



**Paper: Chicago Tribune**

**Title: Coercive and illegal tactics torpedo scores of Cook County murder cases**

**Date: December 16, 2001**

Substituting interrogation for thorough investigation, police in Chicago and Cook County have repeatedly closed murder cases with dubious confessions that imprison the innocent while killers go free.

In the first investigation of its kind, the Tribune examined thousands of murder cases filed in Cook County since 1991 and found at least 247 where police obtained incriminating statements that were thrown out by the courts as tainted or failed to secure a conviction.

Some crimes offer little in the way of physical evidence or eyewitnesses and would go unsolved were it not for a confession. But the newspaper's investigation revealed case after case in which confessions were untrustworthy or unconvincing in the eyes of jurors and judges. And these cases only hint at the depth of the problems involving one of law enforcement's most potent tools.

Police have obtained confessions from men who, according to records, were in jail when the crime occurred. They have obtained confessions refuted by DNA evidence. They have obtained confessions that contradicted the facts of the crime.

Two teenagers confessed to shooting a man from across the street. The bullet was fired point-blank. Another teenager confessed to shooting a man point-blank. The bullet was fired from a distance. Yet another teenager confessed to stabbing a woman. The autopsy found no stab wounds. In all, eight defendants confessed in those three cases. All eight were acquitted.

Police have obtained scores of confessions from suspects especially vulnerable to making false admissions of guilt. Children ages 7, 8 and 9 have confessed, only to have the charges dropped. Mentally retarded men with IQs in the 40s, 50s and 60s have confessed, only to be acquitted.

All but 11 of the 247 cases were handled by the Chicago Police Department, which relies heavily on confessions but has seen an embarrassing number of these prosecutions fall apart.

Earlier this month, after DNA tests exonerated them, four men convicted of the 1986 rape and murder of Rush University medical student Lori Roscetti had their cases thrown out. Two of them, Marcellius Bradford and Calvin Ollins, had confessed to Chicago police.

At the time, Ollins was a 14-year-old boy with mild mental retardation and no prior criminal record. His explanation of why he confessed echoes the accounts of scores of defendants interrogated by Chicago police.

"They threatened to do things and got me thinking they could do them," Ollins said. "One said he would smack me in the mouth if I didn't cooperate. Another said they would put me in jail. . . . Then they told me I would go home if I gave them what they wanted.

"I thought I knew the streets a little bit, but it turned out I was just a little kid who didn't know nothing. . . . They got me good."

In a postscript written many times, Chicago police are searching anew for Roscetti's killer, 15 years after her body was found.

As evidence of guilt, confessions hold extraordinary power. But the country's mounting number of provably false confessions -- many unraveled by DNA evidence -- has undercut the belief of some law enforcement officials that nothing short of torture could persuade someone to admit a crime he did not commit.

In the 247 cases identified by the Tribune, the charges were dropped, the confession was thrown out by the courts, or the defendant was acquitted. Although an acquittal almost always means a confession was insufficient to prove guilt, judges and juries are not required to explain their verdicts.

The cases expose a system in which police have violated well-established safeguards, such as questioning suspects after they've asked for an attorney or invoked their right to remain silent, interrogating children without trying to notify their parents, or arresting people with little or no evidence and grilling them for hours or days.

Chicago Police Supt. Terry Hillard and other police officials declined to be interviewed for this series.

Cook County State's Atty. Dick Devine said he has taken steps to enhance the reliability of confessions, including videotaping many confessions and requiring police in some cases to do additional investigation before prosecutors approve charges. But he said in an interview that he does not believe false confessions are a systemic problem.

"Many people in our system, in this jurisdiction, confess to crimes they didn't commit? No, I don't believe that," Devine said.

Among the cases identified by the Tribune, 71 were confessions by suspects who were 16 years old or younger when interrogated. Police have repeatedly violated an Illinois law meant to provide minors with the protection of a concerned adult during questioning, appellate rulings and other court records show.

Since 1991, appellate courts have thrown out the murder confessions of at least 70 defendants in Cook County -- more than half because police arrested people with insufficient evidence before interrogating them. Taking people into custody without probable cause is both illegal and a precursor to many false confessions. But in Cook County, an appellate judge wrote last year, that prohibition is "routinely ignored."

Some police officers have figured prominently in a string of cases with questionable confessions. One Chicago detective has helped get confessions from more than a dozen people who were acquitted or had their charges dropped. They included one man whose records show was in jail when the crime occurred and another whose confession was undermined by DNA evidence.

