice about his writing and his life. But both came to an end with a death that was ruled natural causes, but which his sister still insists was murder.

"Paul didn’t have an MI [myocardial infarction]" she pleads. "A heart attack that killed him so quickly would have been massive, it would have blown out the back of his heart. I work in cardiac ICU. I know that. But both came to an end with a death that was ruled natural causes, but which his sister still insists was murder."

"Paul didn’t have an MI [myocardial infarction]” she pleads. "A heart attack that killed him so quickly would have been massive, it would have blown out the back of his heart. I work in cardiac ICU. I know that. The autopsy didn’t show that. It showed he had arteriosclerosis. That doesn’t kill you. Almost every 38-year-old black man walking around probably has that condition."

"I don’t know how much time and money it’s going to take, but I’m going to make people believe he was murdered. Then maybe my brother can rest in peace. Maybe I can sleep at night. The drug dealers killed my brother. I’ll believe that until the day I die."

Her belief is based partly upon her medical experience, mostly upon some inner voice haunting her about Paul’s death. Now I believe it, too. But my conviction stands upon the results of a year-long search for evidence.

Paul Gipson was murdered.

"I must have been a tremendously gifted young man. I got thrown off my pace. I’ve not been a saint. I’ve been digging deep into some of the most [unscrupulous] things that you can think of. [But] it’s too late to cry, I lost a little something every year until I had nothing... "Thank God I’ll get another chance... ."
REQUIEM
continued from page 77

thing of that.

"I entered Booker T. Washington High School as a freshman in 1961. I weighed only 119 pounds, but I had the heart of a lion. I quickly became the second-string quarterback. I had good hands and could run with the ball and could throw it...."

"I had began watching football on TV. I knew from watching Mr. Jim Brown and Mr. Sam Huff... that no matter what, I had to be ruff. I knew that tough and reckless was the only way to play football."

Paul grew to 185 pounds in high school, and tough and reckless was just how he played it. He was all-state for Washington in both football and baseball. In his final high school season, he played quarterback, rushing for 2300 yards, passing for 1800, and playing cornerback on defense. But Southwest Conference football was still an all-white sport in 1965, and Gipson received only three scholarship offers—Prairie View A&M, Texas Southern University, and the University of Houston. Gipson signed with Houston assistant Chuck Fairbanks, and proceeded to erase most of the top line in the Cougars' rushing record book. Simultaneously, Paul and his classmates helped change the pace—and color—of college ball in Texas.

Warren McVea broke the barrier in Texas major college football when he played for the Cougars in 1965, a year ahead of Jerry LeVias at SMU, who was the first black to get a SWC scholarship. Then in the rest of the decade, a remarkable collection of pre-pros, all black, took up football in Texas major college football when he proceeded to erase most of the top line in the Cougars' rushing record book. Simultaneously, Paul and his classmates helped change the pace—and color—of college ball in Texas.

When Paul signed with Atlanta, he pocketed $50,000. A new Corvette, a new Cadillac, an all-night dice game, and poof! Goodbye 50 grand.

But Gipson's stay at the top was a short one. The cracks were showing even during his glory years with the Cougars. His sophomore season in 1966 was abbreviated to three games when he missed a bed check. When Paul signed with Atlanta in 1969, he pocketed a $50,000 bonus. Paul's sister recalls that the money was gone within hours. First, a new Corvette. Later that day, a new Cadillac convertible. Then an all-night dice game. And poof! Goodbye, 50 grand.

His sister laments, "I told him, 'Paul, why in the hell didn't you just buy one Toyota, and save the rest of your money. Nobody needs two big expensive cars like that.' But he just couldn't understand. Everything always came so easily for him. Everyone always felt so sorry for him. Money just never meant a thing to him."

"I've always thought that if he could have met a good, strong, honest woman, someone he could have fallen in love with who had a good, sound value system that might have made a difference in his life. He might never have ended up on the streets and in jail. Maybe he'd be alive today." But that opportunity didn't present itself to Paul.

"Don, I don't wish to offend anyone, but shouldn't I talk about the affairs I had with the young ladies in my book? I was always gifted with a beautiful body. And some people used me for it. Some of the ladies."

Gipson's sexual performance in college nearly matched his gridiron feats. He fathered seven children, six of them by five women during his junior and senior years. Yet his sister now says, "I don't think Paul was just being stupid and irresponsible. I think all those women, and all those kids, was just some futile attempt he made to create family bonds. I really believe he pictured himself as the daddy he never had by fathering all those children."

