

Texas millionaire to defend penniless killer in Florida

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294 Vic Fezell says representing Henry Lee Lucas is the right thing to do

WACO, Texas — Saying it is the right thing to do, former McLennan County District Attorney Vic Fezell plans to defend convicted murderer Henry Lee Lucas in three new murder cases filed against him in Florida.

Fezell said Lucas and Clementine Schroeder, who is known as "Sister Clemmie," have asked him to represent Lucas. Schroeder, who had a jail ministry when Lucas was in the Williamson County Jail, has been a Lucas confidant for at least seven years.

"I told Sister Clemmie if she would pray for me and pray for the Belo case every day, that when it was over, I would get back on Henry's case and see what I could do," Fezell said.

"I made a commitment and that is what I intend to do. She kept her commitment to me. With a \$58 million verdict, I have reason to believe that God hears and answers prayers. I think Sister Clemmie has a red phone straight to God."

A McLennan County jury in April awarded Fezell \$58 million in his libel suit against the Belo Broadcasting Co., which owns Channel 8 in Dallas, and former television reporter Charles Duncan.

The jury found that Duncan's series in

1985 maliciously portrayed Fezell as a lax, corrupt prosecutor who took bribes to dismiss cases.

The verdict is the largest in a libel case in the country.

Fezell settled with Belo officials in June for an undisclosed amount, but the settlement is reported to have made him a millionaire many times over.

Asked why, with his newly acquired fortune, he would want to get involved with Lucas again, Fezell said, "The same reason I got into it in the first place. It is the right thing to do."

Fezell presided over a special grand jury in 1985 that considered three McLennan County homicides to which Lucas had confessed. Sheriff's Department investigator Truman Simons had developed a strong suspect in one of the homicides, and when Lucas confessed to it, his suspect, who was about to confess, became uncooperative.

After the grand jury cleared Lucas in the three murders, hundreds of other confessions he had made were called into question. Soon afterward, the Lucas confession spree came crashing down and the Texas Ranger Lucas Task Force, which was set up to provide law enforcement officers from around the country access to Lucas, was

disbanded.

Fezell accused Task Force members of feeding information to Lucas to get him to confess to slayings he did not commit.

Texas Ranger Capt. Bob Prince, who was in charge of the task force, called Fezell's accusations a personal affront to the integrity of all law officers.

When told that Fezell would be representing Lucas in Florida, Prince questioned if he will be "defending Lucas or promoting Vic Fezell."

"It is none of my concern. It doesn't bother me at all. Certainly, Lucas is entitled and expected to have adequate representation, and I am sure he will get competent representation," said Prince, who is now stationed in Houston.

"I don't need to get in a war of words. I don't think that that would be professional. I will say that I am certainly not surprised," he said.

Fezell has claimed that Duncan's 10-part series on Channel 8 paved the way for the federal government to indict him in 1986 on bribery, racketeering and mail fraud charges. Officials embarrassed over the Lucas confession revelations provided a willing Duncan with false information to make Fezell look like a crook, Fezell has said.

The TV reports and the indictment were in retaliation for Fezell's role in exposing that Lucas lied to authorities, Fezell has contended. Much of the evidence brought out at the libel trial tended to back up his claims.

"I only want the same thing I wanted in late 1984 when I first got into this," Fezell said, "and that is to find the truth. It would be really easy to walk away from this and forget right now, but that is not the right thing to do. I like to finish what I start."

Attorney Bob Adams, appointed to represent Lucas in Jackson and Holmes counties in Florida, said Friday he has filed a motion to withdraw from the three Lucas murder cases — mostly because the counties don't sufficiently compensate appointed attorneys to make it worth his while.

Like Fezell, however, Adams says if the judge doesn't let him off the cases, he thinks he has a good chance to get at least one or more of the cases dismissed for lack of evidence.

Fezell said Lucas "can prove absolutely that he didn't commit one of them," but declined to elaborate.

He said if the cases are not dismissed, Tulsa, Okla., attorney Gary Richardson will join him in Florida to assist with Lucas'

defense. Richardson, a former U.S. attorney in Oklahoma, successfully represented Fezell in his federal criminal trial in Austin in 1987 and in his libel suit this year.

"I will be filing a motion for speedy trial," Fezell said. "It is time for them to either put up or shut up. It is time this thing was put to rest."

Fezell said Lucas was transferred from the Texas death row to Jackson County, Fla., about six months ago.

Prince said the Florida cases were filed after the task force disbanded in mid-1985. Florida officials interviewed Lucas on death row before filing he charges, he said.

Prince continued to defend the role of the task force and said that of the 11 murder cases in which Lucas has been convicted, including the death of his mother, only one is on appeal. The case being appealed is the one he is on death row for, he said, adding that death penalty cases are appealed automatically.

"There wouldn't be anything that I know of that we could do to improve the quality of the task force work that we were involved in," Prince said. "If we were asked to conduct another one starting today, I just don't know of anything we could do differently to improve on it."

I am very confident that he has committed many homicides," Prince added. "How many, I can't tell you. I just don't know."