The precision of science has repeatedly exposed the fallibility of confessions. In Cook County, DNA has helped unravel the murder confessions of at least eight defendants, including a Death Row inmate. Forensic work also cleared two boys, ages 7 and 8, who police say confessed to murdering 11-year-old Ryan Harris. Laboratory tests showed semen on the victim, and police eventually charged a 30-year-old man with the crime.

In the past 10 years, Chicago police have obtained confessions from three people who produced records showing they were in jail when the murder occurred. In addition, 14 other people confessed to the murders -- and said one of the men with a jail alibi committed it with them.

Two of the men with jail alibis were set free. But Daniel Taylor was convicted and sentenced to life without parole. A Tribune investigation of that murder has turned up new evidence, including crucial social service records and police reports, that bolsters Taylor's alibi and undercuts the prosecution's case.

While the paper found numerous examples of defendants who appeared to have been wrongly charged through a false confession, it is likely that some defendants were guilty. But by making illegal arrests, resorting to improper interrogation tactics or failing to investigate other evidence aggressively, police contributed to them going free.

Thirty-five years ago, when the U.S. Supreme Court required police to inform suspects of their rights to remain silent or have an attorney present, some law enforcement officials predicted the confession's demise. But in Chicago, police still obtain an admission of guilt in 7 of every 10 murder cases they solve.

Many judges and legal commentators have long feared that police can become too enamored of the confession and its virtually unmatched power to close cases quickly.

In the landmark 1964 case of *Escobedo vs. Illinois*, the U.S. Supreme Court wrote:

"We have learned the lesson of history, ancient and modern, that a system of criminal law enforcement which comes to depend on the 'confession' will, in the long run, be less reliable and more subject to abuses than a system which depends on extrinsic evidence independently secured through skillful investigation."

Sang Kim's story

Before he was freed in the fall of 2000, Sang Kim spent 3 1/2 years in the Cook County Jail awaiting trial for murder and a possible death sentence. Police said that he had confessed to kicking and pushing his

pregnant girlfriend so hard that she was forced to prematurely deliver a child who died hours after birth.

Friends refused his calls, and some called him a baby killer. In Kim's nightmares, jailers led him down a long tunnel into an execution chamber.

Throughout the ordeal, Kim insisted that he was innocent and that he had confessed only after Chicago police had reduced him to a state of fatigue, fear and confusion through lies, threats and manipulation.

Police have denied mistreating Kim during the interrogation and his attempt to have his confession suppressed by a judge was refused.

But, in the end, the girlfriend recanted and said no assault occurred. Unable to prove there was a murder, much less that Kim committed it, Cook County prosecutors dropped the case. Now Kim is suing police and others involved in the investigation.

Detectives arrested Kim, then 21, in the spring of 1997, after his girlfriend, Elizabeth Xiong, 17, told police that Kim's assault led to the baby being born four months premature. His account of what happened next is based on an interview with him and court records.

At Area 5 violent crimes headquarters in the Grand Central District, police handcuffed him to an interrogation-room wall, Kim said. The room had one small window in the door and was sparsely furnished with a narrow metal bench, a chair or two and a table.

Kim was left alone for about an hour before Detective Neal Jack entered and removed Kim's handcuffs. Jack said that he was investigating Xiong's claim that he had battered her. He did not mention murder. The interrogation, which would last more than 30 hours, had begun.

Sitting in the interrogation room, Kim didn't even know Xiong had given birth, let alone that the baby had died. He denied hitting Xiong. He said they had only argued. She wanted him to pay for an abortion, he told police, but he disagreed.

Jack and Detective Robert Rutherford interrogated Kim for stretches of an hour or two, then left. When Kim tried to open the door, it was locked. He banged on the door, but no one answered.

Throughout the interrogation, Kim said, he asked for a lawyer but was ignored.

At one point, police moved Kim into a chilly holding cell with a metal bed that had no pillows or blankets. He laid down and tried to sleep but could not.

The next morning, the interrogation resumed. Rutherford, Kim said, yelled at him and jabbed his finger into his chest. Jack told Kim not to worry, that he was making too much of the questioning -- they were only investigating a misdemeanor battery case.

Kim said the detectives told him that if he signed a statement, he could go home, and that if he did not, he could go to prison for 45 or 50 years. All they needed, the detectives repeatedly told Kim, was a statement from him that matched the one they had from Xiong.