Each of the people whose lives were touched by Paul reacts the same way. They list his misdeeds and say they weren't surprised to hear of his death. Then they turn around and say that he was somehow special. That they're sorry.

Melvin Brown, Gipson's backfield coach, recalls, "I kind of thought of myself as a father to Paul. We tried every way we could to help him. But he was always in [Coach] Bill Yeoman's doghouse. He would be late to practice, or miss a bed check. And he

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was gambling even then. We caught him several times.

"It was just a tough environment for Paul. Before him, most black kids always went to black schools. But Paul was a tremendous athlete. And he would have been a pretty good student too, if he had ever applied himself."

Charles Brown, now a coach at Jersey Village High School near Houston, was Gipson’s coach at Conroe. Brown also knew the many sides of Gipson: His anger at the world that drove him to fight, every day, against anyone, any size, for any reason. Yet he raised pigeons as a hobby. As a boy, he’d sleep in the grass next to the pigeon coop, caring for a sick bird or waiting for new eggs to hatch.

"I think Paul spent his whole life longing for a father and mother," says Brown. "He was like one of our kids in high school. He worked for us, he ate at our house. He wasn’t a hustler. He was a nice, easy-going country kid. And we knew early that he was a great running back."

"I don’t know what happened. Someone gave Paul a different impression, the wrong impression, of what life is all about."

Tom Wilson, the University of Houston trainer, was perhaps the closest person to Gipson during college. "His life is a tragedy. He just couldn’t give up life in the fast lane. He could never stay away from the women and the dice."

"But he was a great warrior, a magnificent athlete who was totally without fear. He’d run through anything," says Wilson, a man who passes out compliments about a player’s toughness about as often as Vince Lombardi did.

"I sometimes think if I could have hand-cuffed him to me every night, he’d still be playing in the NFL. I don’t really know how much we [UH] are responsible for Paul losing his life, but I do know his life was a total waste," says Wilson. "Maybe he’d have been okay if we’d just left him in Conroe. He might have been better off just living out his life in the woods."

Elmo Wright was a mainspring performer as a receiver on Houston’s 1968 team. He roomed with Gipson. Like so many others, he saw the best and worst of Paul. During Wright’s freshman year, his brother was killed. During Elmo’s crisis, Gipson was the key figure, staying close, helping his friend through the grief. But years later, Gipson appeared in Wright’s office, broke, asking for a $50 loan. "Gipson pledged he would endorse over to Elmo an $800 pension check he was due from the NFL Players’ Association. Wright called the association office, suspicious, and was told, ‘Don’t do it. You’re the fifth person this month he has pledged that check to. And there isn’t any check.’"

"Gip was made for the streets," Wright says. "He wasn’t trained for anything, except survival. And he could only survive where he was comfortable, in the lowest part of society. People on the street expect less from you, and that’s where Gipson could manage things better."

"Back when we played there was no help at managing your time and learning good study habits. There were no role models. Gipson thought the only way to make it was to make it on his athletic skills."

"U of H gave me every opportunity to get an education. Sure they probably made me mistakes but hasn’t everyone. I as everyone else had tutors to conscript me. We were often check on to see we attended class."

"U of H stood by me and has even tried to help me now. They’re offered to help my family. No they haven’t deserted me but I who have deserted them."}

Feegel asserted that if Gipson had been "hot-shot" by cocaine laced with heroin, the blood and urine tests meant nothing.

Gipson was chewed up by a system he never understood.

"I remember the day he signed his first pro contract," says Nance. "He took me to lunch, I asked him, ‘Paul, what do you think I made on my first job out of college?’ He said, ‘About $50,000.’ When I told him I made $100 a week, he couldn’t believe it. ‘Gip had no idea of the value of money. He never had any as a kid, so it just wasn’t important to him. Bill Yeoman did everything he could, I’m convinced. I know Bill arranged at least three jobs for Paul. But he’d never show up, or else he’d quit after the first day of work. The system fools a kid like Gipson. He thought someone would always be there to bail him out no matter what happened. He thought it would go on forever. But once he left football, there was nobody around to pick up the pieces any more.’"

Nance adds, “Paul had a lot of chances, and never took advantage of them. But I still feel sorry for him. It’s a tremendous waste. He was a good person. Potentially a great pro back. But he was just crushed by circumstances. I really can’t say I’m surprised though. I believe one of the turning points in Gip’s life was that knee injury in Atlanta.”

Not only did the injury rob his legs of speed and punch, it precipitated an explosion with Atlanta Coach Norm Van Brocklin, but the resulting shouting match ended his days in Atlanta, and branded Gipson around the league as a bad actor, a discipline problem.

