

advertisement

1600 1700 1800 1900 2000

Explore Your Family in History 200+ Million Names

GENEALOGYBANK

[Log In](#) | [Register](#)

- [Home](#) |
 [Search](#) |
 [Tracked Searches](#) |
 [Saved Articles](#) |
 [Search History](#)

- SEARCH INSTEAD:**
- United States
 - All Papers
 - Newswires/Transcripts
 - Custom List
- NARROW TO:**
- Pacific
 - South Atlantic
 - U.S. Outlying Areas
 - Mountain
 - West North Central
 - East North Central
 - New England
 - Middle Atlantic
 - East South Central
 - West South Central
 - National
 - Newswires and Transcripts
- INFORMATION:**
- Prices
 - FAQ
 - Search Help
 - Complete source list
 - Advertising info
 - Privacy policy
 - Terms of Use
 - Freelance writers

SEARCHING: UNITED STATES (2123 title(s) - see a list)

for: jack swerling [advanced search](#) [new search](#)

return: Most recent matches first from: all documents

Search Hint: Put phrases in quotation marks, e.g., "gun control"

Record 1314 of 1533
Estimated printed pages: 6

e-mail this article to: Save this Article

Docs remaining: 34
Subscription until: 07/24/2008 6:36 PM

Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

April 16, 1989
Edition: ONE-SIX
Section: MAIN NEWS
Page: 1A

Topics:
Index Terms.
LAW BUSINESS PROFILE JACK SWERLING SC

**MR. MURDER LOOMS LARGE IN S.C. COURTS
FLAMBOYANT LAWYER DEFENDS SUSPECTS THAT OTHERS SHUN**
Author: JOHN MONK, Columbia Bureau

Dateline: COLUMBIA

Article Text

On "Mr. Murder's" right hand is a 37-carat, blue sapphire ring. On his tie, a diamond stickpin. A silk handkerchief tops his breast pocket.

He is 6 feet 5 and weighs 240 pounds, a size that gives rise to his second nickname - "Andre the Giant." His left wrist is so big his \$6,000 Rolex has five extra links.

When that combination of flash and bulk lumbers into the courthouse, heads turn.

Mr. Murder is **Jack Swerling**, perhaps South Carolina's best-known criminal defense lawyer.

And over the years he has defended some of South Carolina's best-known criminals, including multiple murderers Donald "Pee Wee" Gaskins and Larry Gene Bell.

Solicitor Donald Myers of the 11th Judicial Circuit, who helped send Larry Gene Bell to death row, calls **Swerling** one of the "three best" he's ever gone up against.

Says former S.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Julius "Bubba" Ness: "I hope I will never be accused of a crime, but if I am, I certainly would want **Jack Swerling** to represent me."

In 1987, the National Law Journal dubbed **Swerling** "Mr. Murder." In the past 15 years, **Swerling** has defended more than 150 murder suspects.

Ads by Google **V.V**

Looking For Obituaries?
Find Any Obituary In Seconds. Huge Database Get Them Now.
www.Gov-Records.com

Local Newspapers
Your Guide To Local Newspapers. Stay Up-to-Date On Your Local News
www.AreaConnect.com

Teeth Whitening Warning
7 Teeth Whitening Products Tested, Rated, & Reviewed A Must Read!
www.Best-Teeth-Whitenin

5 Tips to Lose Belly Fat
Stop making these 5 mistakes & you will finally lose your ugly belly.
www.BellyFattsUgly.net

It came as little surprise when, in March, **Swerling** was appointed one of the lawyers representing Richard Starrett. Starrett of Martinez, Ga., is charged with kidnapping and rape and is a suspect in the shooting death of a kidnap victim whose body was found in a plastic bag in Newberry County.

Most recently, **Swerling** defended Ali Yousefi, a former Rock Hill city electrical engineer. In a highly publicized case, Yousefi was convicted March 2 of trying to smuggle a part of the Hawk missile and other weapons to Iran.

Swerling has no apologies for his work.

"I defend rapists - that doesn't mean I believe in rape," **Swerling** says.