Frightened and confused, Kim finally gave in.

"I was kind of numb, and I was scared," Kim told the Tribune. "I didn't know what to think."

When a prosecutor arrived, Kim tried to recite the account the detectives had provided. When he made mistakes, Jack took him into another room and yelled at him, Kim said. Finally, he signed a 7 1/2-page confession, handwritten by the prosecutor.

The body of Kim's confession says nothing about the baby dying. But on the first page, in spaces filled out by hand, the statement says it was taken regarding the "battery and death" of "Elizabeth Xiong and child." Kim alleges that when he signed the statement, those blanks contained only the words "battery" and "Elizabeth Xiong."

After Kim signed the statement, Jack walked him downstairs. Kim thought he was going home, but instead he was taken to be booked. The officer at the desk asked him, "So who did you kill?"

"That's when it hit me: This guy tricked me," Kim said.

The confession was crucial because the rest of the evidence against Kim was thin. Cook County Deputy Medical Examiner Nancy Jones had ruled that the baby died from a premature birth caused by blunt trauma. But there was no evidence of trauma on the baby, and Jones told the Tribune she never examined the mother. She said she based her ruling on Xiong's allegations.

"If mom said this happened as the result of a physical assault, that's where you go," Jones said.

After a judge ruled that prosecutors Joe Magats and Walter Hehner could use Kim's confession, they told the court that if Kim was convicted they would seek a death sentence.

"My heart just stopped," Kim recalled. "I felt like my life was over . . . I kept thinking, how will they do it?"

Then, on Oct. 23, 2000, Magats and Hehner dropped the charges against Kim. Xiong, they said in court, admitted she had lied, saying she had not been attacked by Kim or anyone else. Xiong declined to comment to the Tribune.

Two months ago, Kim filed a lawsuit against the detectives, Jones, Xiong and the city. The suit alleges false arrest, saying Kim confessed because of "coercion and deceit."

Rutherford told the Tribune that he never pressured Kim, and said the 30 hours in custody was "not that long."

"We never tell a guy he can go home if he confesses," Rutherford said. "We just want to get to the truth, nothing else. Something caused her water bag to break . . . I believe he was guilty of the crime."

Magats said he had "no doubts" about the confession.

"[Suspects] make allegations with every single statement," he said. "He had a full hearing and the judge didn't suppress his statement."

Hehner said that Xiong's recantation did not "reflect" on the credibility of the confession.

Jack, now a sergeant in the narcotics unit, declined to comment.

"This shouldn't have happened," said John Kelly, one of Kim's attorneys in his pending lawsuit. "But since it did, somebody should be trying to find out why."

#### Ambiguous interrogation rules

Over the years, appeals courts have tried to provide guidelines governing police interrogations, but few clearly delineate between improper techniques and permissible ones.

When police arrest a suspect, they must give him his Miranda warning, which includes the right to remain silent and the right to have an attorney present. If a suspect invokes either right, questioning must cease. In addition, police must not use force or the threat of force to obtain a confession.

But beyond those principles lies a world of gray. Promises of leniency are generally forbidden -- but not always. Lying to a suspect is generally allowed -- but not always.

The overarching rule is that a confession must be voluntary. To determine that, courts look at "the totality of the circumstances" to decide whether a suspect's will was overcome. That means evaluating each case individually, matching the interrogation techniques used against a particular suspect's background and vulnerabilities. Techniques deemed proper in one case might be condemned in another.

In some Cook County cases where confessions have been suppressed, judges found that police continued interrogating a suspect after he invoked his right to remain silent or asked for an attorney.

But more often, cases with confessions hinge on whether the statement was voluntary.

In Cook County, police have detained suspects for as long as three days before getting a confession and interrogated people who were in severe physical distress. In a pending case in which the defendant has been found unfit to stand trial, Cook County sheriff's investigators interrogated a paralyzed gunshot victim just out of surgery. They said he confessed by blinking his eyes.

Many defendants have accused police of extracting confessions with physical force. This year, a judge

threw out the murder confession of a man who alleged Chicago police beat him and used a stun gun on his genitals.

Murder suspects in Cook County have claimed that they signed false confessions because they had been deprived of food, sleep or use of a bathroom, or held for so long they simply gave in. Some said they were coerced with promises of being released or with threats such as having their children taken away.

