

On June 14, 2007, the Vaughn family from Oswego loaded up the family vehicle and headed for Springfield, IL to spend a day at Knight's Action Park.

Just after 5 a.m., his wife asked him to pull off of the highway because she was feeling sick, a side-effect of having stress related migraine headaches. A passing motorist stopped to render assistance to Christopher Vaughn, who was found walking along the frontage road of Interstate 55 south of Joliet. He had been shot twice.

Their three children, Abigayle, 12, Cassandra, 11, and Blake, 8 were found dead in the rear passenger seat when paramedics arrived. Each had been shot twice. His wife, found in the front passenger seat of the family vehicle had a single gunshot wound under her chin. A 9 mm handgun belonging to her husband was found on the floorboard near Kimberly Vaughn's feet.

Vaughn initially told the man who stopped to render assistance that he believed he had been shot by his wife. However, when later interviewed by the Illinois State Police investigators he had no memory of the incident. During the interview, he defended his wife and told investigators "she couldn't have done it...She's not that type of person".

Vaughn was arrested on the morning of the funeral for his family. Probable cause to arrest Vaughn was based on blood stain interpretations that were later discredited by DNA testing.

A psychiatrist later explained that Vaughn may have been experiencing dissociative amnesia. This is a form of memory loss caused when a person witnesses a traumatic event like watching his entire family die in an automobile crash and being the sole survivor, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Academy of Psychiatric Association.

A forensic pathologist retained as an expert witness for the prosecutor later described Kimberly Vaughn's injuries as consistent with a self-inflicted gunshot wound when he was deposed prior to the trial.

Vaughn faced the death penalty. More than a year after he was arrested, the Drug and Food Administration issued an alert in Dec. of 2008, warning patients taking the prescription medication Topamax had a statistically significant risk of suicidal ideation and behavior. Kimberly Vaughn had been proscribed the medication Topamax for the treatment of stress related migraine headaches.

A week before her death, Kimberly Vaughn reported experiencing symptoms that the FDA would later identify as early warning signs of adverse side effects from the medication. On May 24, 2007, Kimberly Vaughn told her doctor that she was experiencing anxiety and a big change in her personality. Other family members reported witnessing agitation and as episode of a panic attack during a recent family outing.

Nearly two years later, on May 9, 2009, The FDA issued new warning labels and medication guides for Topamax. The warning label inserted into medications sold after that date advise patients to immediately call their health care provider if they are experiencing: "new or worse anxiety; feeling

agitated or restless; panic attacks; new or worse irritability; other unusual changes in behavior or mood.”

A state police crime scene investigator described how he was persuaded by his interpretation of the crime scene evidence that this was a murder-suicide committed by the wife during a deposition that was taken in the weeks before Gov, Quinn signed legislation abolishing the death penalty.

Former ISP Crime Scene Investigator Robert Deel said. “every time I would come up with something that the evidence would suggest or support or you would be able to at least follow the evidence to come to a logical conclusion, basically I was just given some other crazy way that this could have occurred or they would change their theory of what happened to try to match the evidence rather than letting the evidence dictate to you the events that occurred”. Deel said he cautioned investigators to wait before leaping to conclusions. However, after voicing his concerns, Deel was isolated from the investigation by the Will County State’s Attorney’s Office.

“What he described was tunnel vision that infected the investigation of the Vaughn case”, said Bill Clutter, who is director of investigations for the newly formed innocence project. Clutter was involved in the investigation that helped exonerate former death row inmates Randy Steidl, Rolando Cruz and Alejandro Hernandez. There were 20 men who were freed from death row in Illinois who were actually innocent. A Governor’s Commission would later study the causes of why these men had been wrongfully convicted, and concluded that most of the cases had been plagued with tunnel vision. This is when police investigators leap to conclusions about a suspect’s guilt, while disregarding evidence that points toward other suspects.

The Will County State’s Attorney’s Office had been involved in other high profile cases where it arrested and convicted the wrong person. Most notable is the case of Kevin Fox, a father who was mistakenly arrested in 2004 and convicted of the murder of his three year old daughter. More recently, a police officer was arrested as the alleged *Honey Bee Killer* in Will County, but charges were later dismissed after his alibi was corroborated.

A Seminar called “Side-effects: Homicidal and Suicidal Behavior Influenced by Prescription Medications” was presented on February 18, 2013, at Chicago-Kent College of Law from 1-3 p.m. featuring Dr David Healy. A Wales physician, Healy was the first doctor to link suicidal and homicidal behavior as a side effect of some prescription medications. He was one of the experts hired to testify by Vaughn’s defense team.

However, after the death penalty was abolished in Illinois the resources of the Capital Litigation Trust Funds were no longer available to help defend Vaughn. His defense team was discharged from the case in March of 2011, after the Will County Board refused to provide funding for his defense team. The case was handed off to a new attorney, who refused pro bona assistance from a major law firm that had been recruited by Rob Warden of the Center on Wrongful Convictions based at Northwestern Law School. Vaughn was convicted eight months later, in August 2012.

A new national innocence project called investigating innocence founded by private investigator Bill Clutter, will be providing post-conviction assistance to Christopher Vaughn.