He played only two years with the Falcons, then moved to Detroit for the 1971 season. He resurfaced at New England in 1973 briefly, playing under Chuck Fairbanks, who had recruited Paul for the Cougars. By then, Gipson was only a shadow of the young stallion that had torn up the Astroturf for Houston. No speed. No power. No legs.

Gipson’s NFL career totals don’t use much ink in the record book—123 carries, 491 yards, one touchdown; 21 receptions, 290 yards, 3 touchdowns.

Two years later, Paul took one last shot with the football John of the Seventies, the World Football League. He played the 1975 season with a traveling sideshow called the Shreveport Steamer. Then he said goodbye to the game he loved, the game he lived for as a child. After 1975, the streets were his life. Instead of yards and touchdowns in a football record book, Gipson’s achievements were measured by the entries on a rap sheet.

His first arrest came in 1973 for unlawfully carrying a weapon. Six more busts followed in the next decade, all for either possession of drugs or possession with intent to deliver drugs. And still he fought, taking knives away from guys on the street without a second thought. And still he gambled, shaking those devil-dice whenever he had money. In 1978, he surfaced from the streets long enough to have a bullet dug out of his back in an emergency room, then faded back into his element.

In July of 1983 he really hit the big time. Another drug arrest resulted in a three-year sentence at Texas Department of Corrections. The sentence was probated for five years, but Gip blew his chance to stay out of state prison quickly. Early in 1984, he was busted on a misdemeanor charge of drug possession when he sold two Predelin pills. But that arrest was enough to revoke his probation. In August, he started three years at the Ferguson unit.

That’s when my job as a reporter for Channel 13 in Houston took me across Paul Gipson’s path again. That’s when he began putting his autobiography on paper. That’s when he promised his sister that he was changing his life. Getting straight.

But in fact, his writing shows that in November of 1984, Gipson was still a dreamer.

“I’ve come close to having several fights but [but] hav[ed] backed out. Yes, I’ll try to stay out of trouble for I want to come home. I have so much I want to do and I’m happy. I’ve already
seen the parole board and I could be home before Christmas.

"Starting Monday, I will be on the weight lifting team. I bench 300 pounds, squat 405 pounds, and dead lift 500. Pretty good for an old man. I've a lot of plans. It's now secret that I can still run. The Houston Gamblers need a linebacker that can run with the backs. Yep, I'm there man. That's why I got on the weight lifting team. I honestly think I can still play.

"Do you know what a story that would make. Plus the fact I'd have a chance to make some quick money."

With time in local jails to his credit on the latest conviction, Gipson was eligible for parole after only four months in the Texas Department of Corrections. So, on December 5, 1984, he walked free. Immediately he gravitated back to the life he knew best, where he was most comfortable. Back to the Third Ward in Houston, back to the Bottom.

But not for long. Three weeks later, two days after Christmas, a drug dealer's shotgun blast landed him in the emergency room at Ben Taub Hospital. Three weeks later, on January 16, 1985, he was found unconscious in a ditch. The paramedic found him at 6:15 A.M. Thirty minutes later at Ben Taub, he was pronounced dead.

During those six weeks between his release from prison and his death, he proved he still was as elusive on the streets as he had been on the football field. He pledged to write his autobiography so others could learn from his mistakes. But he never penned a word after his parole. He promised his sister he would stay with her, change his life, break out of the drug-dominated culture of the Bottom. But she never saw him alive during his freedom.

Even more importantly he failed to contact his parole officer in Houston, Debra Harrell. And in Texas, that's big league trouble. Under state law, parolees must contact their parole officers immediately. Failure to do so means revocation of parole and a return to prison.

Incredibly Gipson's case illustrates how the bureaucracy can bounce off itself in the night, then move off in opposite directions, never functioning as intended. Houston police narcotics investigator Kevin McCoy, who had previously arrested Gipson, remembers seeing him several times at a popular Third Ward street hangout . . . The Lucky Seven & Corner. But not until three months later, after Gipson's death, was McCoy informed that a new arrest warrant for parole violation had been issued. McCoy recalls, "If I had known he was violating parole, I would have pulled him in. I spoke with Paul several times and he was as friendly as he always was."

Similarly when Gipson caught a load of shotgun pellets on December 27, he spent six hours in the Ben Taub Trauma Center.
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Hospital policy dictates that police be notified when any patient is treated for gunshot or stab wounds, aggravated assault injuries, or drug overdoses. That night at Ben Taub, a new desk clerk was working patient check-in. He did not follow hospital policy and notify police. One supervisor at the hospital says, "He just forgot to do it."