In 1998, a jury rejected Rashon Harris' nine-page confession and acquitted him of the murder of prep basketball star Reggie Nunnery, who was gunned down in 1995 on a West Side playground.

Harris, who was 17 and did not have a criminal record when arrested, said he was high on marijuana when detectives interrogated him. He said they handcuffed him to a ring on a wall, did not give him anything to eat and refused to let him use a restroom. Harris said he finally signed a confession because the detectives told him it was a release form.

"They were saying, like, 'You sign these papers and we can let you go,' " Harris said in an interview. "So I signed them papers. If I thought I was in any sort of jeopardy, I never would have signed anything."

Police denied mistreating or duping Harris. But at trial, Harris' lawyer, James A. Stamos, presented jurors with a booking photo that showed Harris smiling broadly. It was evidence, Stamos said, that Harris believed the detectives were going to release him.

"We didn't believe that was his confession," said Sophia Dahl, of Tinley Park, who was a juror. "It was like they talked that into him. The police orchestrated the whole thing. That's the way it looked to us."

Because Cook County law enforcement agencies will sometimes videotape statements but not the interrogations that preceded them, what occurs inside the interrogation room is often disputed and largely unprovable. Typically, defendants allege mistreatment and police deny it, leaving judges to decide who is more believable. Most times, the police version prevails.

Many suspects' claims appear baseless. Defendants claim injuries that don't show up in medical reports or abuse by officers who weren't working that day. But unless they are alleging broken bones or other severe injuries, most defendants have little evidence they can offer other than their word.

Mental capacity is key

At a hearing last year, a Cook County prosecutor and Chicago police detective said that before 18-year-old Luster Nelson confessed to killing two teenagers, he read and understood the following words, commonly known as the Miranda warning:

"I understand I have the right to remain silent and that anything I say can be used against me in a court of law. I understand that I have the right to talk to a lawyer and have him present with me during questioning, and if I cannot afford to hire a lawyer one will be appointed by the court to represent me before any questioning. Understanding these rights, I wish to give a statement."

Nelson confessed on Jan. 27, 1999, about 16 hours after the murders of Mark Hemphill and Steven Bausal in a second-floor apartment in the 4800 block of West Monroe Street.

At last year's hearing, a detective told a judge that Nelson read the statement explaining his rights in about 10 seconds. A prosecutor testified that Nelson took about 90 seconds and had trouble recognizing one word -- appointed.

At the same hearing, the judge heard testimony from a clinical psychologist hired by Nelson's attorney to test his level of comprehension. She testified that she visited Nelson in jail and asked him to read the Miranda warning aloud while she transcribed his words and reactions on a laptop computer.

"Uh, uh, uh, uh, I don't know that word," Nelson began. "I have the re-re-reg to remember."

He stopped and looked up, puzzled. "And --" He stopped again and sat in silence. Finally, he began once more.

"I can be --" He rubbed his forehead. "-- Me in a --" He halted again, heaved a sigh, resumed. "Kuh-kuh-court of law, law," he said, trying to sound out the words.

"I un-un-un that I have the ra-ra-ray-rate to take a law, law, law and him point pre-wha-want me."

After reading "questioning" as "Christian" and "represent me" as "repair me," Nelson finally reached the third and final sentence. He made it halfway through, then gave up, saying, "I can't."

Elapsed time: 11 minutes, 26 seconds.

In March, Cook County Circuit Judge Marcus Salone threw out the alleged confession, ruling that Nelson did not have the mental capacity to understand what he was doing when he waived his Miranda rights. Nelson, the evidence showed, had an IQ of 53, well below the dividing line for mental retardation, which is commonly placed at 70.

Since the state's remaining evidence was a 13-year-old boy who implicated Nelson and then recanted, prosecutors didn't have a case without Nelson's confession. They dropped their charges in July. Nelson maintains he was innocent.

Mentally retarded individuals are vulnerable to exploitation, susceptible to suggestion and more likely to confess falsely than other suspects, medical and legal experts say. But police and prosecutors in Cook County have repeatedly assumed the risk of building cases on little more than a confession from such defendants.

At least two dozen of the 247 defendants in the cases examined by the Tribune were mentally retarded, or had significant learning disabilities.

Eight years ago, as it threw out a mentally retarded teenager's confession in a Downstate case, the Illinois Appellate Court wrote that "society is not being served by the police obtaining a false confession from a subnormally intelligent suspect, while the real criminal remains free."