"The Constitution and the Bill of Rights would be very hollow and spiritless documents if they only applied to people we agreed with," he says. Fifth Circuit Solicitor Jim Anders - the Columbia-area prosecutor who has opposed **Swerling** in court many times - isn't impressed.

"He represents all those perverts and murderers and acts like he's doing a public service," says Anders.

Anders beat **Swerling** in one of **Swerling**'s best-known cases. In 1983, **Swerling** defended Pee Wee Gaskins.

Gaskins, of Florence County, the confessed killer of 13 people, was serving his life sentences in maximum security at Central Correctional Institution in 1982 when, using plastic explosives smuggled in to him, he blew up another inmate.

For weeks, **Swerling** and another lawyer tried to persuade a jury that Gaskins had been framed. They didn't. The jury voted to send Gaskins to the electric chair.

Swerling's voice is deep and low, like far-off thunder. Juries pay attention when he speaks.

"The guy just reverbs through the courtroom. He just knows how to dramatize," says Richland County bailiff Norman Jenkins. Of the hundreds of lawyers Jenkins has seen, he thinks **Swerling** is the best.

To his cases, **Swerling** brings a blend of preparation, patience, scholarship and doggedness. Myers says **Swerling** makes him work. "You know he's going to be prepared, so you better be prepared."

In 1985, when **Swerling** defended Larry Gene Bell, Bell had what he said were insanity attacks in the courtroom. **Swerling** stayed calm and went on to try to persuade the jury that Bell was guilty but mentally ill when he had kidnapped and murdered one of his victims.

It was the first time that defense was used in a S.C. capital case. It didn't work. Bell was sentenced to the electric chair.

Swerling's sense of theater extends to his clothes.

At Yousefi's trial in March, **Swerling** showed up in a custom-made, ankle-length cashmere coat with a collar of brown mink fur, a white silk scarf and a black Borsalino fedora.

But in front of the jury, **Swerling**'s outer garments and ring were out of sight.

Jewelry has no place in the courtroom," says **Swerling**.

But it does elsewhere.

"What people may say is flamboyant is, to me, just fun to do. If I go out and buy a ring or stickpin or suit, it's for myself," he says. "It's not done to impress someone."

Obits
archive.com
Powered by NEWSLIBRARY

**Obituaries
&
Death Notices**
from hundreds
of newspapers

Easy to Use

Can't find an obituary?

Search Now!

Asked how much his cashmere coat cost, **Swerling** says, "A lot."

A lot is the answer **Swerling** and his partner, Dick Harpootlian, 40, give when asked how much they make.

"Let me put it this way," says Harpootlian. "Six years ago, when I went into practice with **Swerling**, I was driving a 1970 Volkswagen, I had a 1,600-square-foot house and about four suits.

"Now I drive a 1988 Mercedes 420 SL, I have a 3,600-square-foot house and a lot more suits," says Harpootlian. The Mercedes, he says, cost \$55,000.

Swerling and Harpootlian go out of their way to nourish friendships in the state's legal and political communities. Both teach at the University of South Carolina's School of Law. Harpootlian is a member of the Richland County Council and is running for 5th Circuit solicitor next year.

Swerling, who has won major cases on appeal to the S.C. Supreme Court, gives seminars on criminal law for the state's new lawyers each year and the S.C. Bar.

•

Because he is often on television, cases come to him.

When Lula McKnight, 49, of Hopkins in Richland County, fatally shot her husband, Sam, she told her daughter to contact **Swerling** as the police were taking her to jail. She had seen him on the nightly news.

At her March 1988 trial, **Swerling** persuaded the jury that McKnight had killed her husband in self-defense. He showed that Sam McKnight had gotten drunk and terrorized her for years.

Lula McKnight was acquitted. She credits **Swerling** with the victory.

"He couldn't have been no better," she says.

Not all **Swerling**'s clients appreciate him.

"He's a no-good, lying dog," says Pee Wee Gaskins, now on death row.

Gaskins is angry that Harpootlian, who as a deputy prosecutor helped Anders convict Gaskins, joined **Swerling**'s law firm within weeks of the trial's end. Gaskins, on appeal, has raised the issue of conflict of interest, but it has so far been rejected.

