

Dear AAN Judges,

Writing about Joel Alcox's newfound freedom meant exhuming a chapter of Santa Barbara history that law enforcement desperately wanted to forget.

Alcox was wrongfully arrested and convicted of first-degree murder more than 30 years ago, so it was extremely challenging for me to compile the appropriate legal materials — arrest affidavits, interview recordings, trial transcripts, appeal petitions, etc. — to even begin reviewing his case. Our District Attorney's Office was noncooperative; Public Records Act and Freedom of Information Act requests were necessary. I sifted through hundreds of pages of local, state, and federal documents to find the historical details and facts for which I was searching.

It was similarly difficult to locate and speak with the many people involved in Alcox's case, such as witnesses, friends, family, and attorneys. Some had moved to other parts of the country; others had died. Most of those I did reach were initially unwilling to speak with a reporter. It took weeks of gently convincing them and Alcox himself — including multiple meetings in person more than 100 miles from Santa Barbara — to speak with me on the record. They've since expressed gratitude for the opportunity to do so.

For the sake of fairness, I made repeated efforts to contact individuals who could attest to the reputation of Alcox's original trial defense attorney, who passed away years ago. Alcox's current appeals attorney had made him out to be utterly incompetent. I spoke with the trial attorney's surviving son, who connected me with former colleagues. They spoke highly of the man, which painted a fuller picture of his character.

I also reached out to those who knew the prosecutor in the case. She's been accused of gross misconduct but had also passed away. Her former colleagues helped provide a fairer portrayal of her, as well.

Since the article was published, Alcox has hired two of Santa Barbara's preeminent attorneys to represent him in his multimillion-dollar wrongful-incarceration case against Santa Barbara County and the state. The piece also informed our readers about the injustice of his 25-year imprisonment and the obstructive role our current District Attorney played in his 16-year appeals process. Without it, I fear Alcox and his mistreatment would have remained forgotten.

Thank you,

Tyler Hayden
Senior Editor