If either the hospital or HPD had responded to the warrant on Gipson, he'd have gotten a one-way ticket back to Huntsville. And likely he'd still be alive today. Instead, Gipson stayed on the street—fighting, gambling, dealing drugs. Living out the final few days of his life. McCoy's contacts with Gipson paint the clearest image of the tapestry of a life on the shadowy fringes of Houston's subculture. McCoy knows the Third Ward. He talks to and arrests hundreds of small-time dealers like Gipson.

They get pills on consignment, selling them for fifteen to twenty bucks apiece, making perhaps a dollar on each pill. But Gipson, always a step faster, stronger, smarter in his own mind, was keeping all the money or using the pills for his own "highs." The drug is termed pinkies, ludes, or pres where Gipson worked. And users will take the pills orally, or melt them and inject the drug under the tongue or between the toes for a quicker rush.

McCoy's opinion of Gipson was perhaps the most revealing piece of information to develop in the entire investigation. It was consistent with what all of Gipson's friends and teammates said, but it was surprising coming from a man who had arrested him, who knew that Gipson was a criminal. "Paul was really a pretty nice guy," says McCoy. "Even though he was moving dope, he never gave us any trouble. When we had to arrest him, he always came along peacefully. Considering how big he was, that was fortunate."

The day before Gipson died, one drug dealer told another HPD officer that he was going to kill Gipson. Paul wasn't paying off his suppliers.

The next day, when Gipson was found dead, McCoy's undercover narcotics division notified homicide of the death threat. Presumably, homicide didn't pursue the case as a murder investigation when the autopsy report was released.

But Gipson's sister refused to drop it. She pleaded, "Paul didn't die of a heart attack, he was murdered. He never had a history of heart problems. No one in our family did. Listen, he was always in trouble with the drug dealers. He'd hide out for weeks at a time. And he always warned me not to tell anyone I was his sister. He told me these people would hurt me and my family if they couldn't hurt Paul." I dismissed most of what she said. Still, I agreed to check with the Harris County Medical Examiner. Don't ever read an autopsy if you want an idea of a person's life. It is cold and to-the-point: AUTOPSY

REPORT, Case 85-321, January 16, 1985; Pathological diagnoses on the body of Paul T. Gipson, 1) Arteriosclerotic heart disease. 2) Coronary artery sclerosis. 3) Shotgun wound of head and chest, old. OPINION: It is our opinion that the decedent, Paul T. Gipson, came to his death as a result of coronary artery sclerosis. (signed) Joseph A. Jachimczyk, M.D. J.D. Chief Medical Examiner. Robert A. Jordan, M.D. Assistant Medical Examiner. An accompanying toxicology report showed the results of laboratory tests. Gipson had Preludin in his blood and urine.

Nothing was there to convince anyone they were looking at the elements of a murder mystery. Nonetheless, I agreed to take one more step, again only because of the convictions of Gipson's sister. Based upon those convictions, coupled with Kevin McCoy's statements about the murder threat on Gipson, Dr. John Loomis, a pharmacist and director of the Turner Drug Information Center, agreed to evaluate the autopsy.

At first glance, his opinion seemed to dash the drug overdose theory. He wrote, "While it would be attractive to link the presence of phenmetrazine (Preludin) to Mr. Gipson's death via its cardiovascular stimulatory properties, it is impossible to state that the drug caused his death."


But on the second reading of Dr. Lummis' letter, the introductory paragraph registered. Finally, "upon review of the autopsy report ... the exact cause of death is undetermined. As we discussed, while the autopsy report designates coronary artery sclerosis as the cause of death, no one actually dies of this condition. Rather, patients succumb to a consequence of the disease, such as myocardial infarction (heart attack). An infarction is unlikely the cause of death because a lack of heart tissue damage or necrosis is noted in the autopsy."

That sounded familiar. Paul Gipson's sister had been saying that since the day he died.

By now, four months had passed since Gipson's death. I now shared the conviction of Gipson's sister that he had been murdered. But our convictions weren't proof, so I kept searching, peeling back one layer of this mystery at a time.

Dr. Joe Jachimczyk agreed to talk about the autopsy, based upon Dr. Loomis' conclusions. Could he have made a mistake? Was it possible Paul Gipson died from an overdose of drugs administered by the same dealers gunning for Gipson? Was this the ultimate solution to their collection problems with Gipson?

The medical examiner and his staff pulled Gipson's file, retested his blood and urine, and affirmed their original opinion. None of the tests support the theory of drug...
overdose. They stood by the autopsy. Again, the theory was squelched. The story dead.