The case of the Ford Heights Four, one of Cook County's most infamous miscarriages of justice, can be traced in large part to a false confession from Paula Gray, a 17-year-old with mild mental retardation.

Under pressure from sheriff's deputies, Gray falsely implicated herself and four men in a 1978 double murder. Two of those men were sentenced to death. The four men were exonerated in 1996 and wound up receiving \$36 million in a wrongful-prosecution lawsuit.

Confessions from mentally retarded suspects often prompt legal challenges concerning a defendant's ability to understand his constitutional protections.

Last year, the Illinois Appellate Court upheld a trial judge's ruling that threw out the murder confession of a 13-year-old who had scored 52 and 54 on IQ tests. A psychologist asked the boy what "silent" meant, prompting him with the song, "Silent Night."

The boy replied: "Like silent, like you said, Christmas song. Mean like what they said, some stuff. I forget."

Videotaping in question

Responding to a series of high-profile cases where confessions have unraveled, the Cook County state's attorney's office began to videotape murder confessions when suspects consent.

Since August 1999, prosecutors have videotaped more than 400 such confessions, State's Atty. Devine said.

But in all those cases the camera did not start to record until after police had finished interrogating the suspect. Critics say such limited use of videotaping does little to prevent the kinds of abuses that can occur during interrogation and lead to disputed confessions.

Although the Chicago Police Department has vigorously opposed taping interrogations, Devine said in an interview that he would support a pilot program in which interrogations would be videotaped.

The case of Corethian Bell provides a dramatic example of how a videotaped confession can fail to resolve questions of guilt.

Bell, in a videotaped confession, explained how he was angry because his mother had resumed smoking cocaine, so he grabbed "a little kitchen knife." Then, he said, he stabbed her to death in her South King Drive apartment.

"She hurted me to the point where I just walked up to her and shanked her probably like six, seven times," said Bell, then 24, who was charged with murder for the July 2000 stabbing of his mother, Netta.

But DNA tests conducted earlier this year raise questions about Bell's guilt.

Bell was picked up by police after he came home and found his mother dead. He called police to report the murder, telling them he thought she had been shot.

At the time, he made money panhandling, selling the newspaper Streetwise and washing windshields in Hyde Park. He suffered from mental illness, including schizophrenia, and he was borderline mentally retarded, court records show. He had an IQ of 74 and had only completed school to the 8th grade.

Bell was questioned repeatedly by Chicago police detectives at Area 2 headquarters in the Calumet District, and when he was not being questioned he was left alone in the interrogation room for hours at a time.

At first, Bell repeatedly denied he killed his mother. According to court documents filed by Bell's lawyers, detectives yelled at him, told him he failed a lie-detector test and insisted he confess. He said they hit him so hard he fell off his chair.

After 50 hours, Bell agreed to make a videotaped confession. He did so, he told his attorneys, only because he thought he could later tell a judge the truth and be released.

The new forensic tests show that DNA in semen found in Bell's mother and in blood spatters on the walls of her home matches DNA from another man. According to police records, the man has told police he had sex with Netta Bell shortly before her death, but he denied killing her.

That man currently is in Cook County Jail on charges that he stabbed and sexually assaulted another woman in December 2000, six months after Netta Bell was killed and roughly five blocks from where Bell was attacked.

Corethian Bell is still in jail, awaiting trial.

Tribune analysis of murder confessions

For this series, the Tribune researched thousands of murder cases and appellate opinions dating to 1991.

A confession was defined as a statement, made to police or prosecutors, in which the defendant admitted killing the victim or participating in the crime in a way that could make him eligible for murder charges.

This includes cases where a person is held accountable under the law even though he didn't fire a shot or otherwise kill someone. For example, if two men rob a store and one shoots the clerk, both men can be tried for murder.

Instances in which the defendant made what authorities call a false-exculpatory statement--in which the defendant professes innocence but provides details that can be proven false--were not counted in the Tribune analysis. Statements that were incriminating only in context--for example, if a defendant said he was wearing particular clothes that matched eyewitness descriptions of the killer's clothing--also were not considered confessions.

When there were no copies of the defendant's statement available, reporters considered the statement a confession only if other records in the file adequately described the defendant's statement, or if attorneys involved in the case clearly recalled the defendant's admissions to police.

Also, some of the statements were given orally, so there was no signed admission to examine.

Dozens of cases had all the markings of a defendant who confessed, such as descriptions of lengthy interrogations and alleged police coercion, but they were not counted when attorneys could not remember or when the file was otherwise silent on what the defendant admitted doing.