•

For part of his life, it appeared **Swerling** might wind up needing a lawyer rather than being one.

Growing up in Belleville, N.J. ("a tough town, all Italians, some Jews, a couple of blacks") **Swerling** hung around with two sets of friends - one set black-leather-jacketed greasers, the other set college-bound.

His father, a warehouse foreman, died of a heart attack when **Swerling** was 16. His mother worked in a clothing store.

At the urging of an uncle, **Swerling** entered Clemson in 1964. He intended to become a veterinarian. But his real major was trouble.

"I would be leading a panty raid on my motorcycle with 1,200 freshmen walking across the field chanting, Panty raid, panty raid," **Swerling** says. In dormitories, **Swerling** remembers, he flooded hallways with water and Ivory Snow, turned shower stalls into swimming pools and leaned 55-gallon drums full of water against doors of sleeping students.

One semester, three weeks before exams, **Swerling** dropped out, with 17 hours of F's. The vice president of student affairs, Walter Cox, now 70, tried to

talk him out of it.

He didn't listen to that, he was headstrong," says Cox, who now points to **Swerling** as one of Clemson's biggest success stories.

What turned **Swerling** around, after he reenrolled, was meeting his wife-to-be, a Clemson freshman English major named Erika Heifer.

"He had no grades, and he was going nowhere," she says.

Swerling first saw her while he was swinging from the rafters at a party. "I said, God, look at that girl. I'm going to marry her," **Swerling** says.

Although her friends discouraged her from dating **Swerling**, she says, she did. "I found **Jack** very entertaining. He had a good sense of humor. We had a lot of laughs."

She encouraged him to study - which got him through Clemson - and to go to law school. He had to take the law boards twice. At law school, he began to excel, getting A's in criminal courses.

"I found something I loved," **Swerling** says about the law. "I went from a guy who didn't take books home to a guy who studied six-seven hours a day."

While he was in law school, Erika - by then his wife - taught school to support them. Their parents helped with clothes and food. A friend loaned them money for a car and furniture.

Once out of law school, in 1973, he got a job with state Sen. Isadore Loune's Columbia law firm. In 1983, he struck out on his own.

*

At **Swerling**'s five-bedroom, five-television house in a subdivision in northeast Richland County, he is sipping a Glenlivet Scotch. Beyond his pool is a broad backyard fronting a lake. He has two Jacuzzis, one inside and one out.

The garage holds a 1981 Corvette, which **Swerling** drives on weekends. In the driveway is his 1988 black Mercedes, cost: \$55,000.

Yes, **Swerling** says, his work has brought him financial success. But he quickly adds: "You really can't do this for money. Doing criminal work takes part of your life. . . . There's a little piece of you in every case, because you are dealing with human tragedy. It takes its toll."

The toll comes in various forms. **Swerling**'s house is alarm-wired, his subdivision patrolled by security. When he represents well-known killers, he gets telephone threats from kooks.

In 1985, while trying a case, **Swerling** felt his face freeze up. Doctors found 93 percent clogging in his major heart artery.

Swerling told himself that if he lived, he would change his lifestyle.

He went from three packs of Marlboros a day to one cigar. From 350 pounds to 240. From red meat to chicken. From 80-plus hours a week to the current 65. "I realized the work would be there tomorrow," said **Swerling**. "Now I spend a lot of time with the family."

*

Around **Swerling**'s house are a half-dozen statues or pictures of Don Quixote, the fictional Spaniard who tilted at windmills.

"Don Quixote is a person fighting against overwhelming odds," says **Swerling**.

"That's my nature. I've always rooted for the guy who didn't have the odds on his side.

Swerling knows many of his clients are in jail. But he says, "As long as I do the best I can, I can sleep at night.

Caption:

Staff Photos By BOB LEVERONE / 1 **Jack Swerling** may be South Carolina's

best-known criminal defense lawyer 2 **Jack Swerling** at his Richland County home: "I've always rooted for the guy who didn't have the odds on his side.