But I decided to play a final trump card. Perhaps a pathologist outside of this area would evaluate the autopsy. Maybe a cardiac specialist. One consideration to present was the autopsy number, 85-321. Gipson died in mid-January and already the coroner’s office had performed 321 autopsies in 1985. Surely there’s a likelihood of a few errors when it processes that many decedents.

Another couple of months passed while I searched for such a doctor. Finally, Dr. John Feegeel agreed to the request. Dr. Feegeel is now a lawyer in Tampa, Florida. But he previously was the medical examiner in Atlanta. Ironically, Dr. Feegeel and Houston police chief, Lee Brown, were both in Atlanta during the investigation of that city’s mass child murders in 1979 and 1980.

Dr. Feegeel’s first question after reviewing the autopsy was the payoff on a year-long investigation. He asked, “Why didn’t you send the complete report?” He pointed out, “This report lists that Gipson was a known drug dealer and suspected cocaine user. Didn’t they take a nasal swab test? These drug dealers are smart. They know how to mix heroin with cocaine, which can kill a person within seconds. The drug shorts out the brain, and the heart can go into arrhythmia. Drug dealers call this ‘hot-shooting’ someone.”

“This appears to be too casual an investigation,” Feegeel told me. “It’s ridiculous if they didn’t run the nasal swab test. Coronary artery sclerosis is a cop-out conclusion. They used it because they could not point to one thing for a cause of death.”

Feegeel asserted that if Gipson had been “hot-shot” by cocaine laced with heroin the blood and urine tests meant nothing. Gipson could have died within seconds. His metabolism would have ceased functioning immediately, thus the drug would have never reached his blood or urine. They wouldn’t show up in the medical examiner’s tests, unless a nasal swab was performed to reveal the presence of drugs in Gipson’s nose.

Finally, a nationally recognized pathologist was willing to take on the medical and law enforcement establishment of Houston. All his life, Paul Gipson fought his battles alone. Against opponents on the football field. Against the law. Against everyone around him. And even against himself. Finally, someone would step forward to defend him.

When Dr. Jachimczyk heard that latest criticism of his autopsy, this time from Dr. Feegeel, he wasn’t nearly so confident about the pathological conclusions. He admitted the nasal swab tests should have been run, but were not because blood and urine tests showed no evidence of cocaine or heroin. He added that the swabs of Gipson’s nose had been taken, they just hadn’t been tested. “We’ll do those tests now,” he said. He also confirmed that the autopsy could have been too casual. But still, he stood behind the original conclusion. Heart attack.

Dr. Jachimczyk’s response cemented Feegeel’s opinion. “Something sounds fishy to me,” Feegeel said when I told him Jachimczyk’s story. “It sounds like they’re covering their ass. Why didn’t they run the nasal swab tests right away? They inadequately investigated for the presence of cocaine. They just used a grab-bag conclusion when they said hardening of the arteries.”

Feegeel added, “It’s not normal. It sounds like they’re trying to clean up their act. It sounds like they failed to run all the necessary tests on Paul Gipson.”

When Dr. Jachimczyk reported the results of the nasal swab tests, the final pieces of the Gipson death puzzle fell into place. The medical examiner said, “The nasal swabs are no longer available. We can’t find them. Dr. Jordan said he did take the swabs during the autopsy, but when he went back to check them, they were no longer there. We repeated the blood and urine tests. They are confirmed negative. It’s possible that heroin could have been mixed with cocaine and used to kill Gipson. But it’s not likely. That would have taken a massive dose.”

The key words here are, “It’s possible.” The medical examiner couldn’t say, “It’s impossible.”

Now, of course, none of the possibilities matter for Paul Gipson. His journey ended more than a year ago in that drainage ditch. But he wrote and talked about his life as though he expected it to end prematurely. He certainly had the closest, clearest view of his own limited future.

He dreamed about playing pro football at 38. He dreamed of busting loose from the drug culture and the street violence. And he dreamed about reestablishing family relationships with his sister. His nephews. His own children. But he never had any illusions about what the drug dealers had planned for his future.

While still in prison, he wrote what may stand as his epitaph:

“I dedicate this book to my three sons, Marquis, Michel, and Paul Jr. I’ve long for you guys so much and miss you until I can’t begin to explain. I’ve done the best that I possible can in telling you how I lived. I made mistakes and wrote about them so that maybe you will profit by them . . .

“As a nation, if we don’t take better care of our young and give them more love and teachings, we shall be in damnation.”

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