There also are at least 700 cases from this time period in which murder charges are still pending.

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A 10-year review of questionable confessions

The Tribune used computer records and court files to examine Cook County cases in which murder charges have been filed since 1991. In at least 247 cases, a person confessed to murder but prosecutors dropped the charges, the courts threw out the confession or the defendant was acquitted. The Chicago Police Department handled all but 11 of these 247 cases.

#### WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE 247 CONFESSIONS

Total number of confessions: 247

Case went to trial: 207

Charges dropped before trial: 36

Undetermined: 4\*

Defendant convicted: 29

Defendant acquitted: 178

#### ALL 29 CONVICTIONS WERE APPEALED

Confession and conviction thrown out: 25

Confession thrown out but defendants convicted with other evidence: 4

#### 25 DEFENDANTS WERE PROSECUTED AGAIN

Convicted again without confession: 10

Acquitted: 1

Charges dropped: 5

Undetermined: 9 (Eight trials pending; outcome of one juvenile's case is confidential)

#### WHY CONFESSIONS ARE THROWN OUT

Confessions were thrown out by judges before trial or on appeal of a conviction for a variety of reasons. They include findings that police coerced a confession, violated a defendant's right to counsel or illegally arrested a defendant before the confession was made.

#### FINAL OUTCOME OF CONFESSIONS

TOTAL CONVICTIONS: 14

NO CONVICTIONS: 220

Undetermined: 13

\*Confessions were thrown out in these cases but the outcome is unknown: three cases have not yet gone to trial and one juvenile's case is confidential. In 20 of the 36 cases in which charges were dropped before trial, a prosecutor was prompted to drop charges after a court threw out a confession.

Source: Tribune analysis of Cook County court records

Chicago Tribune

Police use admissions of guilt to help solve cases

In about seven of every 10 murder cases it solves, the Chicago Police Department obtains a confession. That rate has held constant even as the number of murders has dropped.

#### CHICAGO MURDER CASES SOLVED WITH CONFESSIONS

Year Total murders Total cases solved Solved using confession

1991 927 650 471

1992 940 594 438

1993 850 555 405

1994 930 604 392

1995 827 511 334

1996 789 426 275

1997 759 429 292

1998 703 367 255

1999 641 326 219

2000 629 294 204

Note: The Chicago Police Department defines a confession as an admission of guilt, including a claim of self-defense, that results in criminal charges. A case is considered cleared, or solved, when detectives make an arrest or identify a suspect who has died, made a deathbed confession or is in a country from which he cannot be extradited.

Source: Chicago Police Department

Chicago Tribune

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THE SERIES

SUNDAY

Tainted confessions

Since 1991, at least 247 murder confessions have failed to hold up.

MONDAY

Police tactics

One cop's history of dubious confessions.

TUESDAY

Juvenile arrests

Police often violate laws designed to protect youths.

WEDNESDAY

A case study

When being in jail is no alibi

Caption:

PHOTOS 5 GRAPHICS 2

Caption:

PHOTOS (color): Calvin Ollins (center) was released from prison Dec. 5 after serving nearly 15 years for a 1986 rape and murder. Ollins, who was 14 years old at the time, had confessed to police. But after DNA tests indicated he was not at the scene of the crime, the state vacated his sentence and Ollins was set free along with Omar Saunders (left) and Larry Ollins. Tribune photo by Candice C. Cusic.

PHOTO: Public defender Denise Streff represented Sang Kim, who spent 3 1/2

years in the Cook County Jail awaiting trial for murder and a possible death sentence. "They worked on him and worked on him and worked on him until he caved," said Streff. "It's not physical coercion like brutality. It's more subtle. You're in a little room for a couple days, so you just give up." Tribune photo by Ovie Carter.

PHOTO: Luster Nelson waits in his attorney's office with his mother, Gertrude.

Detectives said Luster Nelson confessed to killing two teenagers in 1999. But in March, a judge threw out the alleged confession and ruled that Nelson did not understand what he was doing when he waived his Miranda rights. Tribune photo by Ovie Carter.

PHOTO: Sang Kim, who spent 3 1/2 years in Cook County Jail before murder

charges against him were dropped, says the words "and death" and "and child" were added to the cover page of a 7 1/2 page confession he signed. The body of the confession, made after 30 hours in custody, does not mention a child's death.

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