

Dear Rick,

Nov. 21, 2016

This letter is in response to your column published Friday, "Connecting the wrong dots." You made three factual errors:

1. You wrote: "None of the experts interviewed made those connections to Desmond." Adina Schwartz, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, was interviewed by Mandy Locke and had specific criticisms about Beth Desmond's work in these cases. Schwartz also filed a sworn affidavit that was critical of Desmond's work: "...The conclusions in this case were distinctly unreliable, even by the standards of the field....Special Agent Desmond's laboratory reports and bench notes did not support her testimony at the trial of co-defendant Green that a Hi Point Model C was the make and model of the gun that fired both the eight cases and the bullet and bullet jacket fragment in the case." See also my responses to Nos. 2 and 3.

2. You wrote: "Locke posed the questions to the experts as hypothetical situations, and then for her stories attached their responses to Desmond's work in this case." All of the experts viewed a photograph from the same specific case and were asked by Locke about that photograph. The photograph was real and not from a hypothetical case. In an affidavit, William Tobin, former chief metallurgist for the FBI, confirmed telling Locke: "This is a big red flag for the whole unit....This is as bad as it can be." But he testified he was not referring to a specific case or examiner. He also said he could be difficult to understand. He said Locke was professional, courteous, intelligent and was trying hard to get it right.

3) You wrote: "After the series ran, several of Locke's sources contacted the newspaper, saying they were misquoted or taken out of context." This also is false. Liam Hendrikse was the only source to contact the paper. After the story was published, Locke reached out to Tobin and Hendrickse. Tobin did not respond to calls or email. Initially, Hendrickse, an independent firearms analyst, said in an email there were "a few minor errors in translation and I can't fault you for that." He said maybe later they could grab a drink. Several weeks later (40 days after the article was published) Hendrickse requested a correction because, he said at trial, his published comments were hurting his consulting business. After receiving Hendrikse's complaint, The N&O reviewed Locke's notes and saw Hendrickse's comments in her notes matched his comments in the published story. For that reason, we published no correction and invited Hendrickse to write a letter to the editor to clarify his remarks. Hendrickse declined our offer and testified at trial that he was satisfied with how we handled his request.

I request that you correct your column and publish this letter. Finally, as far as I know, you made no attempt to reach Mandy Locke or me for comment, either by phone or email. You should have. And you know that.

Best regards,
John Drescher
Executive editor
The News & Observer