PHOTO-2

Copyright (c) 1989 The Charlotte Observer
Record Number: 8901080386

Record 1314 of 1533
Estimated printed pages: 6

[Printer Friendly](#) | [Back to Results](#)

e-mail this article to:
[add message](#)

Save this Article

Charlotte Observer

Sunday, April 16, 1989

E 1 Dollar

er' rge courts

r Defends ers Shun

DNK
Murder's" right hand
ring. On his tie, a
handkerchief tops his

240 pounds, a size
nickname -- "Andre
so big his \$6,000

of flash and bulk
heads turn.

ling, perhaps South
l defense lawyer.

defended some of
criminals, including
"Pee Wee" Gaskins

f the 11th Judicial
arry Gene Bell to
e of the "three best"

Court Chief Justice
be I will never be
m, I certainly would
nt me."

w Journal dubbed
the past 15 years,
e than 150 murder

when, in March,
be of the lawyers



BOB LEVERONE/Staff

Jack Swerling may be South Carolina's best-known criminal defense lawyer.

representing Richard Starrett. Starrett of Martinez, Ga., is charged with kidnapping and rape and is a suspect in the shooting death of a kidnap victim whose body was found in a plastic bag in Newberry County.

Most recently, Swerling defended Ali Yousefi, a former Rock Hill city electrical engineer. In a highly publicized case, Yousefi was convicted March 2 of trying to smuggle a part of the Hawk missile and other weapons to Iran.

Swerling has no apologies for his work.

"I defend rapists -- that doesn't mean I believe in rape," Swerling says.

See 'Mr. Murder' Page 6A



He answer Swerling and Dick Harpootlian, 40, asked how much they put it this way," says "Six years ago, when I practice with Swerling, I a 1970 Volkswagen, I a 3,600-square-foot house and ts. ve a 1988 Mercedes ve a 3,600-square-foot lot more suits," says The Mercedes, he says, and Harpootlian go out to nourish friendships s legal and political Both teach at the f South Carolina's aw. Harpootlian is a the Richland County is running for 5th or next year. who has won major al to the S.C. Supreme seminars on criminal me's new lawyers each

When Lula McKnight, 49, of Hopkins in Richland County, fatally shot her husband, Sam, she told her daughter to contact Swerling as the police were taking her to jail. She had seen him on the nightly news. At her March 1988 trial, Swerling persuaded the jury that McKnight had killed her husband in self-defense. He showed that Sam McKnight had gotten drunk and terrorized her for years. Lula McKnight was acquitted. She credits Swerling with the victory. "He couldn't have been no better," she says. Not all Swerling's clients appreciate him. "He's a no-good, lying dog," says Pee Wee Gaskins, now on death row. Gaskins is angry that Harpootlian, who as a deputy prosecutor helped Anders convict Gaskins, joined Swerling's law firm

For part of his life, it appeared Swerling might wind up needing a lawyer rather than being one. Growing up in Belleville, N.J. ("a tough town, all Italians, some Jews, a couple of blacks") Swerling hung around with two sets of friends--one set black leather jacketed greasers, the other set college bound. His father, a warehouse foreman, died of a heart attack when Swerling was 16. His mother worked in a clothing store. At the urging of an uncle, Swerling entered Clemson in 1964. He intended to become a veterinarian. But his real major was trouble. "I would be leading a panty raid on my motorcycle with 1,200 freshmen walking across the field chanting, 'Panty raid, panty raid,'" Swerling says. In dormitories, Swerling remembers, he flooded hallways with water and Ivory Snow, turned

One semester, three weeks before exams, Swerling dropped out, with 17 hours of F's. The vice president of student affairs, Walter Cox, now 70, tried to talk him out of it. "He didn't listen to that; he was headstrong," says Cox, who now points to Swerling as one of Clemson's biggest success stories. What turned Swerling around, after he reenrolled, was meeting his wife-to-be, a Clemson freshman English major named Erika Helfer. "He had no grades, and he was going nowhere," she says. Swerling first saw her while he was swinging from the rafters at a party. "I said, 'God, look at that girl. I'm going to marry her,'" Swerling says. Although her friends discouraged her from dating Swerling, she says, she did. "I found Jack very entertaining. He had a good sense of humor. We had a lot of laughs." She encouraged him to stay which he did.