

# 'Our Father Who Aren't in Heaven' Sisters Discover Late Father's Life of Crime

By LINDA COMINS  
Life Editor

After years of research, two sisters from Youngstown uncovered their late father's not-so-secret life of crime — including a 1967 kidnapping and armed robbery in Wheeling — and revealed their findings in a new book, "Our Father Who Aren't in Heaven: A True Story of a Career Criminal."

Debbie L. Frye and Tracy L. Mercier, who now live in the Washington, D.C., area, discussed their project at the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling Tuesday, Dec. 27. On hand for the presentation were Wheeling residents Bernard Lipscher, the victim of the 1967 kidnapping and robbery, and Jim Hutchinson, one of the arresting officers who captured the sisters' father.

Throughout the book and in their presentation, Frye and Mercier referred to their father by a pseudonym, "Bim," but Lipscher identified the kidnapper as Hugh Lynn. Lynn also had been indicted on counterfeiting charges a few years earlier, according to federal court documents.

Frye and Mercier, both former employees of the Central Intelligence Agency, said they discovered the details of their father's criminal past after an adoptee, identified as "Melissa," contacted them in 2002 because she thought Lynn might be her biological father. Ironically, it was later determined that she wasn't their half-sibling, but her inquiry led the sisters to nine years of research and writing. "She isn't our sister, but she was a conduit to our past," Mercier said.

Frye and Mercier have early memories of traveling to Moundsville to visit their father in the West Virginia Penitentiary where, they said, he was confined for 9,288 days. "We spent a lot of our youth visiting our father in Moundsville," Frye said.

Mercier also remembers being present, at age 2, when their Youngstown home was raided in 1960 by Secret Service agents investigating the counterfeiting ring. Mercier was 8 and Frye was 2 when the 1967 kidnapping-robbery occurred.

Until launching their research as adults, the sisters were unaware that their father, who died in 1989, had a lengthy arrest record dating to 1938. They said they learned that he was part of the Wheelchair Gang in Pittsburgh in the 1940s; robbed patrons



Photo by Linda Comins

Tracy L. Mercier, at left, and her sister, Debbie L. Frye, give a presentation on their book, "Our Father Who Aren't in Heaven," at the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling. Although their father was a career criminal, both sisters worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for about six years.



at a high-stakes poker game in 1943; "masterminded a sensational escape from the Ohio County jail" and was captured in Los Angeles "after a cross-country crime spree." He was sentenced to 70 years in the West Virginia Penitentiary and served 12 years. After his release in 1955, he went to Youngstown to find his mother, who had abandoned him as a toddler in Pennsylvania. He also met his future wife, Shirley, in Youngstown. Frye and Mercier said their mother is still alive.

Frye said a former Cleveland policeman was involved in the 1960 counterfeiting ring; she said their father turned state's witness and served time in "Club Fed" in Danbury, Conn. A July 1962 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, affirming the conviction of Robert E. Walsh on three counts of counterfeiting, identified Hugh Lynn as the co-conspirator and chief witness of the government, and listed "Shirley Ann Lynn, the wife of the counterfeiter," as a defense witness at Walsh's trial in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio.

Upon conviction for the 1967 kidnapping and armed robbery, Lynn returned to Moundsville in 1968. Because he was on parole when he committed the Wheeling crime, he was later sent to a federal prison in Atlanta to finish the earlier sentence for counterfeiting, Frye said.

The sisters said they did extensive research at the Library of Congress, found more than 100 newspaper articles about their father's crimes, con-

ducted "countless interviews" and toured the former penitentiary. "Some of our findings were very difficult for us to accept," Frye remarked. They also met with Lipscher and apologized to him.

Lipscher, who is now 91, said he was "afraid almost" to answer the sisters' initial phone call. After meeting them, he discovered that "they were quite different. They were lovely girls." However, as for Lynn, Lipscher had a succinct assessment: "He was a bad guy, period."

Lipscher was 47 when he was kidnapped from the home that he and his mother then shared on Hamilton Avenue in Wheeling. Before forcing Lipscher into a car, the robbers "locked my mother in the bathroom," he recalled. "They didn't realize there was a phone in the bathroom."

The victim said he tried to wreck the car to escape from the kidnapers, but was freed eventually by police officers. As the drama unfolded, Lipscher said he thought, "How the h -- did I get in this mess and how the h -- do I get out."

Lipscher's memories of the long-ago crime remain vivid. "It's an ordeal that you don't forget," he commented, adding, "I was so frightened from it all. I slept in the basement for about a month."

As for a motive, Lipscher thinks "word got around" that he had a safe in the house. Mercier said her father and his accomplices apparently thought Lipscher had \$500,000 in the safe, but the robbery netted only some coins and a wristwatch taken from Lipscher's mother.

Annie's  
Mailbox



**Dear Readers: Happy New Year! We hope you celebrated responsibly, and that 2012 will bring good health and good cheer to all of our wonderful readers.**

Dear Annie: I've been married for 14 years and have known my husband's family for an additional 10. My mother-in-law has always been critical of me, and I know she was critical of both her sons' previous partners. She has called me lazy, disparages any gift I buy her, criticizes my weight and even selected furniture for our home because I "have no taste." I always bite my tongue.

Now that we have a child, her behavior has escalated. We moved to a different country (it was my husband's dream), and she blamed me, saying I am preventing her from having a relationship with my husband and child. For the first time ever, I stood my ground and we had an argument.

Since then, she has openly complained about me to my mother and stepmother. My husband told her she was out of line, but she didn't stop. My father-in-law takes her side, and they both are demanding an apology. (I've already apologized.) They say I am not welcome in their home. My husband's brother also has joined forces with them.

My husband is having a hard time standing up to his family. I also believe he figures it's pointless since we live so far away. I will support my husband and child in whatever relationship they decide to have with my in-laws, but I have decided to remove myself from his parents' lives altogether.

How do I do this without causing an issue in my marriage? Although I am convinced that cutting ties is the healthiest option, how do I stop the anger and sadness at the way I've been treated?  
— California

**Dear California: Try to understand that this is not about you. It's about your mother-in-law's need for**

**TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH**

